Paper / Proposal Title:
The Use of Exploratory Geographic Fieldwork Techniques in the Development of Observational and Analytical Skills in Students of the Built Environment

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Abstract (300 words):
Exploratory fieldwork techniques borrowed from the field of geography can enrich architecture-related and interdisciplinary curriculums by training students to observe, measure, and analyze built environments as a foundation for developing deeper understandings of the impact cultural, social, political, technological, and environmental conditions can have on loci. Carefully designed fieldwork builds valuable skills, including training students' eyes to be more observant about built environments, and encourages the formation of meaningful questions. Various forms of documentation, including written reports, photography, audio recording, and diagramming, help students record, reflect upon, and synthesize site experiences. Fieldwork exercises can then serve as catalysts for students to incorporate their observations into larger research explorations, such as answering questions regarding how the site has evolved over time, how the location is perceived and used by various local and outside groups, and what political and other unseen influences have impacted the design and use of the place.

This paper, which explores ways to develop engaging and impactful fieldwork assignments for students in architecture and related fields, is based on the adaption of educational practices used in geography and art history courses for a thematically-based interdisciplinary introductory course on the built environment for graduate
students in architecture, landscape architecture, and planning at the University of Arizona, and on the author’s participation in the development of an exploratory curricular unit on issues of colonialism and contested spaces designed to help students at different levels become more cognizant of the forces that led to the current condition and uses of public places around them. This curricular unit was funded by and is available through the Global Architectural History Teaching Collective.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each): Lisa D. Schrenk is Associate Professor of Architectural History and a Faculty Fellow at the University of Arizona, as well as former Education Director of the Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio Foundation. She received a B.A. from Macalester College with degrees in studio art and geography, a Master’s Degree in Architectural History from the University of Virginia, and a Ph.D. in Art History from the University of Texas at Austin. Her core research focuses on international expositions and the early work of Frank Lloyd Wright. Book publications include Building a Century of Progress: The Architecture of Chicago’s 1933-34 World’s Fair (University of Minnesota Press) and The Oak Park Studio of Frank Lloyd Wright (University of Chicago Press, 2020). She has documented works of architecture in over 85 countries, including while traveling on Fulbright-Hays, NEH, and East-West Center programs and while teaching on two around-the-world Semester at Sea voyages. She has served on the Board of Directors for the Society of Architectural Historians and as President of the Chicago Society of Architectural Historians. Her academic work has been featured in the Chronicle for Higher Education.