

FORMATIVE BEGINNINGS: A HISTORY OF THE AIAS

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Summary

The American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS) at the Illinois Institute of Technology has a long history dating back to its original charter as a Student Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in 1953.

My curiosity as a leader of the present day organization sparked a vast research effort that would transcend the legacy of IIT's chapter and work to unearth a national history. Goals through the ongoing research are not only to unearth a history but also to discover the relation between supplemental experience and architectural education; working to define the importance of the integration of both into a holistic educational experience. The AIAS has served as the official voice of architecture students for 56 years and championed the message of empowering the student voice; influences of the organization are clearly seen in the evolution of architectural education but there lacks clear documentation. The production of a large-scale archeological hunt for information works to properly document the historical legacy of the AIAS and expand comprehensively the institutional memory of the organization for future members, leaders, and students of architecture.

Introduction

This research project originally started with a curiosity into the history of IIT's chapter of the AIAS and how a historical legacy might better validate or connect future members to its purpose. The mission of the AIAS is to "promote excellence in architectural education, training, and practice; to foster an appreciation of architecture and related disciplines; to enrich communities in a spirit of collaboration; and to organize students and combine their efforts to advance the art and science of architecture."¹ This intrigue sparked multiple visits to the IIT archives and research online, leading to a sparse output.

While searching, I began to compile a list of past student leaders of IIT's chapter and started reaching out, inquiring about their experiences in leadership and seeing where they were presently. The variety of discussion and overall still infectious passion made me curious if the national organization could provide the same experience to chapter leaders and members. As I began these conversations, the idea of launching a full-scale investigation into the national history weighed heavily on my mind and evolved into research during my spare time. This devel-

oped into a draft for a formal proposal of an independent study course. With the support of Professor Stephen Sennott, AIAS IIT's faculty advisor, I prepared a syllabus and began the official process of creating a trajectory of course work for the spring 2013 term.

Since 1956 the AIAS has served alongside four collateral organizations defining the future of the architectural profession, The AIA, National Architectural Accreditation Board (NAAB), National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB), and the National Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA). The AIAS serves as the unique representative of the student perspective and voice amongst this collective body of five that defines and drafts the future of architecture within the United States. The singular most important attendee at the table is the student perspective and many provoking conversations along with championed initiatives have taken place over the course of the organization's history. The lack of formal documentation of these happenings has been the true motive behind this research endeavor. In an era of digital technology, there has been a lapse in the integration of digital archiving, to that extent I hope to assist the national organization in properly documenting the past while setting up the infrastructure to preserve the future.

Methods

IIT's extensive bound journal collection has provided the foundation for broadening specific research topics and objectives. After reviewing AIA Journals from 1956 to the early 1980's I was able to uncover articles and mentions of the organization in its many phases of name change and autonomy from the AIA. By utilizing IIT's Galvin Library and extensive online resources I was able to extract enough pieces to begin segmenting periods of time and selecting areas of interest. Whether it be specific documents of mention or finding the missing puzzle pieces to the organizations arisen from the AIA, I was able to bring these somewhat segmented findings into a defined approach. With this stepping-stone, I reached out to the AIA Archivist in Washington D.C. to begin pulling materials from storage and identifying what might be of use. This translated into the first of many future ventures to the Institute's National Headquarters in D.C. to sift through papers, boxes, books, and films in an effort to better understand the evolution of the present.

Results

Currently my research has provided a basic timeline of understanding and has thus defined the first step to publishing this information. By carefully collecting and creating a third party database of all this information I can begin to extract and curate “decades in review”. The first series of these reviews will focus on the beginning, how the organization originated and the six years that led up to the official creation of the National Association of Students of Architecture (NASA). After the production of these “decades in review” it is hoped that enough content will have been defined, and cultivated to begin the editorial compilation of a comprehensive history for the 60th anniversary of the organization in 2016.

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References

[1] “American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS).” About:Mission. Web. 14 Aug. 2013. <<http://aias.org>>.