

## ACSA

### The Long View: Strategic Planning with ACSA Administrators

November 16, 2024

Slides are [here](#).

#### Introduction

ACSA held a conference of its program administrators over several days in mid-November, 2024. While a range of topics were explored ([program linked here](#)) an overarching theme was an investigation of prospects for ensuring the long term viability of architecture education in the face of mounting pressure from within academia and beyond. The Strategy Matters consulting team facilitated a closing session at the Administrators' Conference to contextualize some of the major themes of the conference and to offer an "outside" perspective on the challenges and opportunities on the horizon for architectural education in general, and for ACSA in particular. The goals for this session of the conference were to:

1. Introduce participants to the strategic planning process
2. Generate discussion about the present and future of architectural education and ACSA's role in supporting its evolution

The sections below summarize the consultant teams' perspective on the dynamics currently at play for ACSA and the results of an exercise in which conference attendees participated.

#### A Framework for Understanding Challenges in Architectural Education

The consulting team introduced a framework<sup>1</sup> for understanding and evaluating the performance of a field of activity. Here, a "**field**" is taken to be a community of organizations and individuals working together to achieve a common goal using a set of complementary strategies. A field is **strong** when it possesses the following characteristics:

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Bridgespan's "[The Strong Field Framework](#)"

1. **Shared identity:** clarity and agreement about the purpose of and membership within the field.
2. **Standards of practice:** a well-defined and understood account of what it takes to do the work well.
3. **Knowledge base:** bodies of research supporting standards of practice.
4. **Engaged participants:** influential leaders, key constituencies, and members of the field actively participate in field-related activities.
5. **Funding and supporting policy:** coming from formal, informal, institutional, and/or grassroots sources dedicated to support and enable all (1) - (4) above.
6. **Catalysts for emergence:** Strong fields are able to renew, reinvent, rebuild themselves based on new participants, new ideas, and new socio-cultural and technological paradigms.

One of the roles of an association within a particular field is to help ensure that the field is strong in the sense articulated above. It is the view of the consulting team that simultaneous pressure from many different sources is revealing what is likely a long standing crisis of identity in the field of architectural education. State and federal interventions in college and university admissions and curricula, the financial models of higher education, growing skepticism about the value of higher education, and pending enrollment cliff, and more threaten architectural education from the outside in. Meanwhile, ACSA members struggle to agree about what architecture and architecture education are or should be. Moreover, ineffability of architecture and architectural education threaten to undermine effective efforts at advocacy, since it is hard to be an advocate for something one struggles to describe, at a time when it is most needed.

In response to this clarification of the myriad challenges facing architectural education, and therefore the ACSA's members and the association itself, the conference participants envisioned new ways to work together, and toward shared goals. This work began with envisioning a different future, and exploring the implications of aspects of emerging visions.

### The Long View: Architectural Education Today and Tomorrow

#### **Question: What does the future look like for Architectural Education (AE)?**

This was the question that conference attendees considered in our first session. The field of architectural education is experiencing a range of serious challenges which together may be undermining its ability to operate as a 'strong field'. What are the potential consequences of this situation for AE between now and 2030?

Here are the participants' answers. We may see:

### **A shift in the positioning of Architectural Education within education and training landscapes**

- "Architectural Education becomes trade education"
- "More mixing of academic study and paid practice"
- "The partnership between AE and practice will not be as it was in the professional's and incoming years"
- "AE is to contribute and develop that built environment that profession will take over very quickly"
- "Guide/polarization of Architectural disciplines core + auxiliary"
- "Missed opp as practice 14: -resilience -AI"
- "Third story: a natural evolution + development story"
- "Assessment: Practice: Assessed to DEATH, Practice - Autonomy/intensive regulation"
- "More co-op programs"
- "No M. Architectural programs in public universities"
- "Consequences: Learning post, exploring + innovating w/ new technologies (such as RE) re: that provide students with new skills/modes of design study that plans/studios may use advancing with... Granting new ties to the profession"

### **Adaptations to Adjacent Educational Evolution and Reform Efforts**

- Traditional programs face existential threats, with smaller liberal arts-based programs at risk of disappearing
- Need for diverse and additional pathways in education and licensure
- Integration of practice-based learning and community engagement
- Focus on developing critical thinking and soft skills
- Breaking down silos while encouraging specialization
- Teaching applied research becoming increasingly important
- Evidence-based practice culture emerging

### **The Impact of Changing Technology, Including Artificial Intelligence**

- AI viewed as both challenge and opportunity
- Will support technical and routine aspects of project development
- Potential to address intern work and create diverse possibilities
- Need to prepare students for AI integration
- Questions about architect's value in AI era
- Changing how we prepare students for practice

## **Necessity of Clear Messaging on the Unique Value of Architectural Education for Many Career Paths, Professional Settings and Sectors**

- Communication of professional value becoming crucial
- Risk of being "reduced to a stamp"
- Divided classes within the profession
- De-siloed approaches to expertise needed
- Concern about designing for reuse
- Need to foster empathy in designers
- Finding balance between market-ready skills and traditional education
- Leadership/political advocacy career paths in government
- Crisis as a leadership opportunity direction/inertia
- New ways of communicating
- Partnership based curriculum

## **Ongoing and Potentially Expanding Institutional Challenges**

- NAAB accreditation at risk of ceasing to exist
- Architectural alliance relationships deteriorating
- Need to regroup around education rather than architecture
- More mental health issues emerging
- Concerns about ADA erosion
- Weak built environment trade education
- Risk of becoming reactive rather than proactive

## **Question: As the impacts and forces above shape our work, what good outcomes could emerge by 2050 for AE? Here are some thoughts:**

This follow up question was intended to enable the participants to do some forecasting; what happens if these trends continue? What is driving the field(s) of AE and in what directions? What are the potential good outcomes from all of this turbulence?

