Detroit Mercy SACD

AIA MI Newsletter: View from our Educational Sector

Michigan is fortunate to be home to five accredited schools of architecture (listed alphabetically: Andrews University, Kendall College of Art and Design, Lawrence Technological University, University of Detroit Mercy, and University of Michigan) and one post accredited degree school (Cranbrook Academy). Each one brings unique value to the educational process and our discipline. We support and collaborate with each other. Therefore, it was natural for me to reach out to the six deans and directors as I prepared this update in an effort to ensure that its content reflected more than our school's agenda. I received a variety of responses ranging from: 1. maintaining and growing enrollment despite the falling demographic trends in Michigan, to… 2. Engaging and attracting a variety of student demographics and decolonizing our educational process, to… 3. navigating a critical dialogue on the transitions represented by A.I. content generators like Midjourney, Dall-e or ChatGPT, to… 4. the list continues, but for the sake of brevity, I will stop it here.

A.I. Architects + Impact: We may look back at this past year (2023) as the year Artificial Intelligence became mainstreamed: Dall-e 2, ChatGPT, Midjourney…or another way to illustrate this point: artists making art with A.I. software, students using ChatGPT to write papers, but ultimately according to The New Yorker (Accessed 14 April 2023), it was "Harry Potter by Balenciaga" (Accessed 14 April 2023) that truly supports this statement that perhaps 2023 will be the year that mainstreamed A.I.. Though, whether or not this is true, is not the intent of this brief commentary. Since this potentially dramatic shift is happening around us, I am interested in the role architects will play moving forward. Will we ignore A.I.? Will we engage it? The critical thinking behind answering these questions is ideal for our educational institutions to explore. Our 6 universities and schools have the capacity to be the places that neither embrace nor reject these innovations. Instead, we can provide a critical and thoughtful process to analyze the implications of A.I., define key places for impact, and prepare our students to lead in its application or in the policies surrounding its application.

Growing, Diversifying + Exceeding: The statistics are clear that the numbers of non-white male architects in our profession have changed very little in 50-60 years. This is not solely an issue for our educational institutions. But it is one that all of our schools have taken very seriously. We all have been working to create the environment where there will be a mosaic of students who will become a mosaic of architects working with the mosaic of communities that make up our cities and towns. Similar to the assertion in the prior paragraph regarding A.I., our educational institutions are also ideal places to make the changes necessary and to advocate for the changes required beyond the walls of our institutions.

While we work too adjust the equity of representation in our schools and discipline, the number of students graduating from high school has been dwindling for the past few years and is predicted to continue until approximately 2030. This is happening simultaneously when many if not all of our schools of architecture are being pressured to increase our student body. Increase our student numbers from a dwindling pool!?! The effects are and will be different for each of our schools and institutions. But it does propose opportunities to expand the boundaries of the pool to include more than traditional high school incoming first-year learners or community college students, which essentially still originate from the high school pipeline. At the very least we all have begun explore adjusting the deliver methods for our curricula and the support we provide for students who do not originate from the transition enrollment pool: Adult learners… Nontraditional Working Students… Students with only a four-year architecture degree from many years ago…the list continues…

Closing Statement: As I alluded in the first paragraph of this update, the variety of issues that coexist at our institutions are many and distinctive. This is not new. Though some of the issues may have changed or moved up on the priority list, our Michigan schools of architecture have always simultaneously juggled and balanced them to create thoughtful and critical institutions that have expanded and supported our discipline. For this update, I have merely selected two that offer a glimpse into the complexity of the current issues all of our schools are facing. We embrace them as potential opportunities to increase the meaningful impact of our discipline and to further foster the understanding that the *profession* of architecture encompasses both the *academy* and *practice*. One does not feed the other. Instead, they learn from each other—education inside and outside of the classroom, practice inside and outside of the office.

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