

From: Brad Horn, Interim Dean

To: SSA Faculty, Staff, Students, Alumni

Re: Dean's Letter – summer 2021

June 17, 2021

Dear Spitzer Community,

I want to congratulate all of you for your brilliant work and perseverance during this challenging year. It was a true joy to see the fruits of your labor this spring and to spend time together reflecting and making plans for the future. I was honored to be part of both the Graduate Toast and the commencement ceremony two weeks ago, where we celebrated all of our students receiving degrees this year. We are so very proud of all of you! We end this semester with great optimism not only for our graduates who are launching out into the professional world, but for everyone returning in person next fall to our shared creative space.

This was a transformative year for our college and school on many levels. The spring semester brought forth extraordinary self-reflection and visioning. I'm humbled by the way we've started to come together as students, faculty, staff, and alumni over the past five months to speak frankly about who we are, where we've been, and where we see ourselves in the future. These conversations were diverse in both scope and scale, and I am grateful to the staff, faculty, and students who spoke honestly and bravely at meetings and town halls, those who chaired and participated in committees focused on equity and justice, and those who wrote letters and emails urging change.

I am likewise grateful to all who contributed time, empathy, and love to the collective project of deepening our cultural competency and working toward a more equitable, respectful, and inclusive school community. We owe a tremendous debt to Diana Cuzzo, CCNY Chief Diversity Officer and Title IX Coordinator, and Lynn Hernández, Assistant Dean for Diversity and Inclusion and Associate Medical Professor at the CUNY School of Medicine, for guiding important early discussions. The two workshops they jointly led with our faculty and staff this semester, *Implicit Bias* and *Microaggressions*, were eye-opening and offered important insights on how we can be more intentional and aware in our interactions with one another. I am attaching the two presentations from these workshops as we reflect on how to incorporate this learning into our school culture.

I am also pleased to share that the inaugural members of the Spitzer JEDI Committee have completed their final meeting of the semester and issued recommendations to my office for actions we can take in anticipation of the fall and beyond. I want to thank Professor Gutman, who chaired the committee, as well as all committee members, for their dedication and for their candor. Over the summer, we will explore implementation of these recommendations, three of which are already being piloted in the current Advanced Studios: 1) making the Hour SSA initiative a permanent part of our studio schedule; 2) developing communication agreements that establish shared responsibility for respectful interaction among faculty, staff, and students; and 3) amending syllabi so that JEDI goals and ideals are front and center. Further recommendations include: 4) scheduling school-wide orientations each year that introduce JEDI ideals and invite students to share their own perspectives; 5) organizing anti-racism pedagogy workshops, which address the various axes of discrimination including race, gender, sexuality, and ability; 6) exploring a restorative justice model

at our school to address grievances and repair harms; and 7) making the JEDI Committee permanent with rotating membership so that the opportunity – and duty – to contribute to this work is shared by all of us.

A key part of this effort is a commitment to elevating the voices of CCNY students and recent alumni. I want to congratulate Marvin Cabrera on being selected for the first *Spitzer Mentor Fellowship*. Marvin, who received his MA in Study of the Americas: Dominican Studies from CCNY this spring, will be partnering with members of our faculty next year to explore avenues for the development and implementation of anti-racist pedagogies at our school. I also want to congratulate B Arch students Nicole Bass and Kedishia Joseph as the first recipients of the *Spitzer Changemaker Scholarship*. Nicole and Kedishia have been ardent advocates on behalf of fellow students, improving communication among students, faculty, and the administration, and building bridges among students, alumni, and the broader professional world. We look forward to working with them next year to further these efforts as part of the broader enrichment of our school culture. It is a thrill to add these new opportunities to the many student scholarship programs we already offer.

Parallel with this work, faculty and staff have embarked on workshops with an external Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion facilitator. Our first meeting in May included school leadership and select staff and JEDI Committee members; we sketched out initial goals for the work to come. An initial summer series will focus on our full-time faculty and staff with expansion to others in the fall. This effort, and the initiatives outlined above, each will require broad and engaged participation by all of us for maximum impact. I want to take a moment to thank Chair Williamson, Professor Gutman, Professor Rickenbacker, and Camille Hall, Director of Finance and Administration, for being such vital partners in these efforts. I also want to thank Venesa Alicea-Chuqui for her leadership of the CCNY Architecture Alumni Group and her steady advocacy on behalf of our school and its students. I look forward to working with our faculty, students, staff, and alumni, as well as future leadership, to continue this work and facilitate these goals well into the future.

As you know, our search for a new permanent dean is in full swing, and the committee will continue its work through the summer. The aim is to select a short list from among the applicants, conduct interviews, and invite presentations to our school and alumni community as soon as possible. We will share those dates once they are scheduled.

Finally, we are proud to announce two new, incoming members of our full-time faculty: Zihao Zhang and Jerome Haferd.

Zihao Zhang will be joining our faculty in the fall as a tenure-track Assistant Professor, teaching in the Graduate Landscape Architecture Program. Zihao is arriving from the University of Virginia's Constructed Environment program, where he recently defended his Ph.D. dissertation entitled *Cybernetic Environment: Uncontrollability and Non-communication for a Future of Coexistence*. Zihao's research constructs a field of landscape inquiry – the cybernetic environment – between sciences, engineering, arts, and design. It interrogates the underlying mode of thought in emerging environmental practices in light of contemporary post-humanist concerns across disciplines. Zihao's work both explores and expands the role of design expertise around discourses such as climate change and smart cities. I want to personally thank Professor Seavitt Nordenson for expertly and efficiently chairing the search committee.

We are also delighted to welcome Jerome Haferd in a new capacity as Substitute Assistant Professor of Architecture. Jerome is partner in the award-winning firm BRANDT : HAFERD and a core initiator of Dark Matter University. He has taught several ground-breaking design studios at SSA, including co-leading Unit 24 with Visiting Professor Mitchell Squire this past year. Next fall he will coordinate the Advanced Studios, where he will introduce new cross-institutional collaborations. Jerome's

pedagogical research explores matters of race and identity, expanded modes of cultural production, and architecture, through speculative readings of how the past and future impact the present.

The excitement and energy around change at our school feels palpable as we progress through the summer sessions and prepare for building reopening in August. This was a difficult and challenging year – but one that both multiplied and amplified the voices that collectively shape our school culture and pedagogical ambitions. Looking forward, we will continue to draw strength and motivation from these experiences and from the power of this watershed moment for advancing civil rights in our country, our community, and the design professions.

Thank you for making the Spitzer School of Architecture the special place that it is, and I wish you all the very best for a healthy and revivifying summer.

Warmly,



Brad