

Development of Cal Poly's School of Architecture and Environmental Design

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Abstract:

In the turbulent decade of the 1960s, Cal Poly consciously diverged from a Master Plan created by the state Department of Education in order to create one of the best architecture schools in the nation, which highlighted the university's unique position as the only polytechnic in the CSU system. This article details Cal Polys commitment to the development of the program through the examination of the expansion of the Architectural Engineering department into a full-fledged College of Architecture in the years 1948 to 1972. Three landmark academic years are examined in order to highlight the growth of the Architecture program. These are: 1947-1948, 1964-1965, as well as 1972-1973. The analysis focuses on the change in coursework, the increase in degrees offered, the growth of total faculty employed as well as the evolution of the program in terms of an administrative unit.

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The 1960s were a time of significant social upheaval in the United States. The baby-boomer generation entering adulthood led to the emergence of a generation gap and the development of a counterculture, both of which fueled civil unrest that was punctuated by the civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam war protests. As is usual in such moments, the governing bodies, from the federal, to state and local, took it upon themselves to counter the chaos with structure, responding to social turmoil with progressive reforms on the one hand as well as rigid

conservative reaction on the other. In the vein of reform, the state of California took steps to overhaul its higher education system, during which time small universities, such as Cal Poly, sought to expand the scope of their curricula. In 1960, the California State Board of Education developed a Master Plan for Higher Education in order to create a coherent statewide postsecondary education system. The plan was implemented later that year as part of the Donahoe Higher Education Act pursuant to which a California State College System was created.¹ The new system incorporated twenty-three state colleges into a single homogeneous organization separate from the University of California system. Of the universities within the system, California State Polytechnic College, otherwise known as Cal Poly, held a unique position in that it was the only one that offered a degree in Architecture related field.² In 1972, Cal Poly was granted a title of a university. In the same year, a master's degree in architecture was offered for the first time in the school's history, culminating the development of the nascent School of Architecture. The development of Cal Poly's College of Architecture appears as an anomaly within the framework of the CSU system since the original California Master Plan provided that professional fields such as architecture be the province of the UC

1 California State Department of Education, *A Master Plan for Higher Education in California, 1960-1975: Prepared for the Liaison Committee of the State Board of Education and The Regents of the University of California*, by Arthur D. Browne, Howard A. Champion, Arthur G. Coons, Glenn S. Dumke, Thomas C. Holly, Dean E. McHenry, Keith Sexton, Henry T. Tyler and Robert J. Wert, (Sacramento, 1960), 1-2.
2 *California State Polytechnic College Catalog, 1960-1961* (San Luis Obispo, CA: California State Polytechnic College, 1960), 117.

system universities alone.³ Was the development of Cal Poly's School of Architecture an oversight by the State Board of Education, in light of the stipulations of the Master Plan for Higher Education? Or was it instead part of a deliberate agenda endorsed and executed by Cal Poly directors? In this paper, I show that the development of Cal Poly's College of Architecture and Environmental Design was, in fact, the result of a comprehensive effort by the university's administrators to develop the school into a nationally recognized architecture program.

The goal of my research is to analyze the expansion of the Architectural Engineering Department and its transformation into the College of Architecture in the years 1948-1972. To this end, I will focus on a comparison of the curriculum, faculty membership, and number of majors of study the department offered in three landmark years. These are the academic years of 1947-1948, 1964-1965, as well as 1972-1973. The choice of the College of Architecture and Environmental Design for this research is due to its prestigious standing among California public universities. Architecture is a field of study that is represented by a separate college only at UCLA and UC Berkeley, two of the most respected public universities in the nation, and solely at Cal Poly among non-UCs. Moreover, Cal Poly's architecture program has been ranked consistently in the top ten in the nation and ranked as the

3 Robert E Kennedy, *Learn by Doing: Memoirs of a University President* (San Luis Obispo, CA: Cal Poly Foundation, 2001), 192.

best undergraduate school for architecture in 2014.⁴ The development of the architecture program demonstrates that Cal Poly was consciously pushing to create a high-profile technical department consistent with its already prestigious engineering school, which would highlight its unique position as the only polytechnic in the CSU system. To demonstrate this, I will first compare the terms of 1947-1948, i.e., the year that the Architectural Engineering Department was first established and 1964-1965, which saw the first addition of a new major to the department's offerings.

