3.2 Program Self-Assessment
3.2 Program Self-Assessment Procedures

Prelude

As the New School of Architecture at Polytechnic University celebrates its thirteenth year, change seems unavoidable. The very claim of novelty implied in the School's original name has been incorporated into the student's work; the nickname ARQPOLI or just “Poli” – as the program is now most often referred to – has co-opted the name of the University. This casual change of nomenclature is a reflection of how much the program is now rooted in its campus, to the point of appropriating its very name. This year, for the first time, the architecture program became the third largest in the University, attracting students from all over the country, from both private and public schools.

Concern towards the School's positioning, first as an alternative for educating architects in the country, and later as the largest program in Puerto Rico, ignited a healthy competitive environment. Comparisons were inevitable, but they were also welcome. Self-criticism contributed to the School's progress and continues to do so. This quality originally moved the School to confront the state of architectural pedagogy, the eroded building environment, the profession's shortcomings on social responsibility, and even the internalized elitism of architecture schools' “natural selection” processes. The desire to design the “perfect” curriculum, reflective of both past and future, is the tangible result of those early struggles. Adjustments were done sporadically as a result of collective monitoring of the students' progress and achievements. This process involved both full-time and part-time faculty, visiting lecturers, the Dean's office and the students themselves. How to question something that has been perceived as good while reconciling the need for change with the need for institutionalization describes the tone of the School's present process of self-assessment. The early compulsive urge to be different from and better than has evolved to our present need to address the School's own successes and challenges. In this sense, the School's early bet on producing critical minds for architectural practice, emphasizing research in design, proved to be of great relevance to the constant processes of evaluation and self-assessment.

The concept of self-assessment is in itself a reflection of changes in both academia and the corporate world that took place as it became obvious that collectivized enterprises obtained better results than individual, competitive, centralized modes of operation. To include and be inclusive is not just a phrase for political correctness or a moral imperative, but an effective way of managing progress and possibility. If the former strategic plan culture received criticism for not being flexible enough to adapt to today's ever-changing societies, the self-assessment alternative can only lead to results if it is customized to the needs and size of the institutional body it has to serve. Self-assessment should not be submitted to positivist premises where scientific proof ends up being an elusive representation rather than the concrete, doubtless truth it was intended to be. The
temptation to embrace the oppositional model of thought based on “pathology” and “cure” must be resisted at all times; circumstances are always more intricate in nature than any reductive tendencies.

Open eyes, minds, and dialogue are prerequisites for self-assessment. They must be embedded in the institutional culture. Networks of inclusive decision making processes have to be in place so as to promote an order in which a balance between the precise and rigid, the casual and fluid, is reached.

Narratives of North-South disparities that attempted to explain cultural difference and its relation to geography have created polarized visions of order. Northern European cultures are often portrayed as plan-oriented, strategically organized and structured, through explanations ranging from religious affiliation to weather patterns. In contrast, the European South – like many other southern places – is stigmatized by the improvisational ‘free spirit’ label or a presumed incapacity for collective organization. Puerto Rico, like the rest of the Caribbean countries – and Latin America, to some degree – expresses a prejudice toward its own cultural particularities; brought about as the result of implicit backward mentalities in relation to the superior North American giant. Newer generations resent this self-deprecating mental construction, and often look at cultural differences from a less ideological perspective. In their worldview, order is not understood as permanent, but as the subject of infinite orientations and configurations. It is essential for them to acknowledge virtue in the casualness that is part of Puerto Rican culture. In addition, these younger Puerto Ricans mostly reject the cultural enclosure that limits space for social evolution to what has been solely represented as an ideal vacation spot.

