

# Project Title: Towards a more Diverse and Inclusive Architecture Library



Submitted by

**Emilee Mathews**, Head of Ricker Library of Architecture & Art

**Soumya Dasgupta**, Graduate Hourly, Ricker Library of Architecture & Art, and PhD candidate, Illinois School of Architecture

In partnership with

**Dr. AnnaMarie Bliss**, Lecturer, Illinois School of Architecture

**Aaron Brakke**, Assistant Professor, Illinois School of Architecture

**Benjamin Bross**, Assistant Professor, Illinois School of Architecture

**Heather Grossman**, Teaching Assistant Professor, Illinois School of Architecture

**John Stallmeyer**, Associate Professor, Illinois School of Architecture

## The project idea

The profession of architecture and that of librarianship have two core aspects in common: that they are both rooted in the legacy of Western-centric epistemologies and resultant knowledge production and dissemination systems; and without key interventions and commitment to action, will not change rapidly enough to be relevant to current and future students. These issues are locally embodied in the Illinois School of Architecture (ISoA) in its curriculum, and Ricker Library of Architecture and Art in its collections (and perhaps just as significantly, in how it represents its collections). Rather than work in isolation, we propose to collaboratively address these challenges, in order to create something more inclusive, student-centered, and sustainable.

Instantiated in summer 2020, Ricker Library's #FromMarginToCenter initiative is a set of resources designed to decenter the canonical approach to representing art and architecture (the trope of the lone genius is very much alive in these discourses).<sup>1</sup> Here, we envision the metonymic architecture library to a more open, inclusive, and diverse platform of knowledge sharing. We have collected information on scholarship/projects/platforms/tools/items that have been hitherto *marginal* to the Western canon, such as:

- [Black Artists & Designers](#)
- [Contemporary Latin American Artists](#)
- [Women-led Architecture Firms](#)

And coming soon:

- Queer Architect(ure)s
- Afrocentric Architecture \*
- Asian American Artists, Designers, and Architects \*
- Pan-Africanism across Art & Literature

\* indicates specifically requested by our patrons.

While it's been gratifying to produce these materials, especially when our public engages with the process and lets us know where they'd like us to devote our energy, we want to further integrate these resources, and the impetus behind creating them, into the intellectual fabric of our liaison areas. This Innovation Grant will allow us to do so in a creative, experimental, and innovative way, while providing much more forward momentum than we could achieve under our own auspices.

We propose to start with the ISoA due to the activism demonstrated through the school's student chapter of the National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMAS). They published a list of goals and demands for how they envision a more inclusive architectural education (see Appendix 1). These students contacted Ricker Library in July, 2020 to ensure that we were actively involved in collecting materials that reflect the contributions of the African Diaspora. We have collaborated with and supported these students since, and in many ways this next evolution to the #FromMarginToCenter initiative is due to their leadership and vision.

What we propose to accomplish through this Innovation Grant is twofold:

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the initiative, please see <https://www.library.illinois.edu/arx/about/frommargintocenter-initiative/>

1. Strategically partner with faculty to proactively implement diverse case studies, precedents, and authors into key courses in the curriculum
  - a. This pushes the materials into the education of every student in the undergraduate and the M.Arch program at this initial stage, so as to infuse broader knowledge and awareness in students graduating from our programs
2. Convene public conversation around decentering the canon
  - a. In partnership with existing events hosted by ISoA, we plan to engage our community in open-ended discussion about what it means to decenter the canon, and why we might want to do so. This reinforces the pedagogical aspects of the curriculum, while providing a broader dialogue around philosophical and pragmatic implications
  - b. Support the NOMAS chapter in their leadership in hosting a global art and architecture symposium

We believe that these actions should be accomplished in conjunction, so as to create momentum and urgency, while generating feedback in real time so as to further integrate our community's interests and areas. See below for more detail about each action.

