

Architecture for all “students” was an ideal worked towards from the inception of democracy in 1994. Numerous programs at different universities in South Africa have attempted to address the enrollment numbers and success of historically disadvantaged¹ students within the architecture undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, with varying degrees of success.

Post 1994 the focus of Architecture schools within the different universities was on the transformation of the faculties’ demographics - both staff and students, as well as transformation of degree content and curriculum. However a number of critiques at the time questioned whether this was possible given the history of these schools.

Mills and Lipman (1994) formulated the question

“are universities appropriate venues for schools of architecture?”²

in their article on society and architectural education. Their conclusions and responses to this question were two fold. If these schools continued with the same “atheoretic formalistic” type of architectural education, then the answer to the question would be no, as such an education “entrenches rather than challenges established privilege”, but if architectural education within these universities could “reconstitute the unity in buildings of form and content ... architecture and society” and thereby literally discard the colonial imported models of education then the answer would be yes.

Low and Smuts’ 1997 study “A New school of Architecture in South Africa?”³, posited a similar question of whether a new school of architecture was the solution, or whether the existing schools could be transformed. The recommendations listed in the study entailed 3 possible strategies –

- CONFLICT -
- REPRESENTATION
- DEMONSTRATION

as well as three precise actions which should be addressed within the existing schools of architecture

- Foundation Courses which act as bridging programs between inadequate schooling and university- especially directed at historically disadvantaged students
- Graduate Programs that address the specifics of the African context and the post apartheid condition
- Bursary schemes for disenfranchised / black students

These recommendations were in fact put into practice by a number of architecture schools in different ways and due to different pressures – both internal and external:

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, Johannesburg (WITS)

Wits put in place an **Academic Development Program** – which ran for five years. The program’s mission was to address the gaps between schooling, especially sub-par schooling and first year and thereby provide a bridging platform to enable students from disadvantaged backgrounds to succeed. The program took in 10- 15 students per year, and had a success rate of 2 students registering and commencing their first year of undergraduate architectural studies (BAS). The program was not strictly confined to architectural subjects and subjects ranged from sociology, to arts and drawing The aim of the program was to ostensibly to fill gaps in education and prepare students for first year of architecture undergraduate studies, however the result was that many students decided that architecture was not for them, and moved on to enroll in other degrees. Even though the program and school heads deemed the program to have been successful, the success rate in terms of the enrollment for the first year of study in architecture was deemed to be insufficient for the capital investment and the program was discontinued. Perhaps the program was too broad, but if the students did proceed to other avenues of study in the university, then the issue was not that it was too broad but that it’s funding

¹ The term historically disadvantaged in a South African context refers to members of racial groups disadvantaged under Apartheid – namely blacks, asians, coloureds

² Society and architectural education in South Africa – are universities appropriate venues for schools of architecture? G Mills, A Lipman Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design 1994 vol 21 pg 213-221

³ A new school of architecture in South Africa? A study launched by Architects Support Group for South Africa // ASGSA- UK , Iain Low, Carin Smuts 1997, Central Printing University of Witwatersrand

should have been drawn across a number of faculties that eventually received much better prepared first year students into their programs.

Dean of the Education Faculty David Freer said: "We're not closing down academic development. We are seeking to refocus it within the faculties so it becomes part of mainstream academic activity."⁴ The role of Academic Development Program was absorbed into each faculty and school, and currently runs in the form of additional tutors (honours or masters students) which increase the ratio of staff to students, especially in studio taught subjects – design and construction – where the additional attention and hands on teaching is purported to help the students requiring support.

In terms of numbers the 15 students previously streamed into the ADP program were allowed entry into the BAS first year. A first year class that previously numbered 60, now numbers around 75, with various initiatives put in place to address the perceived various shortcomings of students – be they poor schooling, language skills, or cultural and academic environment adaptation issues.

The abovementioned additional tutors that increase the staff / student ratio in the studio is just one of the initiatives in place. Another initiative begun in 2010 was a series of tutorials and a workshop organized during the mid-year holidays⁵, which attempted to address the skills gap especially in students who were failing or not reaching their potential. Although the holiday program was targeted specifically at these students, it was open to all students. The intensive workshops served to help a number of borderline students to successfully complete the year, and students who attended gained a better understanding of what was required of them – especially in courses like Design where self motivation and direction is important.

The success (albeit currently based only on anecdotal evidence) of the 2010 holiday program, was expanded in 2011 to include an orientation week program, which introduces students to the various disciplines and skills required for success in the program, as well as a more generic introduction to library facilities and the campus environment. Data for both the holiday program as well as the orientation week program is busy being collated and analyzed for a doctoral thesis.⁶

The anecdotal evidence obtained upon discussing the orientation week program with a number of students repeating first year suggests that it had some success. One student lamented that the previous year he was never quite able to catch up to the rest of the class no matter how much he tried. Other issues also came to the fore especially language, and the students' proficiency in English.

