

To What Extent are the School's Programs Socially Engaged and How Accountable or Committed are They?

Dale Green, Nicole Semmler, Jacqueline Wolke

EVOKE

About the Ethnographer

Dale Glenwood Green:

I am from a small town located on Maryland Eastern Shore; Easton, Maryland. I am a second year graduate student in the school of architecture (Masters of Architecture; Candidate) with a concentration in the preservation option. Prior to my current studies, I completed my undergraduate studies at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland, where I received my Bachelors of Science in Architecture and Environmental Design. My plans after graduation encompass relocating back to Maryland, pursuing a Ph.D., completing my internship development program as an Intern Architect for licensure, and pursuing a professorship.

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Jacqueline Wolke:

I am a second year graduate student in the architecture program studying for my master's degree in architecture with an emphasis in preservation. I did my undergraduate work at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in architectural studies. I am from Sullivan, Wisconsin which is a small town of about 400 people, but before I moved there with my parents and older brother for a short time we lived in West Allis, Wisconsin which is a suburb of Milwaukee. After graduation I hope to move back to the Milwaukee area to continue to work in the architecture profession.

EXPLORE

Question

What questions is your inquiry contingent upon?

MAIN QUESTION:

To what extent are the school's programs socially engaged and how accountable or committed are they?

SUB QUESTIONS:

1. How does UIUC respective programs in Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning empower or influence their students in and within the physical and social environment?
2. Why does society discount the physical? And why do the design disciplines discount the social?
3. What benefits does society experience from the physical influences of the design profession?
4. What are the social ills that result when the design professionals do not take into account social implications?
5. Does the design context success depend on the interaction of both the physical and social connectivity?

Plan

How will you go about answering your inquiry?

These are the questions that we are using for our interviews.

Research Topic:

To what extent are the school's programs socially engaged and how accountable or committed are they?

1. What courses do you teach/take that infuse the social responsibilities associated with the students respective profession?
2. How many of your general courses are based on the premise of the physical attributes of a project as it relates to the students respective profession?
3. What are some of the required classes that educate the students in the physical and social environment?
4. What (if any) guidelines are you required to follow regarding what you teach/take?
5. As an institution, what value do you weigh most as far as education; the physical or the social and or both?
6. How has your education influenced your design in both the physical and social environment within your school and/or professional career?
7. What is your opinion on why the Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Urban Planning departments don't compliment each other better?
8. What responsibilities have you enforced in practice (Physical and/or Social) and what

underpinning (Training and/or Education) empowered such capabilities?

9. Do you feel the UIUC (within its respective departments) influence toward a specific importance (Physical and/or Social)?

10. Are there areas the UIUC can improve to educate in the physical and social environment?

11. What schools or systems of education are you able to name that empower and/or influence its respective students to practice/teach in a manner that respond to social or physical responsibilities?

12. Within your professional and/or school career, where do you measure success? Is it in the physicality or the sociality of the project?

10-26-06:

We created the list of faculty, alumni's and students about who we are going to interview. This weekend is dedicated to contacting, setting up times, and hopefully getting the interviews.

We are revising our interview questions, as a result of our first interview.

We are going to look into other design universities to look at their programs offered and their requirements for graduation.

We might possibly look at projects done by alumni from those colleges.
Do they emphasize the physical or social?

We are going to look into the history of the UIUC in regards to what courses were required when the school started versus today. And what other requirements were necessary to graduate

10-19-06: Plan revised

We are going to interview 3 separate groups. First group is within the Architecture department. The second group is Landscape architecture, and the 3rd is Urban planning. Within all 3 groups, we will be interviewing both faculty and students.

Within architecture, we will be interviewing faculty from all 4 options.. preservations, design, structures, practice. We will then be talking with students from each of the 4 options.

Within landscape and urban planning, we will be talking with faculty and students within each discipline.

Step 1:

Create a list of questions and topics for the interviews.

Step 2:

Create a list of types of faculty and students we want to interview.

