

Dear Students, Faculty, and Staff

As I begin my role as head of the School of Architecture one of the most pressing issues I see facing our school, our profession, and our society is the ever-present and urgent need for racial justice. A number of us within the school have been working intensely and collaboratively on the following statement of action since I officially began my new position a week ago. This summary of actions that will guide change going forward is the outcome of recent discussions in the School of Architecture and within the College of Design. It is the first draft of an evolving approach.

University of Minnesota School of Architecture

Statement of Action: Committing Architectural Education to Racial and Spatial Justice

As members of the University of Minnesota's School of Architecture community, we are witnessing a widespread outpouring of anger and grief, through protests and actions in numerous cities around the globe, all catalyzed by the murder of George Floyd here in Minneapolis. We share these feelings of deep sorrow and anger. This global movement and the protests in our own city reaffirm our commitment to the need for change in our community.

The University of Minnesota School of Architecture respectfully acknowledges that we are situated in the traditional and contemporary lands of Dakota and Ojibwe people. We condemn the continual acts of violence and dehumanization against Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) in our community. Alongside our partners in the College of Design, we commit to action.

We also acknowledge that architecture as a discipline and profession has benefited from and is frequently implicated in systems of racial injustice, inequity, and environmental degradation. Our actions are inspired by this recognition and the belief that design has the power to transform our spatial conditions and help end the inequalities produced through the spaces we inhabit every day.

In light of these conditions, the University of Minnesota School of Architecture proposes the following action items:

Refocus the Curriculum

We will expand our efforts to educate future practitioners and graduates of our programs to design and build better, more equitable, and more inclusive places and spaces that dismantle historical and ongoing forms of systemic spatial injustice. We will also commit to advancing students' skills and sensibilities, and to provide them with resources to contribute to meaningful change in the profession. We will form a working group to address this, and together with the College of Design, we will start to make change on day one.

Improve Recruitment

We will improve recruitment methods, and work to eliminate barriers for people of color to join our School of Architecture community as students, staff, and faculty. We will expand bias training in our community and also intensify our support for the BIPOC students in our program.

Engage Community

To better work with and support BIPOC and other communities whose environments are shaped by inequities—regional, national, and global—we will develop new methods of engagement and new partnerships with disciplines, organizations, and communities within campus and beyond the University, including AIA Minnesota and the National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA), as well as local groups.

We will create new forums for dialogue and new partnerships across disciplines in the College of Design to bring more perspectives from BIPOC architects, academics, and related professionals into the School of Architecture to broaden their impact. We will create new internal mechanisms to identify issues, address conflict, and better support the BIPOC communities in our school.

Environmental Justice

We will expand our commitment to address social, environmental, and climate justice at local, regional, and global scales. We acknowledge the importance of the built environment in contributing to climate change, and recognize that this change has the greatest impact on underserved communities and on BIPOC communities locally and globally.

Holding Ourselves Accountable

We are forming a working group to take action immediately, with the goals that it be both aspirational and comprehensive, and its members will represent many academic viewpoints and diverse communities. This working group will be led by faculty who have already been championing these issues, and will be expanded to include all faculty, staff, and student representatives. Their work will include the broad review of the architecture curriculum through the lens of race, but will also extend this to issues such as gender, sexuality, class, ability, and environmental justice. We will reorient our curriculum and modes of teaching in order to contribute to the ongoing efforts toward an inclusionary architecture. We will identify work that is already ground-breaking and whose impact can be expanded. We will begin by identifying changes in our curriculum that can happen immediately in Fall 2020.

First Steps: Identifying opportunities that can be implemented now across the SOA.

- Review current syllabi to support the incorporation of intersectionally diverse topics, readings, and precedents.
- Review best practices and approaches from other institutions nationwide, inclusive of recruitment strategies, K-12 initiatives, elective and core course offerings, and sample curricula/course syllabi.
- Review our academic structures, approaches, and processes for the purposes of equity, diversity, and inclusion, encompassing but not limited to: our curriculum, syllabi, projects, precedents, assignments, shared spaces and facilities, evaluations, and critiques.
- Formalize efforts to connect faculty and staff more frequently with students of color.
- Redouble our efforts to diversify our faculty, staff, students, critics, and lecturers.
- Work to increase scholarships and other types of support for students of color in both undergraduate and graduate programs.

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- Strengthen School connections with other units and communities in the Twin Cities, inclusive of research partnerships with communities of color.
- Support student initiatives in alignment with this work by amplifying their voices and assisting with fundraising efforts.

We will be sharing information during the next few weeks, giving detail on important work already underway at the School of Architecture and across the College of Design that has focused on racial and spatial justice on our websites and social media. We welcome input, feedback, and will look for possible collaborations as we structure a process to support this effort in the School of Architecture and in the College of Design. We look forward to finding ways to work together to expand this work and increase its impact in the days ahead.

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