

TEACHING EMPATHY

BY EDWARD KEEGAN, AIA

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Perhaps you've seen University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) professor Kathryn Anthony and her class on one of their field trips to Chicago — or you haven't. The visit is an important component of the course, but she explained, "We visit women architects, architects of color — anybody who's not a white, male architect."

Her most recent book represents the interests that have driven her pedagogy for more than three decades — *Defined by Design: The Surprising Power of Hidden Gender, Age and Body Bias in Everyday Products and Places*. She's taught the yearly seminar on gender, race and ethnicity since 1991. While the initial classes were almost exclusively women, "There was maybe one brave male architecture student," Anthony recalled. She told him, "If you're feeling strange, that's good. You'll be empathetic." Last fall's edition had 15 students, including four men, which is now the average.

Topics evolve, as she weaves world and political events into the course's content. Students studied the spatial interactions and spatial behaviors of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump during the 2016 presidential debates, and they researched previous encounters dating back to JFK and Nixon in 1960. Two students from a



ARCHITECTURE/GENDER AND WOMEN'S STUDIES SEMINAR ON GENDER AND RACE IN CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE WITH ILLINOIS SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE ALUMNA JEANNE GANG, FAIA.

Munich school looked at the design of contemporary refugee camps in Germany, and their translation of materials from German opened the topic to an English-speaking audience. Another German student recently took the class on her year abroad in the United States. "I came here because of this class," she told Anthony. "I can't believe it, but this isn't offered elsewhere."

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— KATHRYN ANTHONY, UIUC PROFESSOR

Research can be driven by students examining personal spatial experiences. Last semester, a woman who had attended an HBCU in Tennessee told Anthony of the spatial difficulties she had

navigating as a tuba player in the school's band. This led to a survey on social media that allowed her to gather information from 90 students in just two days. And the class has been an incubator for future

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research. Meltem Gürel wrote about gender in architectural history texts, eventually expanding that paper with Anthony for publication in the *Journal of Architectural Education*. Following graduation, Gürel became the founding chair of the Department of Architecture at Bikrent University in Ankara, Turkey (where six of the 10 full-time faculty are women).

The class has clearly been successful, and Anthony noted that it's become more diverse in the last five years. "There's a timeliness to these issues," she said. And she continues to

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mentor the students long after they leave the comfortable confines of Urbana-Champaign through the networks she has created. Anthony uses

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Facebook groups for her recent classes to keep building community with past students, but she notes that she still keeps in touch with her own classmates,

who she met long before social media. "It's important to keep good friends," she said — which seems like good advice for everybody. CA