

## **Designing the Future Professional: Expectations of the Next Generation**

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With contributions from the 2008 AIAS ARC Task Force

### **Abstract**

Among the many issues and venues in which the American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS) has provided visionary leadership over its distinguished history, the presence of the student perspective in the process of architectural accreditation has been particularly poignant. In preparation for the 2008 Accreditation Review Conference (ARC) of the United States' National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB), the organization proudly contributes the 2008 Issue Brief on Architectural Education to further inform and shape the educational process of twenty-first century design professionals.

The *2008 AIAS Issue Brief on Architectural Education* is positioned as a critical and anticipatory document which highlights issues relevant to the future education and practice of the profession, citing opportunities for necessary and visionary change. It frames the voice of *future* practitioners, educators and leaders who will inherit the legacy of our current decisions.

*Keywords: Architecture Curriculum, National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB), American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS), Accreditation Review Conference (ARC), Studio Culture, Trends in Architectural Education, Pedagogy, Issue Brief on Architectural Education,*

## **1 Introduction**

Since 1956, the American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS) has proudly represented the voice of over 100,000 future leaders of the architecture and design community. In that time, the AIAS has championed many issues relative to education and practice within the built environment. Through AIAS, the presence of the student perspective in the process of architectural accreditation has been particularly poignant. In 2008, we proudly contribute the *2008 AIAS Issue Brief on Architectural Education* to further inform and shape the educational process of twenty-first century design professionals.

## **2 Intent of the Issue Brief**

The 2008 AIAS Issue Brief on the Future of Architectural Education is positioned as a critical and anticipatory document which highlights issues relevant to the future education and practice of the profession, citing opportunities for necessary and visionary change. It frames the voice of future practitioners, educators and leaders who will inherit the legacy of our current decisions. Observations and recommendations herein may serve as a primer of the attitudes, priorities, expectations, and interests of a future generation of design professionals. In keeping with this approach, the brief conveys major areas of focus, trends in priority setting, and expectations of how emerging professionals will need to perform as future architects; and therefore, the means and methods in which they will need to be trained.

## **3 Process of the Issue Brief**

The *2008 AIAS Issue Brief on Architectural Education* is the result of eight months of intense dialogue, both within and beyond organizational, constituent, academic, professional and disciplinary boundaries. Sincere thanks are extended to the AIAS ARC Task Force, the 2006-2007 Board of Directors and the 2007-2008 Board of Directors; a diverse and vibrant collection of student leaders whose talents and characteristics provide just one example of the multiplicities, complexities and pluralities in which we operate.

## **4 Fundamental Concepts for this Effort**

As the AIAS wades deeply into the issues of an increasingly relevant education and responsive practice of architecture in the twenty-first century, we approach these issues with the following core concepts:

- 1. Today's architecture students will be tomorrow's architects and design professionals.** As such, they inherit the legacy of these decisions and share equally in the stewardship of the future. Furthermore, the student perspective provides valuable insight and vision to be leveraged into measurable results.

2. **The only thing that is constant is change.** The context of education and practice is radically evolving to meet the demands of an increasingly complex world. Students embrace this change and are prepared to answer its call with passion and enthusiastic determination.

3. **At its best, the Academy serves as an incubator of ideas and values which shape the future of architectural practice.** As such, the accreditation review process provides students a powerful opportunity to provoke visionary change.

## **5 A Note on Process: Evolution vs. Revolution**

While the AIAS finds great value in the current accreditation system, there is eager anticipation of progressive, evolutionary change to keep pace with contemporary trends and forces affecting the profession. AIAS urges the NAAB process to leverage broad vision into transformative change. Accreditation must seek to be an agent in a process which is increasingly nimble, inclusive and evidence-based. Additionally, an evolution in the accreditation review process should allow for substantial investment, inclusion and care in the process of preparing for changes in accreditation; and therefore, facilitate more meaningful and transformational change that is anticipatory, rather than reactionary.

## **6 Emergent Trends in Architectural Education**

**ECOLOGICAL LITERACY.** Issues of ecological literacy and sustainability require integration into architectural curricula in both breadth and depth. Indeed, ecological literacy requires a fluid manipulation of both “hard and soft” skills, quantitative and qualitative, technical and conceptual. Future professionals are in search of a holistic “re-stitching” of design curricula along a green thread, integrating an ecological understanding as a fundamental aspect of design at all levels. Thus, the charge to embed ecological literacy as part of the DNA of architectural education could not more meaningfully justify an imperative to thoughtfully embrace disciplines beyond traditional borders. Furthermore, the gravity of the ecological imperative facing the design profession urgently necessitates accreditation to foster ecologically restorative goals for architectural curricula and the development of an ethos of stewardship within the academic environment that is both conceptually and practically rooted.

**SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY.** The landscape in which future professionals will operate is increasingly politically charged, and will necessitate fluency in civic engagement and leadership beyond traditional professional capacities. Thus, the accreditation process must empower schools to nurture civic engagement and social responsibility in future professionals, supported by the necessary skills and competencies to be acutely aware, actively engaged change agents within society.

**GLOBAL CHANGE.** Forces of globalization have given rise to new models of practice and reconfigured the architectural process. Thus, the education of future professionals must prepare them to work within a highly globalized profession while still supporting a more robust and finer-grain understanding of unique regional and vernacular contexts. An understanding of the larger global economy and its dynamic forces must create leaders who are broadly experienced and entrepreneurially trained. Additionally, graduates must understand the complexities and implications of the global network in which they operate, developing collaborative leadership skills to fully engage a rapidly globalizing, team-oriented workforce.

**PROFESSIONAL AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY CAPACITIES.**

As architects must meaningfully engage and leverage a diversified team of expertise, the development of a well rounded graduate with sophisticated professional and multidisciplinary capacities will be increasingly relevant. While these capacities have long been valued, they have neither been a defined focus of professional education, nor have the skills, techniques or knowledge base of these capacities been formally structured into architectural curricula across academe. Institutions must also be an incubator of entrepreneurship where a culture of lifelong curiosity and learning are instilled. Developing a culture of research and invention, while embracing a broad liberal education made relevant to architectural studies allows the future practitioner to be nimble and relevant in a context of constant global change on many fronts.

**PROFESSIONAL AWARENESS: LINKING ACADEMY + PRACTICE.**

Students, educators and practitioners share equally in learning from each other. Thus, accreditation must play a supportive role in encouraging new pedagogical approaches and teaching methodologies that enhance collaboration while facilitating the development of a faculty that values and equally represents academic rigor and practice expertise. Furthermore, if licensure is to be a universally valued achievement, then organizations must collaborate to establish a professional license as an equivalent to a “terminal degree” within and beyond the realm of higher education.

As a potential unifier between academia and practice, research must take on a dynamic and valued role in architectural curricula, simultaneously translating between theory and application within the built environment. Even more importantly, however, students must be equipped with skills and abilities to engage research if they are to be future integrators between these two currently disparate worlds.

**DESIGN CULTURE.** Beginning in 2000, the AIAS launched the Studio Culture Initiative, a multi-year effort to critique and positively improve the quality of the student experience within design studios. Since these initial efforts, the AIAS has reviewed the results of this dialogue and will release *Toward an Evolution of Studio Culture: Report of the Second AIAS Task Force on Studio*

*Culture.* Among the findings of the task force, however, a spirit of lifelong learning and curiosity coupled with an appreciation of the traditions and ethics of architecture yield a more holistic notion of *design* culture.

**HUMAN AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY.** Practitioners consistently work in a multicultural landscape, relying on successful teaming strategies across generational, cultural, geographic and linguistic boundaries. It is in this sense of plurality that emerging professionals must be confident, perhaps even fluent. Thus, the AIAS encourages a pluralistic understanding of, and exposure to, architectural history and theory, as well as human culture, traditions, and modes of understanding.

**TECHNOLOGY AND MEDIA.** Emerging graduates are faced with the need to be increasingly techno-literate in both design and production capacities. As such, much study has centered on the impacts of a digital design process on pedagogy, learning processes and outcomes. Architectural practice has seen a similar set of cultural shifts, including the rise of manufacturing, proto-typing and similar design methodologies that have radically changed the established norms of production.

Emerging professionals must be confidently facile with methods of thinking, designing, communicating and producing digitally, while also able to adapt dynamically to the rapid pace of change induced by these tools. Agility with technology and media does not come from direct training in discrete tools of an industry; but rather, holistic education about the means and methods by which technology drives process change and product development.

#### **URBANISM**

Emerging professionals must be ready to tackle issues of a growing international urbanism, as some portion of their practice will directly involve or be indirectly impacted by this condition. Increasing pressures of urbanism heighten the importance of urban design and planning, sociology, policy, international awareness, adeptness with regionalism and the vernacular, issues of sustainable development, landscape design, and the importance of historic preservation and adaptive reuse.

## **7 Summary and Next Steps**

It is the hope of the American Institute of Architecture Students, through this *2008 Issue Brief on Architectural Education* to bring critical focus to areas of necessary change within architectural education. Current conditions within the architectural profession and the perspectives of our members indicate that a transformational evolution of the profession of architecture is underway. It is this evolution which warrants thoughtful, yet visionary response from architectural education, such that the trajectory of emerging professionals keeps pace with the rate of change in the profession.