

## Faculty Fellows Project end of report (due 5/26)

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### **Title and summary / description of your project**

- Summary of why, how, what
- Describe the project. What did you do?
- Describe the challenge you addressed in your department with this project.

#### **DE-EMPHASIZE THE EUROPEAN FOCUS AND DIVERSIFICATION OF THE HISTORY OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE COURSE**

In the spring of 2023, I made significant revisions to the LAND 2003 History of Landscape Architecture course to de-emphasize the European focus and diversify the course content. I removed the excessive priority placed on the history of USA and European landscape architecture. I also reduced the stereotypical 'memorize and regurgitate' method of learning history. These changes served to increase student engagement in the course material. Addressing the challenge of increasing inclusivity in the History of Landscape Architecture will positively impact students of all backgrounds and ages. I began to uncover ways that women, BIPOC, and LGBTQ+ communities have participated in and been excluded from the shaping of the landscape. I placed priority on untold stories of landscape architecture such as the colonization of South America, instances of cultural appropriation that have occurred throughout history, and many examples of the ways that water and agriculture have fueled wealth gaps from early to current times.

My methods for achieving these goals included:

- 1) Consolidating Eurocentric lectures to make room for diverse historical perspectives. I asked how the culture, era, or theme of a lecture can inform practice today or students' ability to formulate their library of knowledge and inspiration for practice.
- 2) Implementing a reverse chronological approach to teaching the History of Landscape Architecture. I framed the relevance of historic movements into modern trends, progress, and missteps by coming to a common understanding of where the field of landscape architecture is today and working backward. This approach was intended to increase interest and engagement in the class.
- 3) Reimagining the readings so that textbook chapters were offered as references and required readings were more current articles on the theme of the lecture that was then incorporated into the discussions.
- 4) Removing quizzes and exams and replacing them with reflections and discussions. This was done to encourage students to visualize themes, relationships, and concepts throughout history and increase consistent participation.

Landscape Architecture history is typically taught from the perspective of European colonization and dominance which omits a rich history of landscape architecture originating in cultures around the world and before the time of European colonization. There are lessons, themes, and perspectives from multiple continents, cultures, and periods that are critical to inform the practice of landscape architecture today that are not adequately addressed in the traditional textbooks. By focusing on colonization (without acknowledging such) and excluding perspectives from other regions of the world, textbooks and courses alienate students from backgrounds typically underrepresented in landscape architecture. A more inclusive approach to teaching the History of Landscape Architecture is needed both to increase our collective knowledge and to become a more inclusive field.

## Describe the desired result.

A truly inclusive History of Landscape Architecture text does not exist. Nor is there a clear framework, guiding document, or set of resources about how to work towards a more equitable and compelling representation of history in academia. The goal of this project was to redesign the History of Landscape Architecture course (in a way that may be applied to other architectural fields) to make room for more diverse perspectives and move away from the colonialist perspective of history.

My desired results for this course were to: 1) diversify the material, 2) better engage the students, 3) teach in a way that allows students to incorporate historical content into their practice, and 4) provide a template for de-emphasizing the colonialist perspective in the design fields.

1) To assess whether I have reached my goal of increasing diversity and moving away from the colonialist perspective of history I looked at both my own perspective of the course and written feedback from the students. Based on conversations with students the increase in inclusivity and equitability in this class was well-received.

Here are a few samples of reflections that communicate the students' response to this type of material:

"Queering landscape architecture was a phrase I had not heard of before, and I found the topic insightful. Diversity is proven to be an impactful source of new ideas and creative exchanges."

"I would like to discuss how I have learned that by declaring to be a Landscape Architecture major I have become a woman in STEM! When I read the article about how Landscape Architecture roots from STEM discipline, I was astonished. I would have never thought that. I read the "ASLA - Landscape Architecture is a STEM Discipline" article and was super intrigued by this new information."

"Since before the term Landscape Architect was a thing, the community of landscape architects has been predominantly white men, and while there were amazing projects that came from some of these folks it is a new age and people are over it. Design is often about the clients and the user groups, but we have failed repeatedly to attempt to understand the demographics outside of cis people, often who are white. In this lecture it was refreshing to learn that it doesn't have to continue this way, we as the next generation of designers need to make a conscious effort into inclusion. The first thing that really stood out to me was that I had never heard of any of the people we talked about in this lecture even though many of them have played big roles in what we know as landscape architecture today. Recognition is the starting point to change and people in the LGBTQ+ design community need more recognition for their projects."

2) To assess my goal of increasing student interest and engagement I compared outcomes from prior years (2018-2022) to this year. When students are assessed (through reflections, discussions, and papers), students should show an improved (compared to previous years) comprehension of the transferable knowledge as compared to previous years. Additionally, history courses may have higher-than-average DFW rates (the percentage of students who receive a D, receive an F, or withdraw) because of the challenging nature of the material. I assessed whether there is a decreased DFW rate for the course under the new format. This semester no students received D or F grades. The class average for all previous years that I have taught this course (2019-2022) is 84.75. The class average this year was 87.86. I spoke to several students who gave me the feedback that they felt like it was easier to meet the learning objectives given the method of assessment that I used for this course. Sometimes they had more time to deep dive into content because they were not asked to focus on memorization.

