

# Dean’s Newsletter 1.6

11.03.2020

Dear friends,

The diverse curricula of a university, school or college can reveal what is at the core of the institution’s educational DNA, directly reflecting the disparate areas of faculty expertise. Curricula also represent an institution’s commitment to deliver on its service to a community and a region.



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## Announcements

Nominations for the **On The Brinck Book Award** are still open. Please read more about the nomination process and jury [here](#).



We are pleased to announce that the SA+P hosted a very successful Virtual Graduate Open House. Kudos to Professors **Nora Wendl**,

A scan of the SA+P’s offerings—totaling 25 degrees, tracks, areas of focus, certificates, concentrations, and minors—reveals the many ways that students approach learning in the School’s unique location in the Southwest region: a region rich with Indigenous history and contemporary tribal life, in close proximity to the US-Mexico border and Mexico, set in an arid, desert landscape. SA+P is, without a doubt, distinctive in its curricular offerings for all these reasons.

This year our faculty has been hard at work, continuing to fine-tune the school’s offerings, but also expanding them with new career pathways for students who want to contribute to the environmental design and planning fields in other ways.

We are pleased to announce the creation of four new pathways that build upon existing SA+P faculty specializations and—in some cases—harness the skills of new faculty members. We will admit students into the following four new offerings in the Fall 2021 semester. To learn more about the admissions process, go to [Admissions](#). Students may also be interested in our existing MS in Architecture: Public Health and the Built Environment degree, led by Professor **Michaele Pride**.

## Graduate Online Certificate in Indigenous Planning

*The intent of the certificate is to provide professional development in Indigenous planning for working professionals, and to promote socially responsible practices that empower tribes to manage and take control of planning, community*

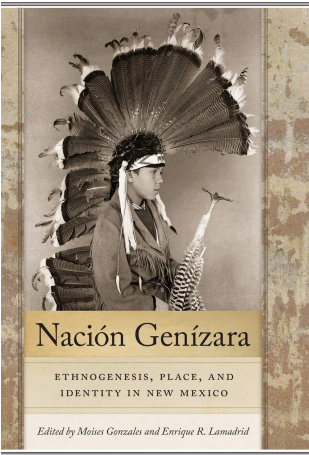
**Katya Crawford, Renia Ehrenfeucht,** and **Cesar Adrian Lopez**, who along with Graduate Advisor **Miquela Ortiz Upston** have surely excited a new generation of graduate students to join us in the coming Fall semester. Thank you to all who participated and aided in this very important effort.

Research

Visiting Associate Professor of Architecture **Jeffrey S. Nesbit** continues to host a mini-series podcast on “Nature of Enclosure” in collaboration with Actar Publishers/urbanNext. The first two episodes are now available, and feature discussions with **Lydia Kallipoliti, Antoine Picon, Jordan Bimm, Aleksandra Jaeschke** and **Fred Scharmen**. [Listen here...](#)



Profiles



Kudos to **Moises Gonzales**, Associate Professor in Community and Regional Planning, and his co-author **Enrique R. Lamadrid**, who were named Second Place Winners for their book *Nación Genízara: Ethnogenesis, Place, and Identity in New Mexico*, awarded by the 2020 International Latino Book Award for Best History Book.

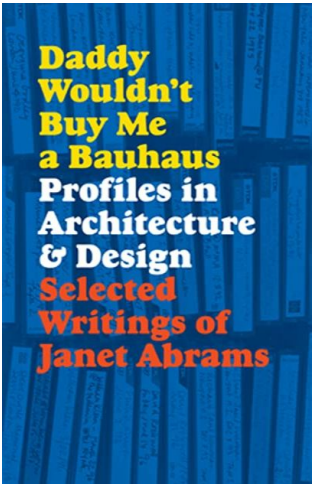
development, and related processes. *Indigenous planning is first and foremost about strategically shaping the physical and social character of Indigenous communities by informing planning and community development to improve economic and social viability, paying close attention to how cultural values can be engaged to generate and sustain places that are productive, beautiful, healthy, and safe. Indigenous peoples, or tribes, have been subjected to assimilative policies and practices for generations. Nowhere is this more evident than in the built environment. This Certificate builds on the current Indigenous Planning concentration in the MCRP degree, offered within the Community and Regional Planning department—the only Indigenous Planning concentration offered in a U.S. planning department.* (15 credits)