Step 3:

Assessing how influences of the Alumni's education from the UIUC have been carried through to their practice.

1. viewing a video entitled "how to design a good neighborhood"
2. talk to an architecture professor at the U of IL about possible directions to take on literature and questions about social and physical environments
3. looking up research in the environmental magazines in the architecture library.

OBSERVE

What observations, or findings are you encountering in your research?

12-06-06

Our initial assumptions were that architectural educations were lacking the social engagement aspect as far as required courses. In other words, we were interested in seeing how many students were graduating without gaining experience in socially engaged education or activities.

We all had agreed that the social and the physical were equally important and that no one aspect should be weighed above the other, however, we felt that such was not the case when it came to the UIUC's "design based" curriculum.

Interview Observation:

People that we interviewed, in general, were excited about our topic. They felt it was a subject that the University needs to address. They were very open and candid about the benefits and/or repercussions of the social engagement of each department.

The interviewees also said that we have a social responsibility as professionals to design both physically and socially and to not discount one or the other.

We have conducted our first interview on Wednesday Oct. 25th. We interviewed an architectural faculty member.

This week, we will be conducting some more interviews within the faculty and student bodies.

DISCUSS

Discuss your inquiry, taking care to separate speculation from fact or data

12-06-06

In short, we found that the architecture department was lacking in social engagement more so than landscape architecture, however, urban planning was the most socially engaged. Furthermore, we found that urban planning and landscape architecture collaborated more so than the architecture department.

In terms of required courses, we found that certain graduate studios were more socially engaged or were encouraged by its respective professors interest. At the undergraduate level we found that the 400 level courses introduced the students to social responsibility.

We found that the students, faculty, and alumni of the respective architecture, landscape architecture, and urban planning departments agreed that they do not compliment each other better is because the administrations do not desire the coordination. Moreover, the culture of the infrastructure is not in place to support a complimented inter-disciplinary interaction amongst faculty or students. At length, the respective ego's of the departments conflicted with the integral process; as a result of fear of identity loss, consolidation, and apathetic responses to integrated curriculum base.

Conclusively, we found that the three departments and respective groups agreed that there was room to improve the programs.

From an architectural standpoint the implications of what one is designing is not holistically looked at in terms of how it impacts the society.

Real projects with real clients should be infused in the studio culture as well as a critical part of the thesis selection.

There is an overall consensus that there is a heavily aesthetic “design based” curriculum set in place and that many professors are not fully instituting their responsibility to shape designers; to see their role in the over arching process.

REFLECT

Link

Connect with other resources and materials.

12-06-06

It was interesting to find out how the students, faculty, and alumni views were in rapport with our initial assumptions and views regarding the UIUC departments.

It made us more aware of our social responsibility to society, and the role that we have as designers and planners within the aspects of social, physical, cultural, historical and geographical realms; and not just its assumed aesthetic based qualities or factors.

It is interesting to note that the society dismisses physical and the designers and planners often dismiss the social; but the social and physical is of equal importance.

Implications

Could your findings have broader implications beyond this inquiry?

12-06-06

Our findings suggest that the students are not being successfully prepared on the education level to contribute or impact socially within the real world.

The university should care about this research because when the UIUC is compared to such schools as Berkeley or others of that caliber we are not commensurable nor are we as competitive.

The lack of social influence within the schools departments may reflect on the professional practices and their lack of interest, sensitivity and responsibility as it relates to community development.

10-26-06:

We are researching the design context in general with the influence of social and physical, rather than just in neighborhood design.

10-19-06:

We hope to tie all of our research back to our original intent of finding out which is more beneficial to neighborhoods... the physical or the social.

OTHER

A space for other notes, findings, comments, etc.

A CASE STUDY OF THE UIUC'S LANDSCAPE, ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN PLANNING DEPARTMENTS:

WHAT IS THEIR INFLUENCE IN HOW ONE MEASURES SUCCESS OF A DESIGN PROBLEM?