1. Strategically Partner with Faculty to Proactively Implement Diverse Case Studies, Precedents, and Authors in Key Courses in the Curriculum Through a Set of Course Guides

In order to fruitfully develop these resources in a way that builds audience and integrates into the academic community, we have targeted specific courses within the ISoA curriculum required of the major and touch critical points of the discipline:<sup>2</sup>

### **Undergraduate curriculum**

- ARCH 171 Concepts and Theories of Architectural Design - taught by Dr. AnnaMarie Bliss.
- ARCH 172 Drawing and Modeling - taught by Professor Aaron Brakke
- ARCH 210 - Introduction to the History of World Architecture, taught by Professor Heather Grossman
  - ARCH 171 and 172 (taught as a two part series) and ARCH 210 are required courses for freshmen, and thus provide an opportunity to embed a more diverse and inclusive sense of what it means to practice architecture from the beginning of ISoA students' careers

### **Graduate curriculum**

- ARCH 577 Theories of Architecture - taught by Professor John Stallmeyer
- ARCH 517 Architectural History - taught by Professor Benjamin Bross
  - ARCH 577 and 517 are required for all M.Arch. students
- ARCH 563 Social and Behavioral Research in Designed Environments - taught by Dr. AnnaMarie Bliss
  - ARCH 563 is required for M.Arch. students on the Health and Wellbeing track

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<sup>2</sup> All mentioned faculty have been contacted to determine their interest in the proposed collaboration; all have enthusiastically agreed to be part of the project.

We are starting with core required courses in the architecture curriculum across undergraduate and graduate courses in order to strategically infuse the curriculum with diverse and inclusive case studies and precedents. The initial set of courses combine a number of different topics and levels of learning, which will allow us to experiment with pedagogy as well as build a rich and comprehensive suite of resources. We plan to expand this service to other courses once this pilot phase has ended and we have a strong foundation from which to build.

For each course, we will collaborate with the faculty in question to identify resources and develop course-specific guides that will help students learn the course content, while providing more recommendations for further self-driven pursuit of knowledge. For example, Global South architecture could be discussed in architectural history classes, non-Western ideologies of perception may be integrated into a drawing and modelling class, or anti-racist research methodologies may be drawn from for a research methods class.

Once the changes in ARCH courses are deployed, we plan to convene a panel of faculty to discuss their experiences, so as to encourage other faculty to consider similar approaches, and we can attract new partners for the next phase of library/curriculum integration (see below, under Timeline for more information).

## 2. Convene public conversations around decentering the canon

“Future of the Architecture Library” discussion series

As a part of the evolving initiative of #FromMarginToCenter, the Ricker Library of Architecture and Art proposes to host a discussion series in Spring 2021, tentatively called “Future of the Architecture Library” - to bring our collective attention to issues of marginalization and under-representation as they pertain to architectural studies, specifically in and around the architecture library’s collection and perception.

This aligns with the intellectual trajectory laid out by the Fall 2020 lecture series at ISoA, and will work with the Spring 2021 Lecture series in complementary ways.<sup>3</sup> The year’s speakers thus far have been provocative, cutting edge, critical thinkers and practitioners who pushed the boundaries of discourse while encouraging architecture faculty and students to imbue in their explorations more imaginative, transformative and open ideas to expand their understanding of ‘architecture.’

Drawing inspiration from such non-conformist and anti-dogmatic streams of thoughts, Ricker Library will take this opportunity to deeply, honestly, and reflectively consider: **how do we imagine the architecture library of the future? How can we reconsider the ways the architecture library works with, of, and for its constituents? How can we collectively design an architecture library that is open, inclusive, and inviting of the ‘other’?**

It is crucial to invite thinkers and makers to our community to engage in a series of conversations around the topic of experimentation in architectural libraries’ collections, services, and spatial configurations. Many roles touch upon the architecture library’s essential mission: educators who convene spaces for ideas to take shape; architects who realize ideas in form; publishers who document these ideas for posterity; curators who bring ideas together to ask

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<sup>3</sup> We have approached the ISOA Lecture series and Events Committee chair and received initial approval to work with their infrastructure and scheduling for this lecture series.

new questions. All these activities touch upon the library and its purpose, and every voice can provide critical perspectives in intellectually co-creating the architectural library anew.

