

Abroad in the World: Some Thoughts on Ever-Expanding Off-Campus Programs

As study abroad programs multiply in American schools of architecture, all roads no longer lead to Rome. Several broad developments have pushed architectural study abroad programs towards diversity in purpose, content, destination, and administration.

Some of these developments are abstract and intellectual. Scholars in the post-modern age have deconstructed the historical canon that centered on Greece, Rome, and Western European architecture; and that they have examined the political conditions behind the creation of hierarchies of cultures and offered alternative narratives of architectural development. In addition, the globalization wrought by digital information has transformed the relationships between local and global, pulling small college towns into productive dialogues with great historical cities.

Other changes have been bluntly pragmatic. Universities seeking new revenue sources or greater enrollment have diversified off-campus programs to appeal to a wider variety of students. In addition, as architectural educators grapple with new modes and models of education, they often turn to off-campus programs to supplement conventional on-campus offerings. For example, internships and co-ops at prominent firms offer practical work experience.

Given the complex factors behind the expansion and transformation of off-campus programs, not to mention the diversity of the programs themselves, how can architecture departments both integrate these programs with on-campus learning and connect them with each other? How can diverse programs all contribute to the overall curriculum?

This paper examines California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly) as a case study of the potentials and problems of expanding off-campus programs. Although perhaps not a typical university (if there is such a thing), its variety of offerings and exigent financial situation present an extreme example of the possible roles of off-campus study. Through its large portfolio of study-abroad and other off-campus programs, Cal Poly addresses some of the shortcomings of its small-town, isolated location. However, the variety of its programs also currently hinders the integration of off-campus and on-campus learning. In order to

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both integrate student experiences and, more generally, to place Cal Poly more advantageously into global learning, the traditional conception of study abroad must be inverted. The geographically distant sites, whether Rome, Tokyo, or San Francisco, should drive learning strategies and perspectives at home.

OFF-CAMPUS PROGRAMS AT CAL POLY

The Architecture Department at Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo, California, grants about 160 B.Arch. degrees yearly. In part because of its relatively isolated location in coastal California about halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco, the department strongly promotes off-campus study during the fourth year of the five-year program. In recent years, over 65% of the fourth-year students have gone off campus, with destinations ranging from Los Angeles to Bangkok to Rome. Moreover, both the number of programs and the number of participating students have grown significantly in the past several years; for 2013-14, only about 15% of the fourth-year students will be on campus. Chart 1 on the following page shows the range and type of programs recently offered by Cal Poly.

These programs vary considerably in location, administration, size, and duration. Not even the most optimistic observer is likely to find any underlying principles that link all of the programs. Some programs are quite old. The Cal Poly architecture department has been sending students to CSU Florence and to Danish Institute for Study Abroad (DIS) since 1973, and continues to send about twenty students to each program yearly. Other programs date only from the past several years: Ahmedabad, DIA/Bauhaus, Canberra, the co-ops, the professional studios, Switzerland, and Los Angeles. Still others, such as San Francisco and Rome, have recently undergone considerable change. The reasons for these new programs and changes are as diverse as their locations. The co-ops and professional studios, for example, were developed to offer students professional experiences and to strengthen Cal Poly's ties with major firms such as Gentler and AECOM. The Switzerland program sprang in part from student and faculty interest in Swiss architects such as Herzog & de Meuron and Peter Zumthor. The exchange programs with Center of Environmental Planning and Technology in Ahmedabad, India, and with DIA/Bauhaus in Dessau, Germany, bring international students to Cal Poly, increasing the diversity of the population on campus.

The body responsible for the administration also varies. California State University (CSU), which includes 23 campuses, runs the programs in Florence and Copenhagen. The Cal Poly Architecture department administers the co-ops and the Paris exchange program, while the Cal Poly College of Architecture and Environmental Design supervises the India, Germany, and Australia exchange programs. Other programs are run by Cal Poly Extended Education (formerly Continuing Education) a non-profit but self-supporting entity that has recently taken over many of Cal Poly's summer programs and off-campus programs; this takeover has created a number of difficulties that will be outlined below.

