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JOHN G. WILLIAMS FAIA architect landscape architect
140 NORTH SANG AVENUE FAYETTEVILLE, ARKANSAS 72701 (501)442-4317

copy link

July 1, 1999

Donald O. Pederson
Vice Chancellor Finance & Administration
University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, AR 72701

Dear Don,

Enclosed with this letter is a copy of a report dealing with the history of campus planning, building design and landscape plans for the University of Arkansas from September 1946 to 1986, with related material and correspondence (see attached to the report). I hope this will be helpful to you.

Don, in writing this I found it seemed necessary to include certain disagreements and other concerns that became personal. This might have developed because there were honest disagreements about how the University might be best served. I continue to believe that an arrangement in which a Facilities Planning Office be separate from the Physical Plant is best, especially if the two can work together constructively.

Also, I mentioned to you that I am writing a series of lectures on architecture that I hope to have published. These lectures will include many colored photographs to illustrate the text. Therefore, this might be fairly costly to publish. I am requesting that if a gift or other possible money might become available to fund the publication of these lectures we might meet to discuss this possibility.

In addition to serving as Architectural Advisor to the presidents as listed in this report, I have also had the pleasure of serving the University in acquiring substantial gifts. These gifts include Mrs. Henderson's Glass Collection, the Markham Hill property, which Mr. Win Thompson traded with Mr. Julian Archer for property near the 71 Bypass, now 540, Mrs. Garvan's property and a pivotal role in helping the University acquire the Cammack property and later in testifying for the University when the heirs sued to have the title repealed (see transcript of John Williams' testimony in first Cammack property trial.) Judge Bullion told me later that it was because of my testimony that the University was given fifteen more years to get under way with plans for the property.

Sincerely,

John

John G. Williams

AUGUST 11, 1954

Dr. John T. Caldwell, President
University of Arkansas

Dear Dr. Caldwell:

This letter is in reference to our recent discussion concerning the need for a university policy which will more fully insure the consistent development and thoughtful expansion of the building program of the University of Arkansas.

Serious consideration of such a policy is especially important at this time because of anticipated increases in enrollment and a general expansion of the services of the university. These factors will of necessity be reflected in sizable expenditures for buildings and equipment. If the university is to receive the greatest return from these expenditures, future buildings should be designed with thorough consideration for the problems of location, use, construction and equipment. Naturally these buildings should be economically sound and visually pleasing.

There have been instances in the past when the architect has not worked in full cooperation and understanding with the various representatives of the university. This lack of cooperation and understanding has led to some rather serious and costly mistakes. It was largely due to such instances that the university officials requested the chairman of the Department of Architecture to employ Mr. Robert Hegardt and Mr. Herbert Fowler to do the necessary research to program and design the Law Building and the Animal Sciences Building, and Mr. James Ward to prepare the present master plan for university expansion. The quality of the design of these buildings and campus plan reflects the importance of a full understanding by the designer of the various problems involved in the preliminary phases of architectural design.

This arrangement however, has not been reacted to favorably by the professional architects of the state. I believe their criticism has been centered primarily on two aspects of this procedure:

1. As a matter of professional pride they resent not having an opportunity to develop and present their own architectural solutions.
2. Since the University has furnished a complete program and definitive preliminary drawings, the architects on these two projects have been asked to reduce their fee.

While it is not assumed that there must always be complete agreement on matters of policy and conviction between this department and the professional architects in the state, it is imperative that this department be able to defend its position in all professional and ethical matters.

The present policy cannot be fully defended.

I am certain that a policy can be formulated which can be justified on a professional and ethical basis and still retain the positive values of the present arrangement. It is highly desirable for the university to retain the advantage of study, research, consultation, and programming because this information is absolutely necessary to the proper solution of our architectural problems. This preliminary service can be most fully rendered by someone who is aware of the particular planning problems of the University and seriously concerned with the proper development of an appropriate educational environment.

It seems that a part of the criticism to the present policy is involved in terminology and definition. The value of this study is not dependent upon what it is called but rather upon its thoroughness and completeness. Regardless of the extent of this research it should not be defined as final and complete and rule out the possibility of further study by the architect.

The cost of this preliminary work is very small in relation to the total cost of the building and should not necessitate a reduction of the architect's fee. It is my firm conviction that competent and full architectural service is one of the soundest investments that this or any institution can make, and I am certain that almost always any reduction in fee is necessarily reflected in a reduction in the amount of time, study, thought and service rendered to the university by the architect. In many offices the greatest return for the amount of time and effort expended is derived from the preliminary phase of the work. Often the expense of later phases of the work balances the profit which is realized by the first payment.

There are members of the teaching staff of this department who are qualified to conduct research and study to program future buildings. Summer teaching assignments are never such that the full staff is assigned classroom work. It is a matter of policy in the department to encourage both students and faculty to broaden their experience by engaging in professional work during the summer months. With a reasonable amount of thought given to future building needs it should be possible to arrange a schedule whereby a member of the architectural faculty would be available during the summer months to program proposed projects.