As English is the teaching language at WITS, the English proficiency of students coming from a multi lingual society is imperative to their success. The question arose as to whether English proficiency tests should be included in the requirements for entry – or whether additional support in English should be given in the first quarters of the first year. Previously Faculty English Support programs in place were deemed to not be focused enough on the specific language needs in the school of architecture. Currently an English tutor is integrated into the First Year Theory of Architecture course, and adds a component of language support and development within the curriculum.

Further initiatives entail addressing the lack of resources- financial and otherwise. Studio based courses are especially tough for students that have limited financial resources – with the amount of materials required to complete projects – paper and model building materials. In previous years it was found that students access to professional grade model building materials enhanced marks obtained for model projects, and both discouraged and disadvantaged those students who were financially unable to buy these materials. New project briefs formulated for 2011 restrict students to building models only in “found” materials – which not only levels the inequalities in available resources – but also focuses on recycling, and creativity in reinventing materials. Added to the materials issue, is one of transport, especially to sites within Johannesburg which has a dearth of public transport. Sites closer to and even

⁴ Dismay as Wits pulls plug on support unit – Philippa Garson – Mail and Guardian - Sep 01 1995

⁵ Ariane Janse Van Rensburg – convenor of the additional holiday program and first year Design lecturer

⁶ Ariane Janse Van Rensburg – First Year Design – Course Lecturer

on campus, have been chosen to ensure that all students have the means to visit site as often as they want.

These various measures need to be quantified and assessed in order to ascertain their success.

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN, Cape Town (UCT)

At UCT in the so called Student Revolution of 1997/98, students requested that the separate academic development program be integrated within the current program arguing that parallel programs result in “longer and more expensive tuition, stigmatization and divisiveness, additional and vulnerable bureaucracy”⁷.

The result was a similar one to that of Wits – the creation of academic posts dedicated to “identifying students with common difficulties and developing unique solutions as required”². The study by Carter, at UCT, further analyzed student enrollment numbers and found that “increases in the number of black South African entrants have occurred in reaction to political events”, both on a national and local level - peaking in 1995 due to 1994 democratic elections and again in 1999 due to the various initiatives put in place after the 1997/98 Student Revolution. These numbers are volatile, however, as is indicated by the drop in black student enrollment by 2003 to pre 1999 numbers, and indicate that the initiatives put in place in 1998 needed to be sustained and constantly re-evaluated, in order for black student numbers to permanently increase. Carter suggests a three-pronged approach:

- “Institutionalized selection policy in order to maintain demographic trends”²
- “Development of a more robust teaching strategy is required to deal with the consequences of increased diversity”²
- “Increased resources need to be deployed to the access project as an integral task of teaching in the undergraduate programme”²

In defining an academic development or support program one needs to first and foremost define the group of students for whom development / support is critical to their eventual success in the programme. It is here where numbers, such as those analyzed by Carter at UCT only tell one story. In the demographic tables published for entry to the UCT BAS program (1994-2004) – students are divided firstly into white or black – and then the political definition of ‘black’ is further divided into African, Coloured and Indian. In another published paper, Iain Low⁸ defines the top three students in the final year B.Arch, UCT (2000-2003) in terms of race (black/ white), gender, and previous architectural studies at Technikon level. It is interesting to note the inclusion of gender, and the level of previous architectural education, in the previously narrow categories of race – in defining success or lack thereof in the postgraduate degree (refer addendum for tables).

The reading of data in terms of race and gender was also carried out in a **Statistical Report to SACAP on transformation in South African Schools of Architecture- 2008**. The study noted the gender factor in that “far fewer female than male students seem to enter the profession, pass and go on to higher levels of qualification than their male counterparts”. A racial reading of the statistics is similar to that of gender, with the ratio of black students to white declining most markedly in the final years of the first degree and in registration for the second degree.

Another interesting outcome of this statistical study was the large attrition rates of students from first to second year, as well at the junctions of the undergraduate with the postgraduate degree. The first year attrition rate confirms the initial focus of the Wits ADP as being the first year student, whilst the attrition rate in the registration for the second degree might have less to do with a lack of academic support and more to do with a change in career path, or as anecdotal evidence in the study suggested - financial pressure to earn a salary after the first degree versus the registration for another degree with its accompanying financial constraints.

⁷ Revisiting Redress and Access in Architectural Education: An analysis of entry into the UCT Undergraduate Architectural Programme, 1994 to 2004 – Francis Carter – Architecture SA vol 15 Issue 1 Nov/Dec 2004

⁸ Design Thinking – the design studio in the ‘post-apartheid’ era – Iain Low . Architecture SA Vol 15 Issue 1 Nov 2004

The question to be made is whether it is sufficient to define the group requiring Academic support or development via racial, gender, economic or educational categories? Is it not that one needs to first and foremost question the “predominantly European urban culture”⁹ that was already established in the schools of architecture pre 1994 where “students and staff (were) overwhelmingly middle-class, white and in the main, male”⁴. One should therefore regard any student who does not fit into this dominant culture as potentially in need of academic support/ development, rather than narrowing the focus of support to a particular racial, or even gender grouping.