Here are the participants' answers. We may see:

## **Architecture and AE addressing global challenges**

- Post-disaster economy
- Building resilience will be critical post climate change
- Judgment, aesthetics as resilient and enduring qualities
- Teach ambition - "to what ends are we doing it"
- Integration of education and technology
- Empathy - genuine not simulated - becomes a job ready marketable competency
- Climate emergency and response

- All built environmental professionals come together thru problem solving, stakeholders
- Architecture is not about new and shiny materials, instead focused on reuse of existing buildings and materials
- Architecture as visible path of civil service (mayor, gov, pres) like lawyer
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- Architectural education will be totally integrated with life in 2050, or whatever life will be
- We will all live underground
- Climate change will trigger a completely new design landscape: practical utopias

## Changes within AE and Architecture Careers

- Increased specializations
- Fewer school - mergers, closures
- Long term integration of education with practice
- Expanded land-grant management
- Re-focus on community engagement
- Increased stakeholder engagement
- "The ancient order of architects"
- A more diverse architecture field
- A less siloed educational model (in disciplinary terms)
- Less focus on "the profession" in our work
- Curricula become less rigid and standardized
- Expanded lifelong Ed model. More opportunities to provide micro-credentialing
- Increased focus on student agency with support for specific paths
- Engage tech to advance impact
- Increase engagement with profession/experts

## Shifts in Education

Curriculum Changes: There's a push for more flexible and diverse curricula, including:

- New Studio Culture model
- Expansion of design thinking as a core/Gen Ed course
- Increased focus on history and tectonics
- Integration of technology in education
- More specializations and deregulated degrees
- Interdisciplinary Approach: The notes suggest a move towards:
  - Easier transfer across disciplines
  - Collaboration across universities and shared facilities
  - Integration with other built environment academic disciplines

- Community Engagement: There's Community of architectural advocates and/or built environment professionals
- Increased and recognized policies and design requirements relating to climate change
- Conception of space will be more flexible - adaptive use - adaptable
- New emphasis on:
  - Increased stakeholder engagement
  - More K-12 outreach
  - Focus on community engagement and impact
- Wider influence of who and what impacts the built environment: climate justice social justice
- Architecture as thought leader
- Increased recognition of value in leading vision/impact (climate and society)
- Changes in Higher Education Sector and the Business of Higher Education
  - Union
  - Community colleges enrollment boom
  - More k-12 outreach
  - Accessible financial models
  - Strengthening low-cost 2-year programs
  - Revenue generating curriculum
- Integration of AE into other fields/career preparation pathways
  - Form new alliances with built environments academic disciplines
  - Architecture as core competency - greater impact at institutions
  - Expansion of design thinking as core/Gen Ed course
  - Easier transfer across disciplines
  - Embracing risk in program
  - Demystified profession -> architect and policy
  - Collaboration across universities/institutions and shared facilities
  - Shifting metrics of success at institutional level
  - Broader exposure to more cultures and bodies of knowledge
  - A new registration model with initial qualifications at graduation
  - We spend more time teaming architectural ideas to non-majors
  - Education addressing and adapting to global issues and impacts of the polycrisis
    - resilient and adaptable to changes - not stuck in what we've done
    - Market ready students for sustainable design
    - Protect cold desk for year 1 and 2 - hot desk after
    - More deregulated degrees
    - Diversity in de-regulated degrees

- Embrace out status as a core stem field (built environment)
- Market ready students for sustainable design
- More important than ever (but different space-use model)
- Pivot towards history in curriculum

## **And also in professional practice**

- Sustainability and Climate Change: A significant focus on:
  - Market-ready students for sustainable design
  - Building resilience in response to climate emergencies
  - Reuse of existing buildings and materials over new construction
- Technology Integration: The role of technology is highlighted:
  - AI empowering new services for underserved audiences
  - AI as a tool for code development and project management
  - Using technology to shift architects' time towards community focus
- Expanded Role of Architects: The profession is seen as evolving towards:
  - Architecture as a thought leader
  - Increased involvement in policy and civil service
  - Leadership in addressing climate and social justice issues
- Use of technology to improve both AE and the practice of architecture
  - Technology is used to shift architects' time to focus on community
  - More tectonics (support by technology)
  - AI can empower new services for new audiences in need of design but can't access it now

## **There will be corresponding or concurrent economic and institutional changes**

- Financial Models: There's a call for:
  - More accessible financial models
  - Revenue-generating curricula
  - Strengthening low-cost 2-year programs
- Institutional Adaptations: Predictions include:
  - Fewer schools due to mergers and closures
  - Changes in campus space-use models
  - Expanded lifelong education and micro-credentialing opportunities

## **We see some future challenges and opportunities**

- Changing Landscape: The notes acknowledge potential radical changes:
  - Post-disaster economy scenarios
  - Completely new design landscapes due to climate change
  - Questions about the need for more buildings

- Professional Identity: There's discussion about:
  - Demystifying the profession
  - Embracing architecture's status as a core STEM field
  - Developing a community of architectural advocates
- Next generation of questions
  - Re-build?
  - Do we need more buildings?
  - How will education react to how practice changes
  - Where will the jobs be - local/global
  - What will firms look like in 2050?
  - What will the economy look like in 2050