Regardless of the extent of this study it should not be considered to be a preliminary design. The architect should be allowed to develop his own design and he should not be asked to reduce his fee.

I do not see that a policy of this kind would alter in any way or lessen the contribution of any presently existing position, committee or department.

Sincerely,

John G. Williams
Chairman, Department of Architecture

JGW:jf

P.S. I am enclosing "The AIA Standards of Practice", as requested.

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

January 7, 1958

Memo to: Messrs. Jack Stephens
Fred Pickens
Paul Sullins

We have all been thinking (and doing some worrying) on the subject of architects for the University. I have certainly done my share of it. No matter how many excursions I allow my thinking on the subject to take, I come back always to an unavavoidable conclusion: that by all tests the University should use Edward Stone.

What are the tests? They come together in an indisputable fact that he consistently designs buildings that (a) meet the space and functional need, (b) with great simplicity and beauty, (c) at an economical cost. And in the process to work harmoniously and constructively to meet the client's standards.

This is what an owner hires an architect to produce.

The superior results are so clear that they constitute an adequate defense against the narrow charge that his principal offices and services are performed outside the State of Arkansas.

(We do not restrict contractors to being Arkansas firms, simply because it is demonstrable that the interest of the State is served by broadening the base of competition and ability.)

I have reason to believe that the architectural profession in Arkansas knows Edward Stone to be in a class by himself. That in itself is a persuasive factor, an effective mitigation of criticism which rests on other grounds than his competence.

Architecture is a part of everyone's life - constantly.

The University and the State gain architectural distinction with the work of Edward Stone.

Our students in architecture (as well as other students and the public) achieve a higher standard of architectural appreciation by living with his work. The entire State gains whenever its tax dollars (or student dollars) are spent on distinguished architecture which is demonstrably less expensive than undistinguished architecture.

And we will live with whatever we decide for a century at the least.

The alternative to Mr. Stone's services is obviously to choose among other local firms, none of which has the demonstrated skill of Edward Stone and none of whom can be employed with any feeling of certainty as to results. In pursuing that decision the University would either (a) select one firm and stick to it, thereby exposing itself to the constant desires and pressures of all the other firms, or (b) use a different firm for each job, thereby inviting all the difficulties, uncertainties, and varieties of taste they each would bring to the job.

If the choice is made to use Edward Stone, then the question of his "local" associations enters the picture. I am reliably informed he will reject, politely but firmly, any suggestion of an "association" with another architectural firm. His services are widely sought. He does not have to perform work for us. He does not wish to compromise the processes or results of his own work by association with another firm.

But even if he should agree to an association, the University would be less well off than under the present situation. In this situation, Mr. Stone has a brilliant young associate, Mr. Ernest Jacks, a graduate of our own Department of Architecture, a practicing Arkansas architect, in charge of his Fayetteville office. The performance of this association in executing the married apartments project was brilliant in all respects. We would be chopping off our own toes and fingers to force a change in it.

With respect to work in Little Rock, I feel confident that Mr. Stone would make arrangements superior to any we might insist upon. By "superior", I mean as to working procedures with the University, fixing responsibility, and getting results.

What I am saying, boils down to this: I would much prefer to defend our demonstrably effective and advantageous use of Edward Stone than to defend our not using him.

I would be remiss not to express clearly my own convictions on this important matter.

John T. Caldwell
President

JTC:vs

C O P Y

January 27, 1958

Mr. Jack Stephens
Stephens Investment Company
Stephens Building
Little Rock, Arkansas

Dear Mr. Stephens:

It was a pleasure to visit with you and I am honored that you wish for me to continue doing the work for the University. I take some pride in the way in which we have our office in Fayetteville organized. Ernest Jacks will remain there permanently and we will supplement our staff as circumstances warrant.

I will be glad to meet young Mr. Wittenborn^{berg} to discuss the possibility of acting in an advisory capacity on work other than that of the University. If he is coming East I can see him here; if not, I will get in touch with you when I next visit Arkansas.

Before I left Fayetteville we started sketches for your Bull Shoals project, which you will have in the near future. I can not emphasize too strongly the legislation to prevent the development from taking on a cheap, commercial character, and I hope that you can prevail upon the Governor.

Please do not hesitate to call on us for any sketches or information which will help you with this development.

With kind, personal regards.

Sincerely yours,

Edward D. Stone

EDS/c

May 10, 1960

Mr. John G. Williams, Chairman
Department of Architecture
University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, Arkansas

Dear Gilbert:

I could use two or three of your
pedigreed students after they have finished
this June -- ones who would wish to stay
here indefinitely. I will appreciate it if
you will think this over and see if they are
interested.

Ernie is in Lebanon with the belly
dancers and Frank is making pictures of our
Tulsa project which we present schematics
on this week.

I will be in Tulsa Thursday and Friday
and will call you.