We propose to convene a series of three to four discussions complementing the Spring 2021 ISoA Lecture Series both in topic and timing, resonating with their underlying pedagogical themes that also become conceptual meeting points for the school and the library. Catering to our range of patrons' diverse and often divergent expectations - including freshmen, graduate students, Ph.D. scholars, design educators, practitioners, historians, and research faculty from architecture and allied fields - our format will be conversational, informal, and inviting participation from the audience. We will pair our guest speakers alongside Illinois faculty and students in small panels to create a multilogue of productive intellectual debates. We hope that these conversations will be the long-awaited beginning point of imagining a more interactive, inclusive, and flexible architecture library of the future.

### **PROPOSED THEMES**

- Decolonizing the Architecture Library
- Open Futures for the Architecture Library
- Architecture Library and Shifting Pedagogies
- Architecture Library and Critical Practice

For a list of proposed panelists, see Appendix 2.

### NOMAS International Arts Exhibit

As part of this proposal we will partner with The National Organization of Minority Architecture Students chapter (NOMAS) to support their annual spring symposium planned for late March/early April, 2021. The symposium is geared to assist in the development of professional skills and knowledge surrounding relevant topics as they relate to the celebration of culture and the architecture profession. This year's symposium, the International Arts Exhibit, aims to inspire through looking toward the creative practices and legacies of architecture and allied fields outside of the U.S. and Europe, to promote greater understanding of how design and its intersectionalities are experienced all over the world. This process will lift voices of other cultures, while providing a lens for students to discover ways in which architecture's role in across geopolitical power relations in order to develop the audience's cultural competencies alongside a set of professional ethics and values. It is important to support student-led efforts in the process of moving toward a more diverse, inclusive library, as they have clearly articulated their vision for the future.

Together, the focus on strategically building curricular strength in broadening architectural discourse, while convening conversations on why one might want to do so, will build a strong foundation for work in Fall 2021 and beyond. In the process, the library is positioned as a key partner in deploying information resources to enhance students engagement and awareness, and can further build on its role as a trusted source of key information.

### Objectives: what problem(s) will it solve

The two-pronged strategy we have outlined will advance innovative ideas and services in support of the communities it serves. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives can be difficult to get off the ground and sustain. This project will provide a co-creative model that builds

audience, sustainability, and future-oriented thinking into its scaffolding. Further, it will provide a model for other potential areas to engage in similar activities, and lessons learned for Ricker and others to integrate into future planning.

### Contributions to the University Library

This initiative aligns with the University Library's Framework for Strategic Action in the following ways:<sup>4</sup>

- **SD1: Pro-active and trusted partners in scholarship, discovery, and innovation.** This initiative vitality user-centered collections resources and services , seats the library squarely as a synergistic part of the research lifecycle with its emphasis not only on collections but also the publishing, exhibiting, and archiving ecosystem
- **SD2: Transformative learning experiences.** Positions the library as a trusted partner in pedagogical innovation that is truly student-centered.
- **SD3: Societal and global impact.** By focusing on diversity, equity and inclusion, the library positions itself as a leader in facing global grand challenges. Additionally, the collaborative nature of the proposed initiative builds in audience as well as sustainability.
- **SD4: Strategic investments for a sustainable library environment.** This initiative directs resources toward high-impact programming and services, that will provide for greater investment opportunities

### How it fits with existing activities in the Library

#### Contributions to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives at the University Library

The Diversity Equity, Inclusion, and Access Task force has been formulated to address specific issues endemic in the library to identify problems and best practices for solutions. The work is primarily focused on issues internal to the library.

