FAÇADE

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 com-
ponent 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 rep-
resents 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

Munich school looked at the
design of contemporary refu-
gee 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.”

Research can be driven
by students examining per-
sonal 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 informa-
tion from 90 students in just
two days. And the class has
been an incubator for future

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

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— ANYBODY WHO’S NOT A WHITE, MALE ARCHITECT.”

— KATHRYN ANTHONY, UIUC PROFESSOR
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 mentor the students long after they leave the comfortable confines of Urbana-Champaign through the networks she has created. Anthony uses 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