

“CHARGE TO THE ARCHITECTS AND PLANNERS”

(Penned in 1961 to task the architects and planners for the development of the current site of Skidmore College, by Josephine Young Case - novelist, poet, educator, trustee, and acting president of Skidmore College. During the 15 months that she led the College and her many years on the board of trustees, she helped keep together the Skidmore of the past, build the Skidmore of today, and set high standards for the Skidmore of the future. Her references to female students reflects a time before Skidmore College became co-educational.)

You will design a campus which will provide for both student and teacher a feeling of freedom and wide horizon, and you will provide the physical opportunities for attaining that freedom in the mind and that horizon in the spirit.

You must allow space for contemplation and for play; privacy for thinking and study; and a pervasive atmosphere which will be at the same time serious and gay, somber and warm, traditional and forward-looking, made up of time past, time present, and time future.

How will you achieve this? For here the student must discover herself, and through herself others and the world, and through others, herself. You must provide for her a place where she lives happily with her peers, and where she meets her teachers easily and often outside the classroom. Her living area as well as her study area must have books always at hand, and art of all kinds, to be lived with. She must have the facilities for quiet, civilized meals, for rest.

Teachers as well must have their areas of peace and privacy, of civilized comforts and amenities.

For the main purpose of the college, you must design sites for serious learning. There must be rooms equipped with every modern aid for teaching, including space for those which have not yet been invented. But also there must be smaller rooms equipped only with chairs and tables and an atmosphere of learning.

There must be large halls for outside lectures on large subjects, for these students seek to participate in outside affairs. There must be the most modern laboratories and scientific equipment, for these students seek to know and must know the newest developments of science. There must be many fine studios for the arts, for these students seek to create as well as to enjoy by seeing and hearing. And there must be space for the technical and professional training which they seek.

Buildings do not cause academic programs, but they can impede them. Therefore all these learning rooms must be so placed and so designed that the campus expresses the unity of knowledge. Access between departments must be easy, so that students moving through this rich array feel from the first a single impact, and gather from the harmonious interplay of disciplines some inkling of the universality of human experience. And at the heart of the beating center, you must set the library where every book wanted is immediately at hand, and a thousand others wait beside them to be discovered.

Other things too you must provide: a chapel, or better two chapels, a large one for services, a small one for meditation; space for collections of art and science; for language laboratories; space perhaps for a computer; for an oriental garden. And since it may be a campus used round the year, twelve months of learning, its planning must offer as much way for summer's winds as it does shelter from winter's. Daylight even in December must flow through all of its rooms, yet there must be shade in the summer for peripatetic scholars.

One thing we do not want for our new campus and that is walls or gates. For we want the world to enter. These students would not and should not have isolation from the immediacy of current problems, however dire. Their concern will reach out far beyond the campus to others everywhere; for awareness will be a virtue of this place.

Yet perhaps you should build in those woods one ivory tower. It might, in the end, prove more important to this campus than a bomb shelter.