"Towards a more Diverse and Inclusive Architecture Library" instead focuses on how the library's outward-facing role. This initiative would be a way to develop and test how these values can be translated into practice. It will provide a pilot project to learn from while the DEIA Task Force works on internal-facing issues, and once the task force's work is done, this may help to envision next steps to productively engage the University Library's public(s), while providing leadership to peer institutions.

#### Contributions to Ricker Library of Architecture & Art Initiatives

As discussed above this grant will allow Ricker Library to take its #FromMarginToCenter initiative to the next level. It will additionally help Ricker Library's hiring and retention: we are in the process of hiring a Visiting Design and Materials Research Librarian. This initiative will help the incumbent to step into the role much more fluidly, through the increased connection to the School of Architecture, and can use the information gathered to strategically engage and position themselves - in other words, to hit the ground running.

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<sup>4</sup> For reference, the entire framework may be consulted at <https://www.library.illinois.edu/geninfo/libraryinit/strategic-framework-2019/>

## Deliverables

- A series of events that will be recorded and viewable
- Revised syllabi that reflect contemporary approaches to decolonized architectural education
- A series of research guides that complement the Illinois School of Architecture curriculum

## Resources needed

Discussion series and NOMAS symposium costs

Honoraria for non-Illinois affiliated speakers:

\$250-\$500 per speaker, depending on stature in field

Approximately 25 non-Illinois affiliated speakers:

=**\$7,500<sup>5</sup>**

Hourly employee costs:

Spring 2021

10 hours a week x 22.81 an hour x 16 weeks

=**\$3,649.60**

Advisory Board

This will bring together a mixture of voices to guide the project, including faculty, librarians, undergraduate and graduate students, and practitioners in the field.

Honoraria for non-Illinois affiliated advisors:

=**\$500**

**Total requested:**

=**\$11,649.60**

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<sup>5</sup> We also plan to request funding from the Humanities Research Institute, which provides up to \$500 for events.

Technology needed:

We plan to use existing resources and services such as Zoom, MediaSpace, the unit's website, and existing social media accounts for event hosting, archiving, and marketing. These resources and services meet the use case's need while incurring no additional cost. If we do determine that we need the Webinar feature for Zoom, we can either use the University Library's or that allocated to the College of Fine and Applied Arts.<sup>6</sup>

## Timeline

### 2021 Spring semester

- Graduate hourlies will research and identify case studies and precedents for faculty to employ in teaching aforementioned classes, including BIPOC architects, social justice projects
- Organize and create graphics for discussion series
- Deploy first phrase of diversified content to Spring 2021 courses; engage with faculty to develop strategies and approaches to the Spring 2022 course iterations
- Collaborate with faculty on Fall 2021 courses and develop resources tailored to those courses
- Contact speakers for series, host events, and market and promote events
- Convene focus groups (see below, How to Measure Benefits)

### 2021 Summer

- Transcribe and analyze focus group data; write up initial findings; publish results through peer-reviewed journal
- Check in with faculty teaching in Fall 2021

### 2021 Fall Semester

- Deploy diversified content to fall courses
- Convene any discussions that were not able to happen in Spring 2021
- Check in with faculty who taught in Spring 2021 for any improvements/adjustments for Spring 2022

### 2022 Spring Semester

- Deploy revised content for Spring 2022 courses
- Convene panel of faculty who participated to discuss the process, next steps

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<sup>6</sup> Proposal author consulted with Tracy Tolliver to ensure that the IT support needed was indeed minimal.

## How to Measure Benefits of the Project

We plan to convene a series of focus groups and interviews in connection with the discussion series programming.<sup>7</sup> We will ask semi-structured questions about users' expectations and experiences using the library in connection to the discussion series' content, in order to draw in interested participants to continue the discussion and feel that their voices are heard. This will be the basis of a peer-reviewed article, planned for submission by the end of Summer 2021.