On a more personal level, even though I belonged to the dominant racial group of the time, I felt marginalized on a number of levels at university, as I did not belong to the dominant cultural and economic make-up of most of my fellow students and staff. I related better to those further marginalized by radicalization, and found that we shared experiences of marginalization on a number of levels.

Is it possible that in defining this group of marginalized students, it is not a shared culture, race, gender or economic status which is the defining factor, but rather a notion of being outside of a dominant culture – whatever that may be. As Lesley Lokko in a self critique on her anthology ‘White Papers Black Marks’ stated:

“Unwittingly, perhaps, the anthology itself remained trapped in its own simplistic binary: black /white. It seems to me now, as it didn’t then, that those of us seeking a deeper connection with architecture were looking in the wrong place. **We were looking at colour. We should have been looking at culture.** The casual, lazy assumption of a link between cultural identity and skin pigmentation obscured a deeper truth -- that there was a much more interesting relationship to be had, if only we’d looked.

But South Africa's challenge, to carve out its own, unique, hybrid culture is made more complex precisely because the overriding logic of its particular condition has always conflated race, culture and class in ways that cannot be easily separated”¹⁰

Our schools of architecture to a large degree shape our cities, our architecture, our culture, and therefore society as a whole, by literally shaping their students. This shaping generally adds layers of the dominant architectural culture atop the students’ own culture through “contingencies, regulations, spatial organisations, pedagogic encounters etc... (and) work on students over a period of time to socialise and acculturate them into ‘architects”¹¹ To further quote Foucault these “practices – micro technologies of power- surveillance, normalisation, and examination... are widely used by all... institutions to control entry or train individuals towards a dominant disciplinary paradigm or habitus”¹² These power relations need to be more carefully analysed, especially in relation to the studio crit sessions, where power relations, and the enculturation of students into the dominant culture are laid bare.

However in a diverse educational environment, such as that found in South Africa, this dominance of one view, one particular culture is not only problematic, but destructive to the already marginalised student. “The design jury’s ritualistic practices had the effect of objectifying a power differential between critic and student and that this asymmetry of power profoundly distorted the pedagogic outcome”⁶

Mark Frederickson has reported on gender and racial bias in design juries in architectural education. His extensive research, based on videotaped protocol studies of 112 juries at three American design schools, examined issues such as interruption, opinion polarization, idea building, advisement, questioning, jury kinesics and proxemics, sexual and racial bias, and verbal participation rates, among

⁹ Society and architectural education in South Africa – are universities appropriate venues for schools of architecture? G Mills, A Lipman Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design 1994 vol 21 pg 213-221

¹⁰ BLACK MATTERS By: Lokko, Lesley. Architectural review, 2007 June, v.221, n.1324, p.80-83. (journal article) (English) AN: 602735

¹¹ Power, freedom and resistance: Excavating the design jury – Helena Webster, International Journal of Art and Design Education Vol 25 Issue 3 Oct 2006

¹² Discipline and Punishment – the birth of the modern prison - Foucault

others. Frederickson's results identified several consistently biased practices in design juries that disadvantage underrepresented students and faculty.

“The presence of an ever increasingly diverse and fragmented society raises many challenges in the design professions and the educational institutions that support them. Some of these issues are ethical and others are practical. The emergence of pluralistic images of the past, present, and future can open the way for more complex understandings of power and social relations and richer, more diverse design expressions throughout the globe, or they can be largely ignored and marginalized, giving way to architecture, urban spaces, and landscapes that reflect the homogenizing effects of modernization and globalization.

Whether we are consciously aware of the consequences, there is a theoretical base to all actions of educators. We implement pedagogic theory when we organize our lectures; choose certain readings over others; plan the content and approach to instruction; choose the site and scope of the studio project; conceptualize the type of exchange between teacher and students; establish the type of relationship the students will have with the client, user groups, or professional base; and so on. These actions go beyond the transmission of knowledge and skill development and simultaneously engage students in power relationships that constitute what some educational theorists refer to as “**cultural politics**”¹³

In conclusion, this paper does not propose any clear direction, but rather was borne out of a curiosity about what had been attempted in the various schools of architecture, and to do a subjective reading of the success of these initiatives as in most cases statistical data to ascertain success is either not available or has not been analyzed as yet. However it is not only narrowly focused on the initiatives already tried (albeit not tested in most instances), but also more generally on the difficulties and related issues of architectural education. As such, more avenues of thought and questions arise than are answered.

In memory of a first year student whose untimely passing prompted the questions that led to the above search for some answers, even though many more questions and avenues of exploration arose than concrete answers to the questions first posited.

¹³ Teaching with Culture in Mind: Cross-Cultural Learning in Landscape Architecture Education Margarita M. Hill *LandscapeJournal* 24:2-05 ISSN 0277-2426