MS in Architecture:  
Historic Preservation + Regionalism

*How can we address the continuous threats to the diverse cultural resources of New Mexico, the Southwest region, and Latin America? The protection of historic sites depends on educating the next generation of specialists in historic preservation and heritage tourism. This area of focus allows advanced students to develop a research program that investigates how preservation can be achieved using different analytic methodologies, from GIS mapping technologies, to oral histories, archival historical data, and community participation. Students will learn how to identify, document (record), evaluate and register prehistoric and historic properties, gaining hands-on experience. They will study vernacular architecture and cultural landscapes, and learn to use emerging technologies, such as photogrammetry, 3D laser scanning, virtual reality, and augmented reality.* Area of Focus Committee: **Tim Castillo, Moises Gonzales, Francisco Uviña-Contreras** (33 credits)

MS in Architecture:  
Climate Change and the Built Environment

*How can designers and planners address climate change by conducting research in the country’s sixth-fastest warming state? Weather patterns are already being altered by climate change, and the infrastructure and resource-management plans that were appropriate for the built environments of the past will not meet the needs of the future. This area of focus allows advanced students to develop a line of research that begins to identify strategies that go beyond energy conservation, to address the full impact of increasing temperatures and shrinking water resources on construction practices. As we confront the reality of climate change, graduates will study various approaches to the built environment, including biomimetic architecture, sustainability, a building’s capacity to achieve zero net energy, and the impacts of innovative material choices—including pre-fabrication, locally sourced materials, and sustainable building techniques, such as rammed earth and adobe. Investigations into sustainable futures for the built environment may also*



Kudos to Visiting Associate Professor **Janet Abrams** for her new book *Daddy Wouldn't Buy Me a Bauhaus: Profiles in Architecture & Design, Selected Writings of Janet Abrams* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2020). This book, “collects the unparalleled writings of legendary British wordsmith Janet Abrams for the first time. From pivotal figures in international modernism to the pioneers of digital media, Abrams explores the ideas, theories, and emotions that fueled their work. The book’s twenty-six profiles—written in Abrams’s signature, personal, often hilarious style—include Reyner Banham, Berthold Lubetkin, Philip Johnson, Paul Rand, Phyllis Lambert, Frank Gehry, Rem Koolhaas, Muriel Cooper, April Greiman, and Michael Bloomberg. It brings together essays that originally appeared in publications on both sides of the Atlantic, in *Blueprint*, *I.D. Magazine*, *The Independent*, and in books and catalogs from the 1980s through the early 2000s.”

## Events

The SA+P CONTESTING Conversation Series continues with discussions about climate, design, policing the city. Register for events coming up [here...](#)

consider how climate change intersects with economic, racial, and environmental justice. Area of Focus Committee: **Gabriel Fries-Briggs, Kuppaswamy Iyengar, John Quale, Kristina Yu** (33 credits)

## MS in Architecture: Culture, Politics, and the Built Environment

*Architecture plays a critical role in the cultural and political forces that shape society, through physical interventions that permanently alter the built environment. Rarely neutral or benign, these design decisions articulate the spatial dynamics between those who hold power and those who are subject to this power. This focus area allows advanced students to interrogate the political and cultural determinants of architecture, and analyze how it has been deployed to uphold historical and disciplinary exclusions, including those of marginalized groups. Specific lines of inquiry may include: borders and boundaries, nationalism, gender and LGBTQ+ studies, global architectural practice, the politics of representation, and racial and spatial justice. Engaging all three of the School’s departments as well as other departments across campus, this focus area will confront architecture’s entanglements with politics and economics, and imagine new trajectories for critical speculation and scholarship. Students will gain a broad view of the many historical and contemporary accounts of the distribution and potential redistribution of power in the built environment.* Area of Focus Committee: **Robert Alexander González, Cesar Adrian Lopez, Nora Wendl** (33 credits)

In addition to these curricular developments, the Conversation Series at the SA+P continues to provide new insights.