By Dale Green, Nicole Semmler , Jacqueline Wolke

Introduction and Motivation-

The main purpose of this case study was to figure out how our chosen education is

influencing our professional practices. In addition, we wanted to investigate how design based other schools curriculums were as opposed to socially engaged curriculums and activities. Moreover, we were further investigating the faculty and the alumni's preference regarding social engagement over aesthetic based design; and whether they were influenced by their education or through their own interest. In the same manner, the respective student's accounts were investigated on the same level. Conclusively, we wanted to find out how the respective interviewees are measuring how successful the UIUC is in social engagement within its respective departments.

As architecture students we were interested in the inconsistencies as to how we were being educated in the physical and social aspects of architecture. Therefore, we questioned what is more important the physical environment or the social environment in design. However, as we developed this thought we decided to see how others within the school of architecture, landscape architecture, and urban planning were influencing the student body; or if at all! Ultimately, we wanted to see the end relationship of the product of ones education at the culmination of their post-graduation experience. As professionals we have a social responsibility in addition to our aesthetic and design based responsibilities.

Research Question and Methods of Research-

Main Question:

To what extent are the schools' programs socially engaged and how accountable or committed are they?

Sub Questions:

1. How does UIUC respective programs in Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning empower or influence their students in and within the physical and social environment?
2. Why does society discount the physical? And why do the design disciplines discount the social?
3. What benefits does society experience from the physical influences of the design profession?
4. What are the social ills that result when the design professionals do not take into account social implications?
5. Does the design context success depend on the interaction of both the physical and social connectivity?

Our various methods of research encompassed interviewing students, faculty, and alumni within the UIUC's respective departments. In addition, we compared the UIUC curriculum to a number of different schools who were coined as socially engaged or responsive based schools and/or programs. Furthermore, we examined journals of architectural education, socially responsive organizations, and leading 21st century figures. Ultimately, we interviewed five faculty members, seven graduate students, and three alumni's associated with the UIUC. We examined twelve different universities core curriculums and course descriptions as it related to social engagements and responsibilities.

Initial Assumptions of Data, Summary of Data, and Major Findings-

Our initial assumptions were that architectural educations were lacking the social

engagement aspect as far as required courses. In other words, we were interested in seeing how many students were graduating without gaining experience in socially engaged education or activities. We all had agreed that the social and the physical were equally important and that no one aspect should be weighed above the other, however, we felt that such was not the case when it came to the UIUC's "design based" curriculum. In short, we found that the architecture department was lacking in social engagement more so than landscape architecture, however, urban planning was the most socially engaged. Furthermore, we found that urban planning and landscape architecture collaborated more so than the architecture department. In terms of required courses, we found that certain graduate studios were more socially engaged or were encouraged by its respective professor's interest. At the undergraduate level we found that the 400 level courses introduced the students to social responsibility. We found that the students, faculty, and alumni of the respective architecture, landscape architecture, and urban planning departments agreed that they do not compliment each other better is because the administrations do not desire the coordination. Moreover, the culture of the infrastructure is not in place to support a complimented inter-disciplinary interaction amongst faculty or students. At length, the respective ego's of the departments conflicted with the integral process; as a result of fear of identity loss, consolidation, and apathetic responses to integrated curriculum base.

