

Diversity and Inclusion in Historical Documentation of Multicultural Architecture Education in the US in a Time of Pandemic

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Abstract: This report focuses on a research project (2019-present) presented at the Society of American Archivists, Research Forum on August 5th, 2020: Although the global pandemic crisis has clearly exposed deep-seated gender, race, ethnicity-based inequalities in the US architecture education (ACSA, 2020), and the roots of this problem are interlinked with how collective memory has been constructed so far, it can be claimed that there is still a big gap in diverse and inclusive historical documentation practice, its method(s) and policies in the field. With this problem, some latest data & surveys by ACSA, NCARB, AIA, and current discussions by several pioneering schools of architecture (such as by the Harvard University-Graduate School of Design) in the country, it is time to shed light on historical documentation practice on architecture education since each architect's social and cultural perception of architecture begin to be shaped during their early formative years at their schools. Based on this problem, critical facts and argument, this report brings archives and collections at pioneering schools of architecture in the US into focus in a time of pandemic, and aims to establish productive and efficient dialogue between architecture education and the field of archive for more diverse, equal and inclusive collective memory and future within the field in order to embrace all architecture students regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and their other identity-based characteristics.

Introduction

Tracing this research problem, in 2019, it was established contacts with archivists, curators and librarians at leading schools of architecture whose graduate programs were ranked the top ten (2018-2019) according to survey conducted by Design Intelligence. Architecture record archivist at the Yale University-School of Architecture; special collection archivist at the Harvard University-Graduate School of Design; librarian at the Princeton University- School of Architecture; curator at the architecture and design collections at the MIT Museum; architecture, urban planning, and visual resources librarian at University of Michigan; art, architecture & engineering library; head of special collections at University of Rice; and library manager at the Kappe Library-SCI-Arch participated in this research project and sent their written responses to research questions. In addition, the director at Archives & Records at the American Institute of Architects (AIA), in Washington D.C., sent her written responses on how the AIA has advocated for some research and archiving to document women in architecture and underrepresented groups of architects to increase diversity in the profession, and the AIA's organizational records within this context. In 2020, it was asked for all participants by e-mail if they had an update to contribute to this research project and their permissions to share some information in their written responses during the presentation by Dr. Ekincioglu at the SAA-Research Forum on August 5th before the event.

Problem Statement

With the rising tension on women, politics of gender and other identity-based issues happening in schools of architecture in the US in recent times, most of underrepresented, minority and international architecture students have been struggling with sense of belonging and social connections with communities in their programs, and in particular, this problem has deepened during COVID-19 (as recent students discussions organized by ACSA have revealed this critical fact). There is no doubt that this problem and struggle are rooted in how history, and historiography of architecture education, and more specifically, historical documentation practice within this field have been constructed so far. The big gap in data, survey, reports on diverse and inclusive historical documentation practice on architecture education (and its multicultural communities), discussion on its method(s), its policies and more critically, its politics point out a vital problem in the field.

Method

As the first part of this research project, it has been focused on top “10” schools of architecture whose graduate programs were ranked the top ten (2018-2019) according to survey conducted by Design Intelligence: They are Harvard University, Columbia University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cornell University, Yale University, Princeton University, Rice University, University of California (U.C.) Berkeley, SCI-Arc, and University of Michigan. Semi-structured research questions were sent to archivists, curators and librarians at relevant programs, and requested their written responses in 2019. In light of research problem, research questions aim to uncover a. if there is a (scholarly) research study on the history of their archives, b. the current mission of their archives to support and promote diverse, equal and inclusive historical documentation practice on “underrepresented, minority and foreign-born architectural profiles, groups and communities” in the history of their schools of architecture, c. how they investigate “gaps” on these subject, and d. if they have data, report and/or survey on historical documentation of underrepresented, minority and foreign-born students (and professors) in relation to their gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, etc. at their schools of architecture.



Figure 1. The Top 10 Architecture Graduate Programs, 2018-2019, by Design Intelligence’s survey.

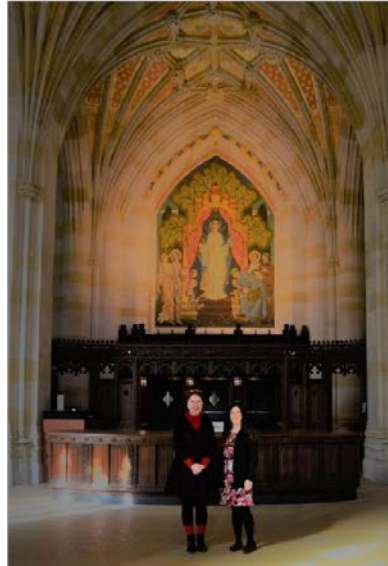


Figure 2. Dr. Meral Ekincioglu and Jessica Quagliaroli, Architecture Record Archivist at Yale University, School of Architecture, 2019.



Figure 3. Demographics in architecture, National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, NCARB, 2020: <https://www.ncarb.org/nbtn2020/demographics>, last accessed on 11.30.2020.