Other metrics include:

- Number of attendees
- Audience engagement with topic as measured by questions and chat activity
- Unsolicited follow up emails from participants

For the curricular intervention, we will work with faculty to measure success through:

- Increase in engagement
- Increase in grades
- Increase in quality of student work

## How to determine whether the project has succeeded or failed

A successful project would be one in which there is engagement with constituents across ISoA in the discussion series, and well-crafted research guides that faculty have approved and are ready to launch in the classroom environment. We will take the following steps to ensure success:

- Employ a consultative process, ensuring that stakeholders are comfortable with and excited about the direction we take
- Ensure that drafts are created early and feedback solicited
- Discussion series are high quality and deliberately align with other lectures and events the ISOA are doing.

Failure would be measured by:

- Lack of engagement in discussion series
- Lack of implementation by faculty

## Sustainability of the Project

The deliverables will be integrated into Ricker library's suite of existing resources and services, and will provide pathways for further development. The faculty will use the resources to diversify their courses. Once the Visiting Design and Materials Research Librarian has started, they can take on leadership for next stages, including more courses in ISoA. If we continue to develop

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<sup>7</sup> Proposal author is applying for a Library Assessment Committee grant to fund the research project, including graduate hourly work for focus group facilitation, transcription, and encoding, and incentives for participants. We also have an IRB application that will be sent in for review mid-December 2020.

the discussion series, we can partner with ISoA lecture and event series to develop and resource the speakers. Other grants may become available through the OVCDEI, for example.

## Appendix 1: NOMAS Goals and Demands, selected (highlighted are the goals that this initiative will help to address)

### Immediate Goals / Demands for the ISoA (This upcoming academic year)

- We demand for professors to attend workshops/seminars to dispel stereotypes, unlearn microaggressions, learn about race relations in America, and how their actions impact students of every minority background
- We demand that all professors are actively anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-colorist, anti-xenophobic, and advocating for justice and equity for all oppressed/affected individuals
- We demand to have BIPOC speakers included in the ISoA Lecture Series
- We demand for there to be a required course for all students to learn about race and design (i.e. Professor Anthony and Professor Dearborn's ARCH GWS 424 Gender and Race in Contemporary Architecture course)
- We demand for BIPOC-owned firms to be invited to the Career XPO
- We demand for firm crawls to include BIPOC firms
- We demand for the acknowledgement of the respective history months and architects/designers related to those movements (i.e. Black History Month, Latino History Month, Pride Month, etc.)
- We demand for BIPOC reviewers to be included in midterm and final reviews
- We demand for the ISoA to participate in the NOMA Conference
  - Architecture & Design School / Graduate Recruitment Fair
  - Student Design Competition
- We demand for professors to learn and teach about, as well as encourage students to use non-western architectural precedents/languages in studio projects
- We demand for professors to teach students about systemic racism in the built environment and to encourage them to create design solutions to the systemic problems minorities are facing in the US and abroad
- We demand for active recruitment from inner city high schools and/or schools that are majority BIPOC
  - NOMA / I-NOMA Project Pipeline Program
  - Increased advertisement of Discover Architecture program in these schools

### Short Term Goals / Demands for the ISoA (within 5 years)

- We demand that more Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, POC, and LGBTQ+ professors are hired
- We demand for courses that actively include, discuss, and focus on BIPOC architects, designers, urban planning, and design languages from around the world
  - The recent curriculum change has erased many of the history courses offered in the program (an area we were already lacking in) which limits and erases chances to learn about architecture in other cultures

- o Include designers and landscape from the entire African Diaspora (Afro Latinx, Afro Asian, Afro American, African, etc.)
- We demand for a Study abroad program in an African country
  - o Can start off as a short (i.e. 1 week - 1 month long) research program or something of that nature
  - o Intention to transform into a complete study abroad program
- We demand for faculty-led research on architecture in African countries and/or hire a professor who specializes in architecture in an African country
  - o Funding for research on non-western architecture/design
  - o More research opportunities for students interested in studying non-western architecture
- We demand for the ISoA to host design competitions that encourage students to study non-western architecture and to use that knowledge to create new design languages that speak for different cultures and ethnicities

