University of Waterloo School of Architecture
Racial Equity and Environmental Justice Task Force Advisory Board Meeting
Thursday June 25, 2020 - 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM
Transcript: Jane Hutton, Editing: Adrian Blackwell

Present: Advisory Board: Joyce Barlow, Michelle Fenton, Omar Ferwati, Jaliya Fonseka, Safira Lakhani, Elsa Lam, Camille Mitchell, Paniz Moayeri, Evan Schilling, Eladia Smoke, William Woodworth Raweno:kwas
Task Force: Adrian Blackwell (Chair), Anne Bordeleau, Elizabeth English, Jane Hutton, Emily Stafford, Fiona Lim Tung

Note: We retain a copy of the original transcript. In this version, only speaker's names and personal introductions have been removed. We have done this to enable people to express opinions freely and to ensure privacy. Specific points do not represent the consensus of the Advisory Board, but the views of individual members. The transcript has been reorganized into the following sections:

I) Thoughts on the initiation of a Task Force and Advisory Board
II) Mandate of the Task Force
III) The five sections of the Draft Proposal of Commitments to Change
    1) School Culture
    2) Curriculum
    3) Hiring and Admissions
    4) Outreach
    5) Accountability
IV) Core Issues not discussed in the Draft Proposal for Commitments to Change
V) Implementation

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I) Thoughts on the initiation of a Task Force and Advisory Board

- I appreciate that document moves on many fronts which is necessary to make change.
- From perspective of draft the high goals of the document are motivating, happy to see UWSA taking it on.
- Grateful to be in the group, and for urgency of document and mandate.
- Heartening that this process is finally happening. There was no conversation like this on the radar when I was at Waterloo– we didn't have the words. So it is good that there is a conversation.
- Gratified to see formation of task force and advisory board around issues dear to me.
- There is a lot of good work taking place at this school. We have a problem; we just need to teach each other.
- Strength of this Advisory Board is its multiple voices.

II) Mandate of the Task Force

Acknowledging the failures of the school as a starting point for change
- As the first document we have to begin with critical reflection
- Beyond generic terms like bias, inequality, there is a need to pinpoint where the shortcomings are. Students have expressed this for years, but they need to hear what school's assessment of the problems are. We can't get anywhere without this.
- Need to start by acknowledging failure, only in that acknowledgement can there be a way of addressing these issues.

- There is an important need to acknowledge where and how we have failed, and take responsibility for how we've perpetuated systemic racism, knowingly or unknowingly
- We need to first acknowledge our failures. This is important to the process of healing and justice. We haven't acknowledged the failure or explored this yet. Having been involved with the Waterloo Architecture community for over ten years, I acknowledge that I too am part of this failure.
- Before the mandate we need to acknowledge the failure of existing mandates and focus on how we can address these failures in the University of Waterloo School of Architecture. We need to step back and emphasize failure. We need to break down the barriers that are affecting others. Once we can acknowledge the failure, we can allow other cultures to flourish. We have to target these issues one by one, in order to understand how these failures deeply scar the profession and experience of architecture.
- Step back and emphasize failure, this is a process of breaking down, removing, changing, and realization.
- Transparency, accountability, and honesty are lacking in the document right now.
- The document needs to acknowledge the school's shortcomings so far. This document is almost lying in the beginning. Downplaying that the role that activist groups have been playing within the school.
- More care is needed in the wording of the document to ensure sensitivity and awareness of issues (i.e: capitalization of "white," the comment about COVID 19, the reason for the formation of this taskforce, etc)

Accessibility, Mental Health and Wellness
- Disability component is not laid out prominently in the document. We need to make sure that inclusion and universal design are explicitly included in the document.
- Mental health and wellness issues are so important to the issues of equity
- Focus on Mental Health is lacking in the document.

The lack of a firm commitment to Environmental Justice
- No mention in culture, of environmental stewardship, value statements. What's your position on equation of climate justice and social justice? Creating fostering environmental stewardship is essential for a place that is a pretext for equity.
- Tighter integration of environmental, plays second fiddle right now. How are these connected. Perhaps they could be integrated under the umbrella of structural violence.

The potential of an architecture school
- Architecture has amazing power to change or influence how people see others, and how we can include or exclude individuals
- This is an architecture school so it's really important to underline the interconnectivity of environmental, racial, psychological, and accessibility issues. These are all fully interrelated. They are not separate at all. Identifying this will bring more people and advocates into this.
- Space shapes behaviour, behaviour over time is culture
- UWSA background in cultural history and interest in infrastructure/systems sets it apart from other schools. The school has a desire to understand the complex interplay of different systems. How can this emphasis intertwine with this transformation?

Creativity at the heart of the project of equity
- It's good you are using the term equity. The nuanced distinction between equity and equality needs to be detailed in the document and mandate. Often, we shrug off equity and say that everyone's got the same advantages, ignoring the systemic disadvantages that underlie formal equality.

