

May 24, 2022

Dear Spitzer School community,

I'm writing with some reflections and updates on the Bernard and Anne Spitzer School of Architecture at the City College of New York. Spitzer is open; Spitzer is thriving; Spitzer is confident. During the past two semesters we have been creating, drawing, building, imagining, studying, working, and learning together—in situ, in the studios, classrooms, labs, shops, offices, and the library that make up the architecture school. I can say with confidence that the state of our school is strong.

Yes, the pandemic has lasted longer than any of us imagined, bringing with it illness, pain, hardship, and loss; this global crisis in public health touched each one of us in the Spitzer community, intimately, personally, politically, professionally. As this academic year draws to a close, here we are yet again in the midst of a surge, reminding us “Covid knows no boundaries,” to borrow a phrase from this year’s Mumford lecturer, Mrs. Yasmeen Lari, the distinguished Pakistani architect. It is a truism that the pandemic has exposed the structural dimensions of poverty in our city, the health disparities that are so intertwined with constructed environments, and the searing imprints of racism and sexism. As Mrs. Lari insists, we are at a crossroads—with the pandemic, the movement for Black Lives, #MeToo, the climate emergency, and the global crisis in affordable housing showing us, each day, that it is time for transformational, generational change.

Over a year ago, during the online memorial for the late Michael Sorkin, the architect Teddy Cruz asked, “Could there be a pandemic variant that changes the way we live together?” “What is the public world that we will make, when we venture outside again?” “Can we project something different?” “Can we learn to live with closeness, proximity, and nearness?” Design matters, and we at Spitzer are facing the harm, damage, violence, and inequalities as they manifest in design culture. I’m so pleased and so impressed that these issues, these concerns, these crises were front and center in your design work, shown with passion, skill, and conviction in the recent design studio reviews.

Yes, I know we have work to do.

A year ago, I would not have imagined that I would be writing to you as the dean of the Spitzer School. As an architect who became an architectural historian, I wasn’t looking to change what I do. I love to teach and mentor students, and to research, write, edit, and read. Life has a way of delivering the unexpected to each and every one of us. The invitation to lead the architecture school came out of the blue from Provost Liss and President Boudreau. It is one that I decided to accept, first as your interim dean, then as your permanent dean. Sometimes, you just have to take a deep breath, jump in, and know that you’ll figure out how to solve the challenges at hand. I had some experience with administration; I knew I would be working with Spitzer’s first-rate staff; and I was fully aware of how hard Professor Bradley Horn, the previous interim dean, and Professor June Williamson, the architecture department chair, had worked with faculty, staff, and students to bring change to the Spitzer School.

As I set out on this journey, I promised that I would follow Brad and June in advocating for students and faculty from each and every program, helping to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on the Spitzer community; making the academic environment even more inclusive and equitable; and encouraging new initiatives that push the boundaries of design thinking and research. Like my colleagues, I am deeply committed to the public mission of the architecture school and City College, and I am grateful for the cooperation that has made it possible to advance Spitzer’s dedication to

social and sustainable concerns in practice, and to provide access to the finest education in the art, history, and technology of architecture, urban design, and landscape architecture to a broad and diverse student population.

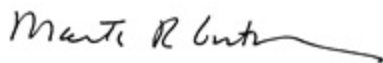
Change is in the air, and today, I'd like to share exciting news about some of them. I'm delighted to announce that Professor June Williamson has accepted my invitation to be director of the M.Arch program, starting in January 2023. June is stepping down as architecture department chair, having served them full three-year term in this position; we at Spitzer are ever grateful to June for steering Spitzer to calmer waters during tumultuous times. I'd like to thank Professor Jeremy Edmiston for serving as M.Arch program director; I accepted Jeremy's resignation with regret, and I am indebted to June for taking on the responsibility that once sat on his shoulders. I'd also like to thank Prof. Frank Melendez who has served as Acting M.Arch Program Director during Jeremy's sabbatical, and who will continue in this role in fall 2022, while June takes a leave of absence. More thanks are due to Professor Fabian Llonch for coordinating study abroad programs at Spitzer for eleven years (even including during his sabbatical!). He has stepped down, and Frank Melendez has offered to take on this position. Thank you Frank for this service too!

I extend my appreciation to Professor Sean Weiss for standing for election as chair of the Department of Architecture (an election that was affirmed unanimously by the faculty), and to Professor Fran Leadon for volunteering to serve as deputy chair. Sean and Fran, I look forward to fruitful exchange and collaboration as we work together to make the Spitzer School an even better architecture school than it already is.

As I write this, we await the report affirming the reaccreditation of Master of Landscape Architecture program, guided so expertly by Program Director and Professor Catherine Seavitt Nordenson. Other plans are afoot including for upgrades to the auditorium, classrooms, and offices on the first floor, more events are in the works; and in the coming weeks there will be announcements new faculty hires, new staff positions, and new staff appointments.

Please share your suggestions! Please take part in governance! And please stay tuned for more good news!

Sincerely,



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