#### Long Term Goals / Demands for the ISoA (5+ years)

- We demand that more Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, POC, and LGBTQ+ professors are hired
- High School and middle school mentorships at BIPOC schools
- We demand that the ISoA makes connections with architecture schools in non-western countries and creates study abroad programs (Barcelona-level alternatives) in those countries
  - o Study abroad in Latin America and/or the Caribbean in/focused around Black neighborhoods/cities

#### NOMAS Specific Goals / Demands

- Actively recruit, mentor, and help first and second year students in architecture
  - o At the beginning of this year, President Dowdell (current NOMA President) asked every professional chapter to reach out to at least 100 youth and every NOMAS chapter to place a special focus on the freshmen
- Provide students with real career strategies and job opportunities post-college
- Continue to inform students about academic and professional opportunities available within the organization such as the NOMA Foundation Fellows
- Do events that discuss how architecture impacts social, economic, health, and welfare issues in minority communities
  - o Get fellow classmates who are not minorities to understand BIPOC/LGBTQ+ problems in society and how they can help to create inclusive/safe spaces for their peers
- Use the symposium to actively highlight and discuss BIPOC architects/designers and movements from around the world that are not discussed in our courses very much (if at all)
  - o Emphasize cultural significance and encourage cultural pride
  - o African Art Exhibit
  - o Series where we have an exhibit showcasing architects from whichever continent or country we want to focus on
- Increase participation, involvement, and support from students and faculty

- Collaborate with other minority student orgs on campus outside of ISoA, other NOMAS chapters across the country, NOMA professional chapters
- We demand for more funding for the NOMAS conference and competition
- Find ways to get community involvement from people outside of UIUC network (local CU minority communities, high schoolers, etc)
- Reassure members to not just meet a quota as a minority in the field, but to actively and radically change their environments for the benefit of all
- Stress the benefits of networking and building strong relationships

## Appendix 2: Possible Invitees and schedule for Discussion Series

### POSSIBLE INVITEES

#### Educators

1. Charles Davis II - Assistant professor - Department of Architecture University of Buffalo
2. Aneesha Dharwadker - Assistant Professor of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
3. Aaron Brakke - Assistant Professor of Architecture, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
4. Benjamin Bross, Assistant Professor of Architecture, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

#### Publishers

1. CLOG - <http://www.archizines.com/CLOG>
2. Log - <https://www.anycorp.com/>
3. NY Review of Architecture - <https://www.nyra.nyc/>

#### Practitioners

1. Amanda Williams <https://mcachicago.org/Exhibitions/2017/Amanda-Williams>
2. Bryan Lee - <https://colloqate.org/people>
3. Liz Ogbu <http://www.lizogbu.com/>
4. Cruz Garcia, <https://waithinktank.com/>

#### Curators/Community Archives

1. Black Reconstruction Collective - <https://www.blackreconstructioncollective.org/>
2. Wrightwood 659 <https://wrightwood659.org/about/>
3. Canadian Centre for Architecture <https://www.cca.qc.ca/en/>
4. NY Center for Architecture <https://www.centerforarchitecture.org/>

#### Practitioners who have built art/architecture libraries

1. Rahul Mehrota, RMA Architects
2. Heneghan Peng Architects
3. Buhler & Buhler

#### Librarians

1. Kai Alexis Smith, Architecture and Planning Librarian, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

2. Kevin Whiteneir, Jr., Reference Librarian, Art Institute of Chicago
3. Jennifer A. Ferretti, Digital Initiatives Librarian, Maryland Institute College of Art
4. Amanda Meeks, Operations Lead, CATalyst Studios, University of Arizona

#### **POSSIBLE MODERATORS**

1. Emilee Mathews
2. Soumya Dasgupta
3. AnnaMarie Bliss
4. Heather Grossman

#### **PROPOSED SCHEDULE**

Session 1 - Week of February 8, 2021

Session 2 - Week of March 15, 2021

Session 3 - Week of April 5, 2021

Session 4 - Week of April 26, 2021