Regards to you and Faye-Kay,

Sincerely,

Edward Durell Stone

EDS:bk

JOHN G. WILLIAMS FAIA architect landscape architect
140 NORTH SANG AVENUE FAYETTEVILLE, ARKANSAS 72701 (501) 442-4317

September 15, 1992

Dr. Daniel E. Ferritor
Chancellor

Mr. Gerry Bomotti
Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration
University of Arkansas

Dear Dan and Gerry:

I would like to commend the two of you and others who have worked toward improving the appearance of the campus. During the past few years I have been pleased to see increased emphasis on planting trees and shrubs in several areas of the campus and along Razorback Road and other entrances to the campus. I am also aware of efforts to protect lawns and planted areas from encroachment and damage by automobiles, campers and RV's, along with recent work to improve and reestablish protected planting areas in the stadium parking lot. I know that parking is a serious problem but to provide an adequate number of spaces on the main campus would seriously damage the visual quality of the campus. Therefore, I concur with plans to provide large parking areas off campus to be served by the U of A Transit system. I hope this good work will continue.

There is a problem, however, that could seriously and permanently damage the overall visual quality of the campus; there is serious need for more diligent efforts to maintain architectural unity on the campus. While there are recent examples of re-establishing architectural excellence such as the renovation of Old Main, there are other recent buildings in which the design seems to be an unnecessary departure both in geometry and color (an example is the Student Services Building). Certainly at this point the geometric form can't be altered, but surely the color of the "Dryvit" surface could more nearly match similar types of surfaces on surrounding buildings. I find no really convincing reasons inside the building for introducing a new angular geometry into the campus context.

*When an architectural firm is selected by the university, it should be clearly understood by the architect that each building is a part of a larger context and while each building should be carefully designed to meet its own individual requirements, it should also be designed to contribute to architectural unity of the campus. Each architect should be asked to explain how this will be accomplished from the preliminary design phase through the entire process. The design should be reviewed to assure that the building will contribute to architectural unity of the campus. Also there should be a knowledgeable university representative who insists on this and sees it through.

I know of instances in the past in which committees representing academic accrediting agencies have seriously questioned this problem of the overall quality of planning and design on campus; but I believe there is an even more important reason for the university to be concerned. I believe that a university has an obligation to teach by example as well as in the classroom, the laboratory and the design studio - that the extent to which an institution practices what it teaches can be taken as a measure of its integrity - or lack of it .

As a teacher of architecture, I would like to see the campus become a beautiful environment for teaching and learning; a well planned campus, beautifully landscaped, with well designed buildings. Coming to the university to study is the first opportunity many students have to see and experience a beautiful place. If they are denied that experience, they are being cheated and shortchanged.

Sincerely,

John G. Williams
Emeritus Professor of Architecture

copy: Daniel Bennett, Dean
School of Architecture

JOHN G. WILLIAMS FAIA architect landscape architect
140 NORTH SANG AVENUE FAYETTEVILLE, ARKANSAS 72701 (501)442-4317

June 25, 1993

Dr. Daniel E. Ferritor
Chancellor
University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, AR 72701

Dear Dan,

Last September I wrote to you and Gerry Bomotti to express my concern regarding what I considered to be a "serious need for more diligent efforts to maintain architectural unity on the campus." I met with Mr. Bomotti and later with Mr. Yanda to discuss this. I suggested that the university might establish a policy similar to that described in the third paragraph of my September 15, 1992 letter (copy attached). Perhaps because of Mr. Bomotti's decision to leave, I do not believe there was any formal follow-up.

Recently I learned that a large band practice area is being planned as an addition to the Band Building and I have been informed that red metal panels are being proposed for the exterior surfaces of this addition. In my judgement such a change in material, and any shade of red for the exterior surfaces would be a mistake. I believe that such a change in material and color, especially in this prominent location on campus, would establish an example which might make it difficult and complicated in dealing with architects for future campus buildings. This would be especially true if they should insist on designs that might be totally inappropriate for the campus. It has happened. Also, I have questions regarding the proposed parking structure that is to be a part of this building complex. How do the materials, color, or colors all tie together? I see the possibility of this becoming a difficult and complicated design problem, especially if there are limited funds.

From 1955 until about 1980 I served as Architectural Advisor to the University. In that capacity I acted as a consultant and advisor in programming proposed buildings and in reviewing design and construction drawings; developing procedures and criteria for long-range campus planning and reviewing landscape plans. In this we tried to follow a procedure somewhat like that described in my first letter. As you can see, we were not always successful but without the policy the campus would be even more random and less unified in total context. There would be quite enough variety even if the policy had been more strongly stated and more carefully followed.

The purpose of this letter is to restate what seems to me to be a serious need for a strong policy regarding architectural unity on campus. Also I hope that it might be helpful in reaching the best decision regarding the addition to the Band Building. Certainly it is not intended to offend anyone, especially those who are working seriously to improve the overall educational and visual quality of the campus.

I will be happy to meet with you and/or Mr. Yanda or anyone you might suggest regarding this.

John G. Williams
Emeritus Professor of Architecture

copies to:

Mr. Leo Yanda, Director
Physical Plant

Dean Dan Bennett
School of Architecture