From this range of programs, what can be inferred about the larger questions facing off-campus programs, study abroad, and global programs? First, for several decades Cal Poly has not subscribed to the "grand tour" model of sending students to a limited range of historically central destinations. Of the older programs, only the Florence program, which is a CSU system-wide program that includes students from other fields, fits within this model. In addition, study abroad has been only one part of Cal Poly off-campus programs. Domestic programs also attract large numbers of students. This historical variety of

Destination	Administration	Exchange	Instructors	Duration	Students*	Notes
Florence	CSU ¹	No	non-Cal Poly	academic year	21	CSU Florence campus
Copenhagen	CSU	No	non-Cal Poly	academic year	15	Danish International Study
WAAC	Extended Ed ²	No	Cal Poly	academic year	13	Consortium of architecture programs
Paris	Arch ³	Yes	non-Cal Poly	academic year	5	École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture Paris- Val de Seine
Ahmedabad	CAED ⁴	Yes	non-Cal Poly	summer+fall	3	Center for Environmental Planning and Technology University
DIA/Bauhaus	CAED	Yes	non-Cal Poly	fall+winter	3	Dessau Institute of Architecture
Canberra	CAED	Yes	non-Cal Poly	2 quarters	varies	University of Canberra
Co-op (various)	Arch	No	non-Cal Poly	1 quarter; offered F,W,Sp	3/quarter	arranged independently by students
SOM Co-op	Arch	No	non-Cal Poly	fall	2	SOM San Francisco office
Professional Studios	Extended Ed	No	non-Cal Poly	1 quarter; offered F,W,Sp	F,W: 9; Sp: 3	various firms in southern California
San Francisco	Extended Ed	No	Cal Poly	2 quarters	20	includes internships in SF firms
Switzerland	Extended Ed	No	Cal Poly	summer quarter	18	
Rome	Extended Ed	No	non-Cal Poly	fall quarter	18	Academic Initiatives Abroad
Los Angeles	Extended Ed	No	Cal Poly	winter+spring	20	includes internships in LA firms
Japan	Extended Ed	No	Cal Poly	spring quarter	18	not offered in 2013-14
Thailand	Extended Ed	No	Cal Poly	spring quarter	18	not offered in 2013-14
* These numbers are recommended numbers for 2013-14; actual numbers vary slightly by year						
¹ California State University						
² Extended Education, a non-profit arm of Cal Poly						
³ Cal Poly Architecture Department						
⁴ Cal Poly College of Architecture and Environmental Design						

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programs may stem from Cal Poly's character as a polytechnic rather than a liberal-arts institution. The historical canon of architecture was probably never as central to architectural education at Cal Poly as it was at many other schools.

Chart 1: Cal Poly off-campus programs.

MOTIVES BEHIND NEW PROGRAMS

The off-campus programs founded more recently suggest how major architectural, cultural, educational, and economic trends have shaped the motives and content of off-campus study.

A. Diversity: One clear trend in international programs, both at Cal Poly and at other universities, is a growing variety of destinations. Off-campus programs help the Cal Poly Architecture Department address one section of its mission statement: To provide educational opportunities to gain an understanding and appreciation for the diversity manifest in the people, societies and cultures in relationship to the design and use of the built environment. In addition, one of Cal Poly's six strategic imperatives addresses both diversity and globalism: Foster diversity and cultural competency in a global context. And although no architecture program is likely to plan its curriculum solely around National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) mandates, it is worth noting that NAAB student performance criteria include "A.9. Historical Traditions and Global Culture" and "A.10. Cultural Diversity."²

New locations for programs have been chosen in part because of the intellectual and theoretical shifts away from static cultural hierarchies to more inclusive perspectives. If in the 1800s Rome was the Mecca for French *École des Beaux-Arts* students, and the *École des Beaux-Arts* the primary model for architectural education around the world, today no such consensus exists. The dismantling of the canon of historical architecture has been accompanied by greater scholarly (and student) interest in formerly peripheral areas. Some of the clearest, if most superficial, evidence comes from recent architectural history textbooks; whether Ching, Jarzombek, and Prakash's *A Global History of Architecture* (2nd edition, 2010) or Richard Ingersoll's reworking of Spiro Kostof's classic survey, *World Architecture: A Cross-Cultural History* (2012), introductory texts now include a far broader scope of architecture, a far cry from the days of Banister Fletcher and James Fergusson in the 1800s, and greatly different even from the dominant texts of the 1980s.