3) I administered two (mid-semester and end-of-semester) surveys assessing how inclusive and equitable students perceived the class to be. When asked, "How well do you think I am meeting the

following goal: The goal of this class is for us to eliminate the habit of remembering the same dates, names, and European movements, and instead begin to thread together the themes, patterns, and barriers that have landed us where we are today.”

Students responded: “I think you did wonderfully at this goal. Instead of memorizing specific information, the assignments encouraged me to focus on the concepts and make connections.”

“You definitely met that goal very well. I didn't focus much on dates and names, and instead followed mainly the thread of oppression and discrimination through design. Of course, there were others too, but that one stuck out to me the most.”

“10/10 its the first history class I've had in a while where I feel like I am getting an understanding of development and connection and not just dates and places. Trying to see themes rather than facts actually helps me retain the information.”

(see attached middle and end-of-semester surveys for detailed information).

4) The goal of creating a template has not yet happened. I do have a great deal of material to complete this in the future.

Describe the **outcome**. What worked, what didn't work, lessons learned.

What worked- Generally the changes seemed to work. Students are hungry for less Eurocentric content and more diverse perspectives so new lectures such as Queering Landscapes: Dismantling the Binary were received with open arms and invited constructive discussions. Students responded well to formal discussions and written reflections, some noting that the reflections were the first time they have ever been asked to identify themes, patterns, or their perspectives when learning history. The mid-class break and brief discussion questions were successful. This class in particular seemed to appreciate my break slides including photos and stories about my pets. This may seem insignificant but I think punctuating sometimes heavy lectures (about the suppression of diverse perspectives in design) with something light-hearted helped students stay on topic.

What didn't work- I think the biggest challenge with reverse chronology is that many movements occur in response to or because of the previous movement. It was challenging to quickly review an occurrence or era that we haven't covered yet. Lessons learned relating to this are to include a few slides at the beginning of each lecture to place that lecture in the timeline. That may include explaining a movement or event that this theme was a response to, what else was happening in the world at that same time, or other details that may be used as a point of reference. I employed a TA this semester whose main task other than grading was to develop a series of timelines to help with the communication of placing each lecture within history. I had a few successful timelines which students responded well to but the TA did not always have time to complete these in time for the lecture. Including the timelines in every lecture could help assuage confusion from the reverse chronological presentation of material.

Other lessons learned include details specific to assignments. I can reduce the word count on the papers, eliminate the last reflection (it is too close to the final paper), and allow flexibility in the format of the final research project. Students proposed making what has typically been a final paper into a creative representation of the same research project. I believe this was a result of the culture I created in this class and felt like an this was an interesting way for them to round out the semester. Students completed pieces of art, comics, diagrams, and slide shows which represented a theme in ancient landscape architecture illustrated through the research of three separate projects (e.g., axis mundi as represented throughout the world or how the method of burial represents the culture around death in multiple times and places). (see specific examples of this assignment at the end of this document) Another modification that I will make for next year is to continue to reorder and consolidate more lectures. Themes like Africa and Asia need more than one lecture and themes like Renaissance and the Baroque can likely be edited down to only the most relevant information.

### **Revised plan moving forward:**

What steps do you need to take to reach this goal? (Action items, timeline, specific milestones, contingency options, etc.)

Done for phase one (spring 23):

- Re-organize schedule (considering ways that reverse chronology influences take-away messages)
- Research and add lectures on “missing” time eras, cultures and geographical areas
- Edit old lectures (all others)
- Re-write assignments and assessments (critical thinking and comprehension)
- Work closely with TA
- Emphasize issues and themes that tie history together
- Start timeline project

For phase two (spring 24):

- Create a template for this type of course revision
- Update schedule (make modifications from spring 2023 and consolidate where needed)
- Continue to research and add more lectures on “missing” time eras, cultures and geographical areas (specifically separating Africa and modern Black landscapes into two lectures and adding China, Tibet, India as a second Asia lecture)
- Edit and revise lectures (as needed)
- Edit assignments and discussion formats
- Work closely with TA
- Continue to emphasize issues and themes that tie history together
- Continue timeline project

### **Reflect on your experience in the Faculty Fellows program and working on your project.**

I am eternally grateful to have been part of the Faculty Fellows program. One year ago I was frustrated with how my history class was going and how few resources I felt I had. This led to a conversation with Kirk which led to my participation in Faculty Fellows. The Faculty Fellows course was energizing and inspiring and I will refer to my notes and saved resources for many years. That course fueled my long-term desire to do a big overhaul of this course. I finally felt prepared to take this project on. In December I was rightfully warned that this was too big of a project for the spring and I had some self-doubt. However, as the semester progressed I was more inspired by the class being taught in this new way and I fed off of the students' energy. I will continue to try to improve this course but I am so grateful for the support I have received for the second iteration in spring 2024. One piece of feedback that I would offer is that I believe there could be more support in the spring. It could be something as simple as a chat or another way for the faculty fellows to stay in touch. I would love to hear about everyone else's projects but am unlikely to read other long reports.