

AIAS STUDIO CULTURE TASK FORCE: ADDRESSING THE HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELFARE OF ARCHITECTURE STUDENTS—A TOWN HALL MEETING

Host: American Institute of Architecture Students

Panelists:

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At its December 2000 meeting, the AIAS Board of Directors established a task force to address the health, safety and welfare of architecture students in the studio environment. Whenever this issue is mentioned, students and faculty alike agree that current studio practices are unhealthy and that change is needed. The injuries incurred due to fatigue that result in loss of limb, or sometimes even life, are unconscionable. The psychological stresses placed on a student create an atmosphere in which harassment is

prevalent, not only from faculty to students but among the students themselves.

While it is easy to acknowledge that there is a problem, the pressing question is not whom to blame, but how to bring about change. Ultimately, it must be up to the students to take action, to set personal limits and to stick to them. At the same time, schools of architecture must do a better job of letting students know that these limits can exist. In no way does the AIAS purport to eliminate studios. In fact, most would agree that students need to be pushed and tested in order to expand their knowledge base and educational development. However, this development must not occur at the cost of mental, emotional and physical harm. The endless stories of car accidents and severely depressed immune systems due to lack of sleep, exercise and improper nutrition as a result of the pressure must be addressed. We must find a healthy balance for all facets of an architecture student's life—school, homework, work, family, friends, extracurricular activities and community.

The format of this special focus session as a town hall meeting provides attendees with the opportunity to provide their personal insight and comments regarding the culture of studio and to help the AIAS shape this initiative and bring about change.

The AIAS town hall format special focus session was lively and well attended by a number of students, young faculty members and deans who all agreed that there are problems with the current culture of studio that need to be addressed. The consensus of the attendees was that the constant pressure to focus on studio to the exclusion of all else, including sleep, personal life, and other coursework, is the major issue, one that students and faculty are equally responsible for creating and changing. Several participants observed that the studio culture appears to be a form of hazing, a "rite of passage" into the profession that has existed since the beginning of formal architecture education in the United States. Fortunately, it was also acknowledged that this does not make the situation right. Student participants also identified architecture as a passion-driven profession where you can't simply tell an architect to stop drawing. Somewhere there has to be a health compromise, and the session participants were able to identify several

jumping off points for the AIAS/ACSA Task Force on Studio Culture, now in formation. Central issues to investigate include: teaching time management; integrating coursework and emphasizing teamwork similar to what students will encounter in the workforce; recognizing and validating skills beyond design, i.e., leadership;

mentoring programs; and competition among both faculty and students. With unanimous acknowledgement of the problem from educators, professionals, and students, now is the time to address the issues and create a healthy and positive studio culture.