The intellectual and theoretical destruction of historical hierarchies of place has been furthered by the globalization of the twenty-first century. Many of the more recent off-campus programs have targeted regions outside the historical Western canon, for instance Thailand and Japan. Japan in particular offers a particularly rich example of the "flattening" of space and time in the postmodern, global age. Students seem as attracted to Zen gardens such as Ryoanji as to contemporary works by architects such as Toyo Ito, suggesting that they can find the past as relevant as the present.

B. Professional Opportunities: If one general motive for expanding off-campus programs has been to incorporate a wider variety of cultures, then a more concrete motive has been to provide professional opportunities not available on campus. For a university such as Cal Poly, which is located in a small town, off-campus programs at major urban firms offer students exposure to the highest levels of the profession. In the past decade, Cal Poly has established several programs that provide students with internships and co-ops in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and other California cities. For example, the Professional Studio program places students in large firms such as Gensler and AECOM, where they complete a paid co-op as well as a design studio. For a polytechnic university such as Cal Poly that prides itself on graduating work-ready students, this kind of

professional experience is fundamental to the department's mission. In addition, co-ops and other internships place students in group settings, where their experience addresses architectural department learning objectives as well as NAAB criteria such as "C.1. Collaboration."²

The desire to provide professional experience stems not only from departmental pedagogical motives, though. Cal Poly, like many other universities, is under increasing pressure to assess and justify its curriculum. The co-op and internship programs not only provide professional experience, but also serve as conduits between the department and major employers. Graduates benefit from increased access to firms, while the department benefits from closer ties to industry, and sometimes from industry donations as well.

C. University Budgets: The desire for diversity and the drive to offer professional experience (although not without their pitfalls, as noted below) at least appear as generally beneficent motives. However, a third major driver of off-campus study is not so benign: financial austerity and the increasing privatization of higher education. The exact effects of shrinking budgets will of course depend on the university, but the Cal Poly experience, even if atypical in its details, serves as a reminder of the dangers of allowing financial imperatives to drive educational programs.

Until 2011, most of the off-campus programs at Cal Poly were funded in the same way as on-campus offerings. As with most other state universities, much of the budget came from state subsidies, since student fees covered only a part of the cost of education. Beginning in 2011, though, the College of Environmental Design decided to farm out as many programs as possible to Cal Poly Extended Education (then called Continuing Education), a non-profit arm of the university. The benefit to the college and to the Architecture Department was simple: the salary of a faculty member taking students off campus would be paid not from the department budget, but by Extended Education. The department budget would remain the same, but the salary of the faculty member would be freed for other expenditures.

Unfortunately, this benefit for the department and college came at a literal price for the students. For example, between 2009 and 2011, the registration fees for students to participate in the Japan Program for spring 2011 almost doubled from \$1681 to \$3210. When operated by the department, the Japan Program was essentially subsidized by the state, since the instructor salary was provided through normal CSU channels. Extended Education, charged with producing budget-neutral programs, was forced to charge much higher fees to the students in order to fully cover faculty salary and costs. Responsibility for planning the programs still fell to the faculty; Extended Education's role was to handle student payments and set up shells for the courses. In other words, the shift from the department to Extended Education inserted an additional layer of bureaucracy that provided little assistance to faculty and no benefits to the students.

The dangers to students and faculty of Extended Education are not limited to the Architecture Department. Extended Education at Cal Poly has taken over the administration not only of many off-campus programs campus-wide, but also most of the courses taught during summer quarter. As with the Architecture Department's off-campus programs, registration fees have risen for many students. Moreover, faculty salaries have been considerably reduced; courses offered through Extended Education, unlike those offered by Cal Poly, are not subject to the collective bargaining agreement between CSU and the faculty.

SOME PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES IN EXPANDING OFF-CAMPUS PROGRAMS

On one hand, the expansion in the number and scope of off-campus programs has created opportunities for faculty and students alike. Especially at a university where research funding is comparatively limited, off-campus programs offer faculty chances to spend extended periods at sites relevant to their own research.