The Architectural Engineering Department grew enormously from its inception in 1947-1948 to the academic year of 1964-1965, which is best illustrated by a dramatic increase in the number of faculty members as well as by the addition of another B.S. degree. During its inaugural year, the department offered a single four-year Bachelor of Science in Architectural Engineering degree and was staffed by only one professor, Gerald E. Ellis.⁵ In the term of 1964-1965, the department expanded to offer a five-year Bachelor of Architecture degree in addition to the B.S. in Architectural Engineering that had been offered since the beginning of the program.⁶ The faculty numbers increased as well, from

4 "America's Best Architecture Schools 2014," DesignIntelligence, accessed April 15, 2020, <https://www.di.net/articles/america-s-best-architecture-schools-2014/>; Shannon McOuat, "Cal Poly Architecture and Landscape Architecture Programs Place High in 2018 DesignIntelligence Survey National Rankings," Cal Poly News, accessed April 15, 2020, https://calpolynews.calpoly.edu/news_releases/2017/september/architecture.
 5 *California State Polytechnic College Catalog, 1968-1969* (San Luis Obispo, CA: California State Polytechnic College, 1968), 287-290.
 6 *California State Polytechnic College Catalog, 1964-1965*. (San Luis Obispo, CA: California State Polytechnic College, 1964), 133-135.

a single professor in 1948, to a cohort of sixteen instructors, including the department head, George Hasslein in 1964.⁷ The addition of the five-year Architecture major is an excellent illustration of the level of commitment on the part of the university to expand the department. As George Hasslein, head of the Architectural Engineering Department, stated in his 1965 Accreditation Evaluation Report: "The State Educational Code did not permit the institution of any five-year programs until 1963 when it was changed".⁸ This change was made in response to Cal Poly lobbying.⁹ In his memoirs, former university president Robert E. Kennedy explained that Cal Poly was able to amend and rewrite a section of the state statute that dealt with instruction in the field of Architecture.¹⁰ Cal Poly's efforts in the state capital were not the only attempt by the school's administration to develop the School of Architecture. The addition of fifteen additional faculty members suggests that Cal Poly allocated more considerable financial resources to the department, clearly indicating that expansion was its prerogative. Cal Poly's active pursuit of an amendment to the Master Plan for Higher Education through lobbying at the state capital also reveals the importance that the university assigned to the growth of the Department of Architectural Engineering in the early years of its existence.

Analysis of the curriculum for the Architectural Engineering major between the terms of 1947-1948 and 1964-1965 reveals a number of

7 Ibid., 133.

8 National Architectural Accreditation Board Evaluation Report, 01 February 1966. Box 402.01 Folder 402 Architecture Department Accreditation. Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University.

9 Kennedy, *Learn by Doing*, 192.

10 Ibid.

differences that suggest a trend towards more demanding coursework, a hallmark of conscious improvement by the university administration. The most readily apparent change is that specific courses offered in 1947-1948 disappear altogether from the curriculum for the 1964-1965 term, while others remain but are renamed. In fact, only two course series from 1947-48 curriculum, Materials of Construction and Strength of Materials, were still included in 1964-65, albeit with different course numbers. Another difference is the number of major courses and credits required. In 1947-1948 these are forty-two and 104 respectively, whereas in 1964-1965, students were required to attend forty-seven courses and accumulate 121 credits in the major. The most dramatic difference appears in the senior year when twenty-seven units of Architecture or Engineering courses were required in 1947-48, while thirty-nine units were required in 1964-65. The final difference is an excess of vocational-type legacy courses, such as fifteen units of Heating and Ventilating (AC 201, 202, 203 and AC 241, 242, 243) or twenty units of Drafting (Arch 141, 142, 143, ME 121, Arch 241, 242, 243) required as part of the degree in 1947-48. It appears that the filler present in the curriculum of the department's inaugural year had been eliminated by 1964-1965 and replaced with a more demanding subject matter. The more intensive coursework points to the fact that Cal Poly administrators were consciously developing the Architecture and Architectural Engineering Department into a program of higher quality that could compete with the best universities in the state.

