

The Boyer Report: Building Community Through Education

Contributed by AIA Communications and Knowledge Resources Staff

Excerpted and adapted from *Building Community: A New Future for Architecture Education and Practice*
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SUMMARY

The Boyer Report, named in memory of coauthor Ernest L. Boyer, late president of the Carnegie Foundation, discusses the importance of architecture in society and calls for a renewed focus on the public benefits of architecture. The report suggests that incorporating architecture into the fundamentals of liberal arts education will help architects better understand and respond to society's design-build needs and provide the general public with a basic understanding of the value and principles of architecture.

ARCHITECTURE IN DAILY LIFE

"Never in history have the talents, skills, broad vision and ideals of the architecture profession been more urgently needed," according to the nation's foremost authority on education, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

"Name any significant environmental, social, political or economic challenge facing the nation, and lurking in the background, hardly noticed and rarely discussed, is the arcane matter of architecture," says Lee D. Mitgang, coauthor of a Carnegie Foundation study that culminated with the publication of *Building Community: A New Future for Architecture Education and Practice*.

First published in 1996, *Building Community* is commonly referred to as "the Boyer Report," in memory of coauthor Ernest L. Boyer, late president of the Carnegie Foundation, who died before the report's publication. The report offers a blueprint for improving the nation's built environment by proposing changes in the education of architects and the public.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The study is concerned with the challenges and opportunities of architecture education and practice in the United States, calling for renewed focus on the public benefits of architecture—the creation and preservation of wholesome neighborhoods, safe streets, productive workplaces, a clean environment,

and cohesive communities. But the report is not written solely for architects and educators. Building community is for anyone who is concerned about "whether beauty still has a place in American society; whether U.S. cities will be centers of

civilization or decay; and whether American children will inherit a wholesome physical environment that promotes health and prosperity." While the authors found much to celebrate in the way architects are educated, they also found a lack of understanding between architects and the public.

This lack of understanding is the result of several factors:

- The profession's failure to understand and respond to the core concerns of American families, businesses, schools, communities, and society
- The tendency of architecture schools to focus on credentials at the expense of preparing architects for their larger public-service role
- The general failure of American schools and colleges to make knowledge of architecture and design an essential part of liberal education for all students

ARCHITECTS IN SERVICE TO THE NATION

Throughout the study, the authors argue for an increased presence of architects in daily American life to meet the challenges confronting families, neighborhoods, and society. At the core of the profession is public trust, say the authors. If architects and those who educate them drift too far from this trust, they risk earning the contempt—or, even worse, indifference—of the public. "The knowledge and talents of architects could contribute vitally to rebuilding our sense of community, yet we are concerned that the voices of architects are not being heard often enough, either in public policy circles or on college campuses," says Mitgang.

"In the case of architecture education it isn't enough for [graduating] students to [be] able to create

beauty,” he continues. “They should leave school prepared for more than simply competent, profitable practice. They should be prepared for the broader professional mission of promoting the value of beauty in society, for connecting buildings to human needs and happiness, and for creating healthier, more environmentally sustainable architecture that respects precious resources.” In short, the authors call for architects to prepare for lives and careers of greater civic engagement.

A NATION OF ARCHITECTURAL ILLITERATES?

The study also considers the risk of a general public that lacks a basic understanding of architecture. From grade school through college, state the authors, knowledge of architecture should be an essential part of liberal education for all.

“Most youngsters will be lifetime users of buildings, and beholders and inhabitants of the built environment,” write Mitgang and Boyer. “But, like the rest of the public, most spend their school days and indeed their lives seldom if ever considering the permanent and profound impact architecture has on their own personal health, productivity, and happiness, and on community life. In short, too many Americans will spend their lives as architectural illiterates.”

The problem is exacerbated in institutions of higher learning, where architecture schools, ironically, are often physically and socially isolated from the larger college or university in which they are located. Architecture students and faculty have few opportunities to interact with their counterparts in other disciplines or to participate in the social and cultural mainstream of university life.

“There are architecture students and there are university students,” the report succinctly notes. “Schools of architecture can no longer afford to be strangers in their own settings; they could reach out to students in other disciplines. Making connections between architecture and other fields to strengthen communities must begin on the campus itself.” And as is the case at most elementary and secondary schools, “at hardly any university is knowledge of architecture considered a basic element of the liberal education of all students, whatever their future plans,” the authors found.

On a hopeful note, the report points to the educational practices of a number of architecture schools as models of excellent teaching and learning for collegiate and professional education of all kinds. The authors note that the design studio

tradition—with its close engagement of students and teachers, and where discovery, application, and integration of knowledge are creatively pursued—can be a model for many other academic disciplines, as well as for elementary and secondary education. “Architecture education at its best,” say the authors, “is a model that holds valuable insights and lessons for all education.”

RESOURCES

More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 01.05.06 The Architecture in the Schools Program Helps to Create the Ideal Client
- 01.05.02 The Boyer Report: Seven Principles for Action
- 01.05.04 ACE Mentoring PrProgram
- 01.03.01 Pro Bono Services: Improving the Profession

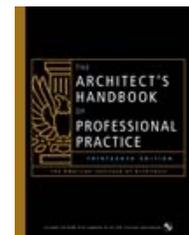
For More Information on This Topic

Originally published in 1996, *Building Community: A New Future for Architecture Education and Practice* was reprinted in 2002.

See also “Architecture Education,” by Eugene Kremer, FAIA, *The Architect’s Handbook of Professional Practice*, 13th edition, Chapter 7, page 177.



See also the 14th edition of the *Handbook*, which can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by email at bookstore@aia.org.



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