Results

According to written responses by participants, documenting and collecting of historical materials at those schools of architecture do not seem to have a long history: The end of the 1960s – 1970s seems to be a historical turning point to establish their architectural archive programs or collections. More critically, among them, the Yale University-architectural archives program located under Manuscripts and Archives, part of the Yale University Library system (as opposed to the Yale School of Architecture) began in earnest around 2002 in spite of the long history of the school of architecture (1916-present), the Princeton University-School of Architecture did not have an archivist, and the librarian at this program was also

responsible for collection development, scholarly collections and research services as Gabriella Karl Johnson, librarian at the School of Architecture expressed in their e-mail, and Cornell University did not have an archivist or a curator specifically attached to architectural and visual documents according to email by Julia Gardner, Head of Research Services & Assistant Curator, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections at this university. In addition, following written responses by Gary Van Zante (MIT) to research questions on May 16, 2019, organization of “**Women of MIT Wikipedia Hackathon**” on August 6, 2019 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of **the Department of Architecture**, and to team up with the MIT Museum and the MIT Libraries to create and improve Wikipedia entries for its alums can be regarded as a motivating step for diverse and inclusive collective memory of the department.

If one considers that a. the historical background of the early architecture programs at major universities as first courses taught goes back to the 1800s in the US, b. the US architecture has long been the beneficiary of multiculturalist characteristics of its architecture community and contributions of foreign-born, immigrant, underrepresented and minority architects to architecture education as well as to the country, and c. the most well-known collections (including models, photographs, and architectural drawings, etc.) now in existence began to be developed since the 18th century in the country as Alfred Willis indicates in his essay, the big gap and unclear picture in diverse and inclusive historical documentation practice, the lack of mission of statement in effect on this subject, and the lack of data, report, survey at archives and collections of those pioneering schools of architecture merit a considerable critical attention.

Findings

- There is no data, systematic or well-detailed information, report, survey and mission of statement in effect to develop diverse and inclusive content and scope in archives and collections (such as historical materials on pioneering profiles of foreign-born, immigrant, underrepresented, minority students, and professors in their own histories) at those schools of architecture. Only Kevin McMahon, Library Manager at the Kappe Library could elaborate that “about 14% of their lecture videos feature women”.
- Although digital tools have being used by architectural world extensively, digital archives and collections make easier and faster to search historical materials and information, most of participants have pointed out that their programs do not have a digital archival project. On the other hand, MIT has a digitization project “underway”; Harvard has “piloted” digital initiatives by scanning significant materials from their collections; Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arch) has an archive on video records of their public lectures.
- Participants have not shared (scholarly) research on the history of their programs in their written responses. Only Rebecca Mary Price (Architecture, Urban Planning, and Visual Resources Librarian and Liaison for Museum Studies at University of Michigan, Art, and Architecture & Engineering Library) indicated that a book by Nancy Bartlett includes some coverage of the history of their collections.
- Although some schools of architecture appointed their first “women” deans and heads of department in recent times (such as J. Meejin Yoon as the first woman head of the department of architecture at MIT, 2014-2018, and then, as the first woman dean of Cornell University-College of Architecture, Art and Planning, 2019-present; Amale Andraos as the first woman dean of Columbia GSAPP, 2014-present; Mónica Ponce de León as the first woman dean of the Princeton University-School of Architecture, 2016present; Deborah Berke as the first woman dean of the Yale University-School of Architecture, 2016present; Sarah Whiting as the first woman dean of the Harvard University-Graduate School of Design, 2019-present, etc.), it is not clear how “those first women academic leaders” have contributed to support and promote diverse and inclusive collective memory through historical documentation practice, methods, policies and politics at their programs.

Conclusion

In light of the current critical landscape, regularly meetings, panels, discussion platforms, and award programs to bring diverse profiles in two fields together with (international) feminist scholars working on architecture and its education history might have very significant contributions to diverse and inclusive historical documentations on architecture education, and to establish more productive and effective dialogues between two fields. With this concern and aim, I have been currently working on a panel organization in collaboration with an organization on women architects in the US for 2021, and aim to bring some significant questions into focus with archivists and architecture historians together, such as a. how can we raise awareness of each other's work, b. what are the expectations by archivists from scholars, professors, students and their programs in architecture for more effective collaboration to support diverse and inclusive historical documentations, etc., c. what are long-held traditional practices, methods and policies in historical documentation of (multicultural US) architecture education and how we can break down these traditions for more inclusive, diverse practice in this field; d. methods for more diverse and inclusive historical documentation practice in the US architecture education, e. what are the changing roles and responsibilities of archival programs and their practitioners as a response to rising influence of globalization, migration and some recent gender-based political arguments in the country and its influence on architecture (education), f. what can be done to give momentum to digital archives and collection with diverse and inclusive emphasis at schools of architecture, etc. As the second step of this (ongoing) research project, it has been planned to contact archivists at the next 10 schools of architecture according to Design Intelligence's same survey.

Resources

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<https://mitmuseum.mit.edu/calendar/women-mit-wikipedia-hackathon>, August 6, 2019; last accessed on November, 30, 2020.

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<https://www.architecture.yale.edu/about-the-school/history-and-objectives>

Note:

It has been established contact with Curator of Drawings & Archives at the Columbia University, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, and Director of Visual Resources Center at College of Environmental Design, University of California, Berkeley. However, they have not participated in the research project.