The Caribbean cannot be defined as a rigid, homogenous culture. Change is a fact of Caribbean life; sun can turn into rain – or a violent hurricane – in just seconds; moist tropical forests in the north have arid counterparts in the south; European immigrants' imagination of western hegemony is confronted by African myths and cosmological representations. A comprehensive understanding of Puerto Rico has to take into account this array of contradictions and conflicting values; embracing the visible and the invisible should be an aspiration. Self-assessment could be implanted rigorously in the School, even institutionalized, but it is in the acknowledgement of fractures, un-evenness and inconsistencies where its true value resides. Perfection should not be the goal. Accidents are essential and should be valued. At the end of the day, architects offer the most articulated testimony of how accidents can improve what was believed to be perfect in plan.
Process Description

There are self-assessment mechanisms used on a regular basis, while others are called upon in an as-needed basis. New situations call for new strategies of evaluation, critique, and proactive courses of action. Since the beginning of the School, both full-time and part-time faculty have worked together on assessment. The curriculum itself evolved out of regular interaction between the Dean's office and the faculty in general meetings, while course sequences, or units, evolved out of smaller meetings. Every trimester there are at least two general meetings and several unit meetings where course content and exercises are debated and decided upon by consensus. In the last two years, particular attention has been given to the standardization of the type and sequence of exercises given in studio classes, with the intention of providing students with a sense of belonging to a larger context, thus injecting energy and a renovated spirit to the courses.

The reorganization of the Dean’s office has included a more efficient division of tasks and responsibilities for facing the challenges of a bigger program. As a result, a faculty committee structure has been put in place. Some of theses committees have student representation, although student participation in the entire school is guaranteed in a parallel system of assessment. Student participation has increased during the last three years. The three student organizations, OPEA, CLEA, and AIA, have become an important assessment resource. They have celebrated general assemblies to discuss issues that include the School's physical facilities, specific suggestions on subject matters, course content, lecturers, and pedagogy. Every trimester the Dean’s office sponsors a student focus group where accomplishments and concerns are openly voiced with the Dean and Associate Dean acting as moderators. Equally useful are the alumni focus groups that started this year as a result of having passed the 100 student mark during last year's graduation. The Dean assesses the faculty’s performance annually. At the end of every year, each professor meets with the dean to discuss performance, student evaluations, previous or new fields of interest and how the School can contribute to their academic and professional development.

Juries are a very public affair at the School. Professors have the opportunity to evaluate their students' work along with invited critics in what is still the best forum for taking the pulse of the School. Discussions, in formal and informal settings, follow the juries. Other courses are adopting this format, including the units of theory/history, representation, technology and even Mid-Career Research.

An annual school assessment report is submitted to the President’s office. The document reviews key indicators of success, showcases present challenges and delineates a plan for the next year. Aspects of this document become the basis for the yearly budget report.

An external advisory committee assists the School on issues of management,
fund-raising, public relations and community outreach. At least four annual meetings with this group are expected; their focus on administrative concerns complements the academic assessment.

**Description of each Self-Assessment Vehicle**

**1. Faculty/Administration Meetings**

Most of the planning involved in coursework, research themes, and pedagogical strategies takes place at Faculty and Administration meetings. These meetings are the core of the self-assessment process, where results are shared and discussed. Both formal and informal meetings are relevant to this process, and while some are scheduled in advance, others happen spontaneously. There is a *Beginning of Academic Year Meeting* where the agendas of different units and work groups are shared with all faculty members; problems are brought for general consideration and recommendations arise from open discussion. *Course Coordination Meetings* occur in smaller groups, and are mostly related to specific design years or units, academic subjects, particular task forces and/or special workshops involving professors teaching different course levels. At the *End of Academic Year Meetings*, the School’s outcome is assessed and discussed; decisions for the following year are usually based on these dialogues. Although there are no minutes for these meetings, an assigned member of the staff takes notes on key issues. *Capstone Project Evaluation Meetings* are where each jury member deliberates on fifth-year students’ performance and grades. These meetings are also an opportunity for self-assessing the School’s development, since professors and visitors look at current projects in relation to previous capstone experiences. Trends, new subject matters, and perceived strengths and deficiencies are analyzed by the jury during these work sessions. Recommendations are given to the professor of each section and are later discussed during faculty meetings. *Administration and Committee Meetings* assess the School in every area and component. Preliminary results are evaluated in relation to short and long term agendas, which are then adjusted accordingly. *Dean’s Faculty Assessment Meetings* are scheduled for each faculty member at the end of every academic year. At these meetings, student evaluations are shared with professors. A discussion of how the School is contributing to each professor’s development is also part of these meetings. This dialogue leads to a plan for the new academic year for each professor, emphasizing their particular areas of interest. Strengths and challenges are documented and become the basis for comparison in future meetings. (See Appendix I, *Faculty Annual Report Form*, and Appendix II, *Students’ Faculty and Course Evaluation Form – Architecture*).
2. School Committees