Conclusively, we found that the three departments and respective groups agreed that there was room to improve the programs. From an architectural standpoint the implications of what one is designing is not holistically looked at in terms of how it impacts the society. Real projects with real clients should be infused in the studio culture as well as a critical part of the thesis selection. There is an overall consensus that there is a heavily aesthetic "design based" curriculum set in place and that many professors are not fully instituting their responsibility to shape designers; to see their role in the overarching process. The overall consensus among students, faculty, and alumni as an institution was that the UIUC's programs were lacking the social engagement component within its departments. Historically, the urban planning department program has been more successful at social engagement, however, it is presently leading towards a more policy based curriculum. Students within the architecture program are more prone to graduate from the program without taking a course or gaining experience within social responsibility; because there are no required courses. Landscape architecture was found to be more physically based however it had directions toward the social but it was not largely represented. The major consensus amongst the improvement strategy regarding the school was that the studios needed to involve more real projects and real clients. Such schools as University of Cincinnati, Penn, Berkeley, NJIT, Pratt, University of Washington, and University of Oregon were referred to us by the respective interviewees as notable socially engaged universities, however, only about six out of the twelve schools that we examined were found to be socially engaged; Berkeley was the most successful in social engagement education and activity. In addition, many of the schools did not offer all three respective degrees that the UIUC offers. Therefore, we were not comparing apples to apples, but more or less apples to oranges! A majority agreed that there needs to be a balance between the physical and social environments within the three respective departments; even though the physical is weighed over the social. Moreover, a majority measured the success through the aesthetic appeal of a space in combination

with the enhancement of the social engagement. The need for social activities was not necessarily seen as a requirement over the need for required social course work.

Implications and Reflections-

Our findings suggest that the students are not being successfully prepared on the education level to contribute or impact socially within the real world. The university should care about this research because when the UIUC is compared to such schools as Berkeley or others of that caliber we are not commensurable nor are we as competitive. The lack of social influence within the schools departments may reflect on the professional practices and their lack of interest, sensitivity and responsibility as it relates to community development. It was interesting to find out how the students, faculty, and alumni views were in rapport with our initial assumptions and views regarding the UIUC departments. It made us more aware of our social responsibility to society, and the role that we have as designers and planners within the aspects of social, physical, cultural, historical and geographical realms; and not just its assumed aesthetic based qualities or factors. It is interesting to note that the society dismisses physical and the designers and planners often dismiss the social; but the social and physical is of equal importance.

Conclusions-

If we were to conclude this research we would follow up with the following questions: What was the UIUC's early curriculum and how has it changed? Are we more socially engaged or less? What can we do as students and faculty to get the school more socially engaged if we are to make improvements to the UIUC curriculum. We would plan to examine the opinions and accounts of international students and undergraduate students as factors in the research.

In conclusion, our findings were what we had anticipated in our initial research assumptions. The physical and social environments are equally important when developing neighborhoods. However, as we delved the research topic in greater depth we discovered through our interviews that there was a consensus amongst the interviewees when it came to the notion regarding social engagement being infused in the schools curriculums. Moreover, the students across the board, were very much interested in seeing more socially responsible and engaging studios. Of greater concern was the issue of required courses that encompassed social engagement as the impetus of the course. It is interesting to note that many alumni's were alarmed by the lack of social engagement at the university. The alumni's and student's seemed to be very interested in the schools reputation as it compared to other schools who were more socially engaged.

Unfortunately, we discovered that there were only one key faculty person per architecture, landscape architecture and planning department that really spearheaded the social engagement within their courses content. Overall, we found that the need for social engagement or a response to the social aspect of environments was greatly desired and needed, however was not being successfully executed.

Today, millions of persons are in great need of shelter and are unable to afford the services of architects, landscape architects and planners. Furthermore, many talented and able young aspiring architects and planners are busy in studios doing theoretical or policy based projects that have no real sense in the context of the built environment or associated with real clients. Currently the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has

very few real client based studios or studios that infuse social engagement. This is not the nature of what architecture, landscape architecture and planning school should be known for.

Conclusively, the plan of action for the schools revitalization was concurred by the students, faculty, and alumni. They all collectively stated that there needed to be improvement in the schools programs. Across the board all departments would like to see more socially engaged studios and required courses infused in the curriculum. All believed that this effort would greatly impact the schools reputation in a positive and enriching manner. Therefore, it is strongly encouraged by the results of the interviews and the context of this research that the UIUC revisit its strategic plan regarding its level of social engagement; and how committed or accountable it is.

Ethnographers-

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