We just hosted our third faculty-and-student dialogue, focusing on The American Roundtable, a new initiative sponsored by The Architectural League of New York, whose call for proposals drew 145 submissions when it was launched last year. We are proud to say that two of the ten projects that were chosen were developed by UNM faculty. Faculty member **Aaron Cayer** and his collaborator **Kerri Arsenault** reported on their findings in Maine. Former SA+P faculty member **Ane González Lara** and her collaborators, **Ted Jojola, Kathleen Kambic**, and **Saray Argumedo**, reported on their findings in New Mexico, specifically on the southern Rio Grande Valley. Architectural League project director, **Nick Anderson**, explained that this new initiative arose after the last Presidential election, when the League decided to gather on-the-ground perspectives from smaller towns and communities around the United States. The League’s initiative was supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Graham Foundation.

We also hosted the “Contesting Climate” conversation, which was supported by the George Anselevicius Memorial Lecture endowment. This event featured: **Thomas Nideroest** of Sasaki, **Sourav Biswas** of GeoAdaptive, and **Billy Fleming**,

Wilks Family Director of the Ian L. McHarg Center in the University of Pennsylvania's Weitzman School of Design. The participants addressed the following questions: What will it take to shift perspectives and design processes to achieve the goals of the Green New Deal? How do we handle the disparities of the Global North versus the Global South? Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture **Kathleen Kambic** led a discussion, asking how the concepts of autonomy and intersectionality play into the speaker's own work. The presentation also explored the role of research in designing for climate change, and the role of anticipatory design in combatting climate issues and shifting social concerns.

On November 11, Assistant Professor of Community and Regional Planning, **Jennifer Tucker**, will host a roundtable with faculty and students titled "Defund the Police," in the context of her class "Policing the City." This dialogue between researchers from Abolish APD and UNM student activists will invite us to re-imagine community safety and well-being. As Tucker explains: "amid unprecedented global uprisings against police brutality and systemic racism, the message from the streets is clear: defund the police. This demand undoes powerful cultural stories about safety and harm, exposing how the police use violence to buttress a deeply unequal social order. From the Black Panthers in Oakland to the Black Berets in Albuquerque, social movements have long organized against police brutality as part of their campaigns for justice. How can we steward our moment of collective protest and outrage into meaningful change?"

The dialogues that are consuming our attention at the SA+P this semester are directly related to our efforts to expand our curricula. But meanwhile, our faculty members are pursuing innovative work—such as **Alexander Webb's** investigations into Smart Cities and artificial intelligence, and his inter-departmental collaborations with the department of Civil Engineering, as you will read in the profile below.

**At the School of Architecture + Planning, there is a passionate, determined interest in re-framing the world, and seeing it through new lenses that challenge us all—lenses that are absolutely necessary as we enter the next chapter.**

Given today's Presidential election, there is no denying we are at a critical juncture. As an institution of design and planning, we are well-positioned to help move our country forward—both through our faculty and student design work and research, and through the new platforms for learning that will attract our future students.

My very best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'AM' or similar, written in a cursive style.

Robert Alexander González

Dean and Professor

 [@Gonzalez\\_UNM](#)

For more information about the new offerings noted above, please contact our Senior Academic Advisor for Graduate Studies, **Miquela Ortiz Upston** at [miquela@unm.edu](mailto:miquela@unm.edu).