However, sending more faculty and students to remote locales also creates a number of potential problems. Here I wish to focus on one central issue: the integration of on-campus and off-campus learning. One of the great problems facing any architecture program is the integration of the manifold fields of the discipline. As long ago as 1996, Ernest Boyer and Lee Mitgang wrote, “Making the connections, both within the architecture curriculum and between architecture and other disciplines on campus, is, we believe, the single most important challenge confronting architectural programs.”¹ It is probably safe to say that Cal Poly is not alone in its current struggles to integrate within its curriculum the various topics of architecture—for instance design, theory, technology, and sustainability. If such integration is difficult for courses taught on campus, it is exponentially more so for courses taught by numerous instructors (some from Cal Poly, some not) in diverse locations across the globe. How can global outposts be connected to the central institution that runs them?

In addition, given increasing pressure for accountability in professional education, Cal Poly and other universities continue to work to ensure that each graduating student has a core set of relevant skills and knowledge. If the fourth-year curriculum of the five-year Bachelor of Architecture program is divided among many programs with few mutual connections, then that year runs the danger of becoming what at Cal Poly used to be called (euphemistically) an “enrichment year”—in other words, a year that is not clearly integral to the goals of the program as a whole. While no one questions the value of a year in Florence or a quarter in Tokyo, as demands on programs and students increase, it is no longer sufficient simply to claim “enrichment” as a learning objective.

Related to the problem of integration is the fragmentation of the student experience. What do Cal Poly students in Florence share with those in Irvine, California? How do students in San Luis Obispo benefit from the adventures of their colleagues abroad? Should pedagogical strategies used on campus be repeated in Tokyo or Ahmedabad? Especially given the rising costs of programs, due in part to changing administrative models, is there a greater differentiation of student experience based on money rather than interest or aptitude? Are students who stay on campus left with an insular, inferior experience? In fact, the students who lack the financial means to study off campus are often the ones who would most benefit from being exposed to a greater variety of cultures and settings.

There is of course no silver bullet for these problems, but one way to address them is to reverse the center/periphery model that takes the experience of the main campus as primary. Rather than seeing international sites as offshoots of a normative local institution, the global and the local should meet on a more equal basis. In fact, rather than applying local pedagogical approaches to off-campus programs, why not let the complex student experiences from each off-campus site inform the curriculum and learning objectives for all students, including those on campus? For example, if students learn about widely differing types of urban space in Tokyo, Rome, and Los Angeles, why not allow experiences shared between off-campus experiences to serve as the basis for a common curriculum? Currently, the experience of many off-campus programs stands apart from what

happens at home—students often vanish and reappear a quarter, semester, or year later having learned a great deal from a distant place without having integrated it with their earlier classes or their home environment.

Most generally, what students develop when away from home is a kind of global awareness: they learn to compare one place with another, to understand alternative perspectives, to create frameworks encompassing here, there, and elsewhere. If Cal Poly and other universities wish to “foster diversity and cultural competency in a global context,” then they must ensure that students share what they’ve learned with other students, whether in San Luis Obispo or Chiang Mai.

Columbia University’s Studio-X program, which has established creative spaces in cities such as Mumbai, Beijing, and Rio de Janeiro, offers one strategy for integrating places far and near. As Mark Wigley notes,

The traditional hierarchical model of a leadership school concentrating expertise in a single place, synthesizing it and transmitting a singular approach to the major questions facing us gives way to the model of a distributed horizontal network that can incubate new evolving forms of intelligence for a new evolving world.⁵

According to the Studio-X mission statement, Columbia seeks to create “a new kind of cultural space in the city” by bringing together not only architecture faculty and students, but also artists, corporations, government institutions, and any other interested parties. At its core, Studio-X is:

Not a school, think-tank, gallery, performance space, communication center, or office—but elements of all.