In the span of the following eight years, that is between 1964 and 1972, a series of developments led to the creation of a master's program in the field of architecture. These developments deserve a brief mention as they directly impacted the Architecture and Architectural Engineer-

ing Department. First, in January of 1968, the Department of Architecture and Architectural Engineering was elevated to a full-fledged school status and was renamed the School of Architecture.¹¹ The new school offered three majors: a new City and Regional Planning major as well as Architecture and Architectural Engineering.¹² Three years later, in 1971, the School of Architecture was renamed to School of Architecture and Environmental Design, and a new four-year Construction Engineering Bachelor of Science degree was added to its offering.¹³ Finally, the following year, a four-year Bachelor of Science degree in Landscape Architecture was added along with a Master of Science in Architecture degree.¹⁴ The addition of the master's program precipitated a reorganization of the entire architecture major.

Direct comparison of academic years 1964-1965 and 1972-1973 shows an astronomic growth of the architecture program. Most importantly, the program was elevated from a Department, subordinate to the School of Engineering in 1964-1965, to the level of an independent School of Architecture in 1968-1969. The second most significant change was the addition of four degrees by the 1972-1973 term.¹⁵ The new degrees consisted of Bachelor of Science degrees in

11 Nancy E. Loe and Dan Howard-Greene, *Cal Poly: The First Hundred Years* (San Luis Obispo, CA: Robert E. Kennedy Library, California Polytechnic State University, 2001), 95.

12 *California State Polytechnic College Catalog, 1968-1969*, 287-290.

13 *California State Polytechnic College Catalog, 1971-1972*. (San Luis Obispo, CA: California State Polytechnic College, 1971), 96-100.

14 *California State Polytechnic College Catalog, 1972-1973*. (San Luis Obispo, CA: California State Polytechnic College, 1972), 100-105.

15 *Ibid.*

City and Regional Planning, Construction Engineering and Landscape Architecture, as well as an M.S. degree in Architecture, bringing the total of degrees awarded to five in 1972-1973, as compared with just two in 1964-1965. It is also noteworthy that the numbers of faculty expanded proportionally to the growth of the program. For example, in 1964-1965, there were sixteen instructors, while eight years later, fifty architecture professors were employed by the school.¹⁶ This is an increase not only in the absolute number of faculty but also an increase in the average of instructors per major, which rose from eight to ten. The number of majors offered, the increase in faculty, the addition of a post-graduate program, and the promotion of a department to a college all point to a concerted effort by Cal Poly to turn its Architecture School into a nationally recognized program.

There is a noticeable difference in the curriculum for architecture, the program's flagship major, between the years of 1964-65 and the same major in 1972-73, a difference marked by more demanding coursework as well as longer duration. It must be noted that the major was entirely reorganized from a five-year professional Baccalaureate of Architecture to a six-year, professional Master of Science in Architecture degree.¹⁷ The coursework itself shows that twenty courses were required in the first two years of 1964-1965, accounting for 48 major units while in 1972-1973, first-year students and sophomores were given a load of twenty-one courses to the tune of 54 units. The difference in the amount of credits is explained by the fact that Introduction to Urban Environ-

¹⁶ *California State Polytechnic College Catalog, 1972-1973*, 100.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

ment series increased its unit load from two to three credits each, and Engineering Problems-Digital Computers (Arch 250) course became a two-unit class in 1972-73 whereas in 1963-64 it was only worth one credit.¹⁸ The later years of both programs also required similar courses, though they were distributed in a different way over the years. In 1964-1965, architecture students were required 147 credits in 54 major courses, while in 1972-1973 that number rose to 189 units and a minimum of 62 courses, taking six years to complete. The additional coursework in the post-graduate studies consisted of a Thesis Project series (Arch 599), two additional quarters of Architectural Design (Arch 561), and 25 further units of 400 and 500 level architecture school electives.¹⁹ These more rigorous standards show that Cal Poly was at this point competing to recruit the best and most committed students, signaling the rise of its School of Architecture to some prominence.

The transformation of the architecture program at Cal Poly from a small department in 1947 to a major college in 1973 was a result of a conscious development meticulously planned and executed by the university administrators. It was accomplished by consistent investment in the department as demonstrated by an increase in majors offered, the addition of a post-graduate program, a significant increase in the number of faculty members, an increase in number of courses offerings, a more demanding curriculum and, most importantly, the founding of the College of Architecture and Environmental Design. Such growth and expansion is evidence that Cal Poly devoted considerable time, effort,

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁹ *California State Polytechnic College Catalog, 1972-1973*, 105.

and resources in order to build its School of Architecture into a nationally recognized architecture program.

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