## ***Architecture Meets Engineering, Big Data, and AI***

Cindy Graff Cohen

The marriage of artificial intelligence and architecture—or at least its close friendship—is one of many ideas driving Alexander Webb, Stamm Professor of Advanced Design and Construction Practices. If you were to only read his works—articles like “Distributed Cognition: Assessing the Structure of Urban Scale Artificial Intelligence” or “Accepting the Robotic Other: Why Real Dolls and Spambots Suggest a Near-Future Shift in Architecture's Architecture,” you may not know what to expect when you talk to him.

However, although Webb may think about morphogenesis, metadata, and mapping social media more than most people, when the young SA+P Associate Professor of Architecture explains the complexities of his work, he makes big ideas make sense. More importantly, he makes them bloom into big plans that could transform a city—and maybe a society.

**“It’s super-easy to stay in the realm of thinking about things, but that doesn’t necessarily manifest in a design,” Webb says. “What’s important is how do we take ideas and have them impact how and what we design—and how well we design.”**

A member of the UNM SA+P faculty since 2012, Webb’s teaching load includes undergraduate and graduate design studios, design visualization courses, and a core seminar in Design Thinking. Until recently he taught Computational Ecologies, a course that investigates techniques of layering big datasets as a method of analysis and representation. It is an area that has engaged him for more than a decade.



“Computational ecologies is kind of a blingy term that served us well for a while, but it is like the first step,” he emphasizes. “I moved from thinking about things in terms of relationships to thinking about what are the mechanisms that can enter into those ecologies and balance them. The next step is how do we do that in terms of design.”

### **Finding a Calling**

The son of a Boston financial advisor and a teacher, Webb enjoyed writing. He says his mother was not only a great educator, but is the best editor he has ever known. He graduated from Colorado College in 1999 with an English degree, coursework in film studies, and a passion for 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Russian literature.

His “so how did you get into architecture?” story is certainly a unique one. For his first job, Webb was living in New York City working on documentaries about engineering and architecture. “One day we ended up in Connecticut for a shoot of a glass house,” he recalls. “It belonged to this older man named Philip Johnson.” The crew was filming Sydney Pollack’s interview with Johnson—an interview that is still available on PBS online.

Webb heard them talking about an architect named Frank and it caught his attention. “I honestly knew nothing about architecture and I had no idea so I assumed it was Frank Lloyd Wright,” he adds. “But they were actually talking about Frank Gehry.” He asked some of the crew about Gehry. They told him to check out the architect’s Guggenheim Museum when he got home.

The museum visit was a pivotal experience. “Coming from New England, I thought that architecture had always been about gabled roofs and doodads around windows and things I wasn’t interested in,” he says. “Seeing Gehry’s work was eye-opening about the creative possibilities.”

Soon after he took an architecture course at Columbia University and began applying to architecture graduate programs. He earned his Master of Architecture degree from the Southern California Institute of Architecture in 2006, completing his thesis on computational design.

Further studies took him to The Berlage Institute in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, an international, interdisciplinary post-graduate architecture school featuring prominent architects as guest lecturers. The school’s collaborative approach and focus on data-driven design led him to think more deeply about the Smart City movement and urban-scale artificial intelligence.

While taking the tests to become a registered architect, he worked as a designer and a project architect for firms like Gensler, Marmol + Radziner and Taalman Koch until he joined the UNM faculty.

After about a year of teaching at UNM, he felt like he was hitting a ceiling in terms of what he was teaching students. He

went to Dean Geraldine Forbes to talk about it. She said “Want some career advice? Get a doctorate!”

He enrolled at the European Graduate School for Digital Design, an option that allowed him to be in a residency Ph.D. program without taking a leave of absence. Located in the “Pearl of the Swiss Alps,” the school drew students from the United States and around the world.

“You have eight hours of lecture for 21 days,” he says. “My instructors read like a Who’s Who in digital design. My brain actually felt different after every session.”