Studio-X is an open flexible work area with exhibition space, book gallery, lecture space, meeting space, some offices and a serious espresso machine.⁴

For many schools, though, the radical approach embodied by Studio-X may not be feasible. With severely limited resources, a polytechnic orientation, a need to accommodate a wide range of students, and a mission to provide professional education, Cal Poly’s architecture department, like those of many state schools, will find it difficult to commit to radical change. Moreover, many of Cal Poly’s off-campus programs are housed at institutions that have their own faculty and their own perspectives on education. Given this situation, it may be most effective, at least in the short run, to work within existing off-campus frameworks to coordinate certain classes and activities.

Broad themes such as collective urban spaces, housing typologies, or historical/modern connections can form the basis not only of courses at off-campus locales but on the home campus as well, with students on campus examining the same issues, but in the local context. In fact, sometimes forgotten in discussions of globalism is that the local is also the global; Saskia Sassen writes, “much of what we might still experience as the ‘local’ (an office building or a house or an institution right there in our neighborhood or downtown) is actually something I would rather think of as a ‘microenvironment with global span’ insofar as it is deeply internetted.”³ Considered in this light, the hierarchy between the original, local campus and the various satellite programs is disrupted – all are microenvironments with a global span. What is learned abroad concerns not only Roman concrete or Japanese joinery or SOM strategy, but an awareness of how these can be related to more generalized issues. What happens in Florence should not simply stay in Florence.

Year	Level*	Course Topic	Format	Students
Third year	Understanding	Historical and Theoretical Topics in Urban Architecture ¹	lecture	all third-year
Fourth year	Ability	Case Studies: Study Abroad Locations + San Luis Obispo ²	seminar conducted remotely through digital methods	all fourth-year
Fifth year	Ability	Fifth-year independent project ³	design studio	all fifth-year
* NAAB student performance criteria accomplishment level				
¹ Replaces one term of the current required history/theory sequence.				
² Fits within rubric of existing Arch 480: Special Studies in Architecture, which is currently taken by off-campus students.				
³ Currently required for all Cal Poly architecture students. All students would be required to address in their independent projects themes of their choice from the third- or fourth-year classes.				

In general terms, an attempt to integrate off-campus experiences with broader learning objectives will require preparing students before leaving campus, communicating with them while they are away, and ensuring that they continue to apply their experiences after returning. One concrete plan for beginning this integration is shown below in Chart 2.

Seminars conducted virtually through the internet could encourage the kind of global thinking and communication so important today. For instance, consider a fourth-year seminar on urban space shared by students in Rome, Tokyo, and San Luis Obispo. Students abroad could introduce experiences from sites such as the Piazza San Pietro or Shibuya crossing, while the San Luis Obispo student could visit a local site – considering all three sites would make little sense from the perspective of a nineteenth-century École des Beaux-Arts student, but in the postmodern, globalized world, such a comparison of disparate sites may yield insights unavailable from examining only a single locale. The seminar would also consider how geographically separated sites are linked by global flows – tourism, for instance, or even cars or coffee.

In short, then, study abroad and study at home should be reconfigured as complementary elements of global study. The ‘grand tour’ of Ruskin or Henri Labrousse that promised enlightenment at the one true source must yield to a more inclusive, complex set of experiences that explores the contemporary network of relationships from multiple perspectives. Taking advantage of a wider variety of off-campus programs, students abroad should be “abroad” not only in the primary definition of the word, but also in its fuller meanings – they should spread in different directions and move about freely, the better to bring global perspectives to bear on environments both local and distant.

Chart 2: Proposal for Courses.

ENDNOTES

1. Boyer, Ernest and Lee Mitgang (1996): *Building Community: A New Future for Architecture Education and Practice*. Princeton: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Learning.
2. The National Architectural Accrediting Board, Inc. (2009): *2009 Conditions for Accreditation*. Washington DC: The National Architectural Accrediting Board, Inc..
3. Sassen, Saskia (2001): “Scale and Span in a Global Digital World,” in Cynthia C. Davidson, ed., *Anything* (Cambridge: MIT Press): 44-48.
4. “The Studio-X Mission.” Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation. <http://www.arch.columbia.edu/studio-x-global/about-studio-x/mission> (accessed January 19, 2014).
5. Wigley, Mark. “Dean’s Statement on Studio-X.” Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation. <http://www.arch.columbia.edu/studio-x-global/about-studio-x/deans-statement> (accessed January 15, 2014).