- While we are looking at equity we need to look for creative possibilities, as opposed to simply making things equal. We need to make the world better, not just kind-hearted and equal.
- To do this we need to value the approach of different backgrounds, rather than making everyone "equal".
- When we break down the barriers that are disadvantaging people, we allow culture to flourish. This will finally allow space for that life.

III) The five sections of the Draft Proposal of Commitments to Change

1) School Culture
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The culture created at the school
- UWSA background in cultural history and interest in infrastructure/systems sets it apart from other schools. The school has a desire to understand the complex interplay of different systems. How can this emphasis intertwine with this transformation?
- Bill noted that only 12 students took his class. This lack of interest speaks volumes to the culture of the faculty, not to Bill's class. You have to ask, what is the school teaching that people don't want to attend this?

Training for faculty and staff
- Need to look at systemic attitudes (by faculty and some staff) about people who are racialized or deemed not worthy of being at Waterloo; resistant faculty need support to address their issues.
- The section on participating in training can seem like a check mark, needs to be put into practice. University training can be ineffective, how will faculty commit to this?

How can equity principles be practiced rather than simply stated?
- The declaration of equity principles in the course outlines sounds like a boilerplate; and it could be a performance. How do we know that people are engaging with good intentions? Is there a way to engage with the faculty better?

Library as a repository of school culture
- Thanks to TLGS for advocating to increase the collection of underrepresented voice in the Musagetes Library, change library instruction, and for literally donating books.

Student Leadership and faculty responsibility
- Student involvement starts as a frustration, feeling like the faculty hasn't been supportive. It shouldn't just be on the students to do this work. Faculty should be accountable to answer for what their goals are and how they specifically will address them themselves.

2) Curriculum

The Goals and outcomes desired for students at this school
- Architecture has amazing power to change or influence how people see others, and how we can include or exclude individuals
- While we are looking at equity we need to look for creative possibilities, as opposed to simply making things equal. We need to make the world better, not just kind-hearted and equal.
- Curriculum needs to be more ambitious. Encourages the inclusion of a preliminary list of target points.
  - What do we want to achieve? What should students know by the time they graduate? What are we going to do about it? The school should commit to something, such as: every student

should graduate with an understanding of climate crisis, racial history of zoning and urban renewal.
- When thinking about curriculum and teaching, what is the ethos of the School of Architecture?
  - What does a graduate from Waterloo Architecture look like? What do they leave with and how do they interact with the world?
  - For example, in Design Studios, we are typically tasked with a specific yet arbitrary programme without consideration of the people whom that programme would affect were this not a theoretical project – how do we bridge theory and practice to develop human-centred design; people is architecture
  - Develop a sense of activism; students as advocates for the possibility of spatial justice
  - The conversation extends beyond diversity and into pluralism. We need to bring this as an ethic into the way that we design
- What's going to be in core vs. elective?

Accessibility
- Doesn't feel like disability component is laid out prominently in the document. Needs to make sure that inclusion and universal design are explicitly included in the document

Climate Justice
- We need to instil a sense of urgency on climate justice and racial justice throughout the curriculum.
- School needs to make statement on its teaching and climate change. Climate Justice is light in the document, needs fully integrated. You need to teach this as if everything is burning behind you.

Racial Equity
- A lecture by a Black professional in the MArch Professional Practice class is too little too late.
- How do we address advisors and lack of knowledge about thesis topics? When supervisors do not know about the topic and its cultural/historical context, there needs to be ways of guiding students towards people who have more specific expertise. This needs to somehow be addressed in the document.

Colonization
- If you were lucky you could go outside of the school to understand colonization
- We are called all the time in profession to reinforce the powers of colonization; we aren't asked to break those structures down.
- We weren't asked to think about the structures and impacts of colonial patterns when I was a student.

Indigenous knowledge
- Indigenous knowledge is only taught in an elective. Adjunct faculty are paid a very small sum to do this.
- It was a decision of our ancestors to bring together disparate groups of people. We felt we could be stronger and better together. That vision hasn't fully realized; we are bogged down by viewing our collective endeavour from different camps. Colonial attitudes have disadvantaged so many groups. The way back would be to start with an acknowledgement of this.
- Indigenous cultures have great deal of intersectionality with other equity seeking groups, surrounding gender and cultural diversity in architecture; that haven't been represented in architecture until now.
- The importance of starting with indigenous perspectives – core to having a regionally valid platform from which to grow our understanding of how hugely diverse Canada is.
- It is important to brings guests to speak to the cultures of diverse indigenous groups, rather than speaking for them.

3) Hiring and Admissions

Hiring
- Acknowledge current Black Indigenous and people of colour designers, shine a light on contemporary work being done by hiring people already out there working.