His almost-finished dissertation suggests different ways of thinking about the role of computation and artificial intelligence on an urban scale. A primary area of focus: Smart Cities. “The most common kind of Smart City is data-driven,” he says. “The system collects information about users’ behavior and interactions. The idea is that it can eventually understand user behavior so that resources can be tuned for them. So, if someone starts heading home, the air conditioning or the heating comes on and the house will be ready when they get there.”

The concept doesn’t quite work yet—at least not in the U.S. A Smart City outside Seoul and another near Abu Dhabi are far ahead of efforts here.

“In the U.S. we don’t have the economic or political forces to be able to create cities from scratch,” he emphasizes. “Most are retrofit, with the most prominent program underway in Chicago. So far, their array of things includes hundreds of sensors throughout the city that track pedestrian movement, sound and light levels, and more.”

“The idea is if we collect all the information, we’ll know what to do with it,” he says. “The problem is that it is so much information that we really don’t know. Smart cities have been around about 20 years, and we haven’t been able to make sense of all that information yet.” In exploring different approaches to using that information, his dissertation leverages AI, sociology, computer science, cognitive science —“all different models that have solved different problems,” he says.

## **Architecture and Engineering**

As SA+P’s Associate Professor of Emergent Technology and Committee Chair of the Computational Ecologies track for the Masters of Science degree, Alex Webb stays on the cutting edge. He has been certified for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), an international “green” building standards program for sustainable and environmentally sound design, construction, and operations.

Webb took on a new challenge when he became UNM’s first co-recipient of the The Robert J. Stamm Professorship in Advanced Design and Construction Practices, an honor



**Mark Stone**, Associate Professor in the Department of Civil, Construction, and Environmental Engineering, and Director of the UNM Resilience Institute, has also been named The Robert J. Stamm Professorship in Advanced Design and Construction Practices in his department. His research and teaching programs are focused on community resilience and sustainable development, especially in the areas of water resources and the environment.

shared with Associate Professor Mark Stone in the Department of Civil, Construction and Environmental Engineering. Named after Robert Stamm, founding partner of Bradbury and Stamm Construction, the state’s largest construction company, the program brings a landmark opportunity for both Architecture and Engineering.

“Bob graduated from the engineering department and he loved UNM,” says Laurie Roche, SA+P development officer. “He was referred to as ‘Mr. Lobo’ and he left a generous estate gift to the University.”

The new program’s goal: bring architects and engineers together to collectively teach about design as it pertains to both professions. Stamm envisioned more in-house architects designing and building alongside engineers and construction professionals in specialized design-build firms—still a rarity in the construction world. “His family wanted his legacy to help ensure that this type of collaboration would be supported,” adds Roche.

Although his own work has been gratifying, Webb has been especially proud of his students’ successes. In the two elective studios he has taught, 40 percent of his students entered competitions and received awards. He promotes student collaboration and likes that some of those awards went to teams of students.

**“Being an educator has absolutely made me a better person. It’s taught me to listen, to have patience, and to truly value other perspectives in a way that no other experience has,” he says.**

“Aside from being married (Amber is the director of New Mexico Film Office) and having two children, I am most proud in my life of being able to serve as an educator for the students at the University of New Mexico.”

Associate Professor Alex Webb can be reached at [awebb4@unm.edu](mailto:awebb4@unm.edu)

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**Feature:** Mark Childs / Fall 2020 Welcome / New Faculty

[Dean's Newsletter 1.2](#)

**Feature:** Michael Pride / New SA+P Org Chart / MakerLab / You Have My Ear / Associate Chairs & Special Asst's to the Dean

[Dean's Newsletter 1.3](#)

**Feature:** Ted Jojola / Land Acknowledgement / Jeff Harnar Award Student Competition / New Alumni Liaison / VAP Jeffrey S. Nesbit



[Dean's Newsletter 1.4](#)

**Feature:** Anne Taylor / On The Brinck Book Award / Asst. Prof. Cesar Lopez

[Dean's Newsletter 1.5](#)

**Feature:** SA+P Recruitment + Advocacy / Contesting Conversation Series /  
Student Experience Project



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