Previous attempts to create a series of committees have been unsuccessful. Now, a larger faculty and staff provide a better environment for a more horizontal decision-making process involving a dynamic committee structure. The proposed committees are goal-oriented, a quality that will facilitate their implementation and supervision. Nine committees or work groups were appointed last winter. Each of them responds to the School’s needs and development plans. One leader per group is selected by each committee, and they all report to the Dean’s office. A definition of each committee’s scope of work is explained below:

a. **Strategic Planning:** This committee assists the Dean in reviewing the School’s short- and long-term plans. Strengths and challenges that have become the basis for this APR’s assessment have arisen from the Dean’s meetings with this group of full-time and part-time faculty.

b. **Curriculum:** Evaluation of the existing curriculum – including ongoing adjustments to course content and sequence – is the most important task of this group. It also discusses new academic offerings, evaluates faculty proposals for new courses and makes suggestions on subject matters, exercises and special workshops.

c. **Personnel:** The committee has the delicate task of comparing differences in salaries that occur at various University departments. This investigation is based on a perception that professors are currently being underpaid, an opinion that is shared by the Dean’s office but as of yet has no empirical evidence. A report on this matter is currently being prepared by the committee. Also, as the institution develops a new process of evaluation for faculty promotion, the committee will look at a specially designed evaluation protocol for the School, which will reflect the peculiarities of both the discipline and the practice of architecture.

d. **Finance:** This group assists the Director of Academic Affairs with the yearly budget, which is prepared by the Dean. Although the final budget needs the Dean’s approval before submission to the Vice-President of Finance, this committee advises the Dean on budget strategies and money allocation.

e. **Extracurricular activities:** A committee has been created to assist the Director of Public Relations with the coordination of School activities – a task that is becoming more complex due to a very diverse calendar of events and a larger audience of both students and visitors. Committee members also help define the scope of events, themes and calendar.

f. **Physical facilities:** Once we realized the need to expand the School’s facility and redefine the arrangement of the studios, a committee was created to assist the Dean’s office in defining a program and evaluating design proposals. Their scope of work also includes evaluating the effect of new representation technologies on studio layout and students’ socialization patterns.

g. **Student Affairs/Studio Culture:** The immediate task of formalizing a Studio
Culture document led to the creation of this committee, which also oversees the student’s general well-being. A student representative is part of this work group.

h. Dissemination: Given the School’s increasing media attention and recognition beyond the architecture community, a committee has been created to design strategic ways for dissemination of both faculty and student work.

i. Information Resources: This committee came about as a result of the Media Lab’s recent creation. It supervises the development of the School’s web page and publication unit. It will also oversee the integration of visual resources from a former slide library, the Library’s image database, and the general collection as well as their access. The recommendations of this committee will help program the School’s expansion with a sound assessment of current technological deficiencies and challenges.

3. Juries:

Design juries are much more than a forum for a one-way evaluation of student work. They are also a space of constant assessment – not just of design courses, but of the entire School – because within them, knowledge from different courses becomes something more than the sum of its parts. Changes and fluctuations in the School are first noticed in juries, and since the one-way conversation is challenged by a multilayered dialogue, they become spaces of reflection and introspection. Because it is an effective pedagogical tool, the jury format is being adopted in courses outside the design course sequence, including the History/Theory/Research and the Technology sequences. Juries at the School have attracted visiting critics from many fields and disciplines, including practitioners, engineering professors, art historians, sociologists, real estate experts, planners, and even “real clients”. This has resulted in a valuable assessment of both work and methodologies from an external perspective. For the faculty, juries are a way of exchanging notes and letting the students see the collaborative nature of the architectural practice and its subjective dimension. The School is at its very best during the weeks where most juries are taking place at the same time; the intellectual intensity of these days is the best method of assessment.