Admissions and Recruitment
- The school needs to do recruitment, starting before grade 10. Mentorship is crucial to create a pipeline into the school. Maybe co-op opportunities or studio projects could create a connection between younger people and the school. It's crucial to expose younger people to the profession and role of architects in society.
- the admissions processes is a really big element. Why did I have such a hard time communicating challenges that I had? When I arrived at the school I felt feelings of shame about my economic situation. When you arrive at the school, you see a sea of expensive computers. You really experience the privilege of the profession from day one in the school and already feel like a second-class citizen.
- I remember one moment on an admissions committee when we reflected on the role that the ability to afford an architecture portfolio camp could have in getting into the school. We reflected on these inequities and how we could provide equal opportunity to every prospective student based on their skillset and potential. How can this be a clear part of every admissions committee conversation?

4) Outreach

Within the University
- Why can't the school or individual faculty make a clear commitment to University of Waterloo divestment from fossil fuels?
- The words outreach/connecting are too passive; we need a more active terms, such as advocacy.
  - School of Architecture can enact change within, but this would still leave students vulnerable to whatever discriminatory or problematic policies made on main campus.
  - Address the accountability of the university –especially around President's Anti-Racism Task Force – as the CBC has reported, there has sofar been no transparency and no consultation with racialized faculty. Dr. Christopher Taylor has been assigned to advise on anti-Black racism on campus, but without tenure. This puts him in a precarious position.
- Faculty should be part of more committees and working groups on main campus

Beyond the University
- Waterloo should reach the OAA (Ontario Association of Architects). Waterloo architecture has a big weight, this could be part of the change that happens in the OAA. OAA has also started a task force; Eladia is part of it. I think it is important that we are in touch with this group to ensure time is not getting wasted by either party.
- The school has put this on the table at the CCUSA (Canadian Council of University Schools of Architecture) – there are internal issues and others that are more cross-systemic; school website to share progress.

5) Accountability

Ethos of accountability
- Transparency, accountability, and honesty are lacking in the document right now.
- Develop systems of accountability that empower open and honest dialogue

Data collection
- Regarding the collection of identity- based data, it would be helpful to look at not just as numbers within the organization but also roles within the organization. We need to watch out for glass ceiling – who is actually doing what?
- Impressed by the emphasis on accountability, but the methods mentioned may or may not work.
- Focus on metrics shouldn't overtake responsibility for other actions.

Care around the distribution of labour
- Increased numbers of black and indigenous faculty – does it put undue pressure on those individuals, does it remove pressure on white faculty and staff.
- Student involvement starts as a frustration, feeling like the faculty hasn't been supportive. It shouldn't just be on the students to do this work. Faculty should be accountable to answer for what their goals are and how they specifically will address them themselves.

IV) Core Issues not discussed in the Draft Proposal for Commitments to Change

Co-op
- This document addresses admissions and curriculum, but it also needs to address the co-op program

Rome Program
- Last June/July there was an event in which there was a discussion of the Rome program one student person of colour said it was never mentioned once, who the builders were of these structures (i.e. enslaved people); that coloured his entire experience of Rome. School is so rooted in the genesis of Rome. If we are serious about addressing these issues then everything needs to be on the table to address them, including Rome.

Separation from Main Campus
- As is the school's separation from main campus, there are many resources there that are unavailable for students in Cambridge. That disjunction needs to be addressed.
- When I was a student at Waterloo, I found community and supports on main campus, when we moved to Cambridge this did not exist. How can students connect to supports on main campus?
- safety in Cambridge is important to discuss
- Safety – has heard anecdotes that many racialized, LGBTQ+, and women/femme identified students have experienced safety issues in downtown Cambridge, and with the rise of anti-Asian racism due to the pandemic, School's Asian students may experience harassment as well. School needs to advocate and work with the City of Cambridge to address safety without the involvement of the police force

International Students
- We need to much more carefully consider all international students; they have huge problems across the board:
  - There is a huge financial pressure put on them.
  - The tuition they pay is obscene (and they don't have access to a lot of financial aid), and it affects their education (not sure if this can be addressed by the Task Force but we need to keep it in mind and see if we can do anything to help the situation)
  - They face issues with finding work without "Canadian experience" after graduation, and when they find jobs, they are underpaid compared to other Waterloo M.Arch graduates.

V) Implementation

- We need to have transparency about how Task Force and Advisory Board are composed
- The document is very large in its scope and I wonder about the steps we need to take to achieve these goals. It is good to be ambitious about our goals, but we should concurrently think about methods to implement them practically.
- The more that students can be involved and fuel this change, the better for the outcome and better for the students. It is important that students are activists in the profession.
- Explore more of how students will be involved in this. Will TLGS /Sustainability Collective be involved? How?
- I am having hard time understanding the document.
  - It's trying to speak to so many things
  - Yet it's not saying how to act to address these many concerns
  - How do you actually act?
- Need to look not just at the amazing voices of students, but at the burden that the students of colour have been forced to carry in this work.