



AIA Best Practices:

The Boyer Report: Seven principles for action

Contributed by AIA Knowledge Resources Staff; Adapted from the Boyer Report

Summary

"Building Community: A New Future for Architecture Education and Practice"—published in 1996 and commonly called "the Boyer Report"—addressed the importance of architecture in society and called for a renewed focus on architecture's public benefits. It also discussed the direction of architecture education and outlined seven principles for action. The report argued that incorporating architecture into the fundamentals of liberal arts education would 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.

A fresh perspective yields results

The Boyer Report—named in memory of coauthor Ernest L. Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation—was commissioned as an independent study of the profession of architecture by the AIA and its collateral organizations. The authors devoted a chapter to each of seven recommendations for improvement and change, summarized below with excerpts from the text. (Page numbers cited refer to the 2002 reprint edition of Boyer and Lee D. Mitgang's "Building Community: A New Future for Architecture Education and Practice," originally published in 1996 by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.)

An enriched mission

"We recommend that schools of architecture should embrace, as their primary objectives, the education of future practitioners trained and dedicated to promoting the value of beauty in our society; the rebirth and preservation of our cities; the need to build for human needs and happiness; and the creation of a healthier, more environmentally sustainable architecture that respects precious resources." (p. 27).

"We therefore urge schools to prepare future practitioners to be effective public 'advocates for beauty,' so that architecture's value is felt by all communities and individuals, not just those who can afford the fees." (p. 35).

"Finally, we urge schools to prepare future architects for lives of civic engagement, of service to the nation." (p. 28).

Diversity with dignity

"We imagine a landscape of architecture programs in which the multiple missions of schools are celebrated, and the varied talents of architecture faculty are supported and rewarded in a scholarly climate that encourages excellence in research, teaching, the application of knowledge, and the integration of learning." (p. 27).

"A majority of faculty, students, administrators, and alumni [agree] that their schools [are not] effectively preparing students for opportunities involving non-Western and developing nations." (p. 68).

"The diversity . . . of architectural programs and the richly varied backgrounds and talents among the nation's architecture faculty are strengths that must be preserved." (p. 49).

"We agree with William McMinn . . . that the national architecture groups and their local affiliates [should] promote conferences that improve the dialogue and understanding among practicing architects, teachers, and university administrators about the special goals and strengths of architecture education." (p. 62).

Standards without standardization

"Such standards would affirm the rich diversity among architecture programs, establish a more coherent set of expectations at all schools that would support professional preparation, and bring into closer harmony the scholarly activities of students and faculty." (p. 27).

"Many programs lack integration and leave inadequate time for electives or liberal studies." (p. 67).

"A more open process, in which the NAAB [educational] standards would become more universally understood, might breathe fresh life into the standards, empower students, and set the stage for a wider dialogue about the goals of architecture education." (p. 72).

A connected curriculum

"A connected curriculum would encourage the integration, application, and discovery of knowledge within and outside the architecture discipline, while effectively making the connections between architectural knowledge and the changing needs of the profession, clients, communities, and society as a whole." (p. 27).

"Making the connections, both within the architecture curriculum and between architecture and other disciplines on campus, is, we believe, the single most important challenge confronting architectural programs." (p. 85).

"The ability to speak and write with clarity is essential if architects are to assume leadership in the social, political, and economic arenas where key decisions about the built environment are being made." (p. 80).

"All graduates should be required to pull together, in a single piece of design work, what they have learned in the professional degree program and express their design concepts clearly—orally, in writing, and in two- and three-dimensional representations." (p. 27).

Climate for learning

"Each school of architecture should actively seek to establish a supportive climate for learning—where faculty, administrators, and students understand and share common learning goals in a school environment that is open, just, communicative, and caring." (p. 27).

"We recommend that alternative approaches to evaluation of design projects be more vigorously explored." (p. 95).

"We are concerned that life for many architecture students is socially isolated and exhausting, and leaves little time for any but the most determined students to explore the connections between architecture and other fields of study." (p. 104).

"Students repeatedly complained to us about inadequate career support and academic counseling. Fewer than 15 percent of students 'strongly agreed' that they could get good counseling at their school." (p. 104).

A unified profession

"The priorities for sustained action between the academy and the profession should include strengthening the educational experience of students during school, creating a more satisfying system of internship after graduation, and extending learning throughout professional life." (p. 27).

"Practicing architects routinely participate in school life—as visiting critics, guest lecturers, adjunct instructors, or mentors. We propose that this rich base of experience be made an even greater part of classroom and studio life, and in discussions about the priorities of the curriculum itself." (p. 113).

"We recommend that firms regularly invite faculty and administrators to spend time in offices to exchange ideas and to help educators and practitioners keep abreast of the realities of practice and academic life." (p. 113).

"We recommend . . . that schools, practitioners, and local and national architectural organizations collaborate to increase the availability, information, and incentives for students to gain work experience during school. And we urge that the monitoring of those internships for their educational value be improved." (p. 117).

"We are not proposing that all schools require work experience for graduation. . . . However, we do urge that schools, practicing architects, and state and national architecture organizations . . . collaborate to create more pre-graduate work opportunities . . . for students who want them, and make those experiences more educationally meaningful." (p. 120).

Service to the nation

"To realize this last goal for renewal, schools should help increase the storehouse of new knowledge to build spaces that enrich communities, prepare architects to communicate more effectively the value of their knowledge and their craft to society, and practice their profession at all times with the highest ethical standards." (p. 28).

"Students and faculty alike should regard civic activism as an essential part of scholarship." (p. 133).

"For students to recognize the professional and ethical importance of civic engagement in their own lives, such behavior ought to govern the day-to-day conduct of each faculty member and the school as a whole." (p. 134).

"Schools, then, must place far greater priority on preparing graduates to be effective and empathetic communicators, able to advocate with clarity for the beauty, utility, and ecological soundness of the built environment." (p. 136).

About the Boyer Report

The Boyer Report was coauthored by Ernest L. Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and Lee D. Mitgang, senior fellow of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. It was commissioned as an independent study of the profession of architecture by the AIA and its collateral organizations: the American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS), the National Conference of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB), the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB), and the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA). Mitgang presented initial findings to the professional community shortly after Boyer's death in 1995, and the final report was published to coincide with the 1996 AIA National Convention in Minneapolis.

About the contributor

Ernest L. Boyer is the president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Lee D. Mitgang is a senior fellow of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

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