4. Student Course Evaluation:

The institution has a formal course evaluation form that is distributed to students at the end of every trimester. Parts of the form are measured by statistical tools that produce a mathematical evaluation index (see Appendix II, Student Evaluation of Faculty and Course Form – ARCH). There is a subjective section where students write their comments on course and professor performance. The results are compared to those from previous years and are used as base material for the individual assessment meetings with every professor, which take place at the end of the academic year. It is important to point out that the results of student course
evaluation are compared with the outcome of all other forms of course assessment. Individual meetings with students work as a counterbalance to the group evaluation. Sometimes an informal conversation with a student and/or professor might work as a better diagnostic tool than the general opinion of a group. In any case, both the individual and collective voices must be heard and documented.

5. **Student Focus Groups:**

Twice a year, starting last May, the Dean and the Associate Dean meet with a group of students that represent a cross-section of the School’s composition. Lunch is served for everybody, doors are closed, and conversation begins. The themes for the session include questions such as: “What are the things you like the most from the School? What do you dislike? What would you change? What would you add? Why?” The objectives are twofold. First, the Dean gets the chance to receive direct comments from the students and reflect on the outcome. Students also have the opportunity to actively participate and lead in a process where they are usually the ones under scrutiny. Second, students have the opportunity to dream and organize their imagination: Their future is open to their own suggestions. A debate is started during the focus group; the Dean and the Associate Dean listen. Differences arise, consensus is not always possible, suggestions are brought to the table on time for dessert, and the occasional joke breaks the ice. Issues are seen as part of a bigger picture, students confront the challenges of leadership, and the Dean receives some of the best ideas for the future. Positive reinforcement of current policies occurs; open criticism of things that should have been done better is encouraged. Students’ comments are taken into account in planning for the following year. Some recommendations do not have to wait as long to be implemented; they happen immediately. Focus groups become something else in the context of a school. They help humanize the administrative aspects of architectural education, and more importantly, they show students how big a part they are of the important changes that are happening at the School.

6. **Student Organizations:**

Last year, student organizations were actively involved in the School’s self-assessment process. In May, a student assembly was organized by the three student organizations, AIA, OPEA, and CLEA. Issues of studio culture, physical facilities and school management, among others, were openly discussed. The Dean, his staff and three faculty members were invited to the assembly and were able to respond to student concerns. The event was a model on civilized dialogue and student leadership. The results were presented in a letter submitted by the students to the President after discussing its contents with the Dean and his staff. The School endorses the students’ position regarding the lack of space in studio areas, among other important issues, and is taking their recommendations into account as part of the School’s expansion. Student organization leaders
periodically meet with the Dean and have been very effective in articulating student needs and concerns. In order to fully benefit from the student organizations’ insights, and to help them develop leadership skills, a proctor has been assigned by the Dean as a liaison between his office and the student organizations.

7. Yearly Dean Office Report:

This document is submitted to the President as the basis for an annual presentation to the Board of Trustees. It summarizes the School’s annual plan in relation to the previous year, describing its goals, special events and/or projects as well as the challenges that require institutional support. The document, which contains contributions from both faculty and staff, is also used to prepare the School’s annual budget.

8. School Digital Archives:

With the Media Lab, the School creates more efficient ways to document and archive student work for future study and analysis. In upcoming assessments, it will be possible to compare current projects and research papers with previous ones, allowing for a more empirical basis of analysis.

9. School of Architecture Advisory Group:

This group works as an independent assessment entity concerned with issues of administration, creative funding and partnering opportunities. The group meets with the Dean four times a year, although individual members are available all year long for advice on their particular fields of expertise. In these meetings, the dean presents a progress report where current and future plans are described for feedback on relevance and viability. The composition of this group is not based on their capacity to influence academic content, but on their ability to offer sound strategic advice on growth and management. A list of Advisory Group members and their areas of expertise is presented below:

- Adolfo González, Developer and President of Desarrollos Urbanos; former president of the Home Builders Association of Puerto Rico.
- Arq. Luis Flores, former president of the Colegio de Arquitectos de Puerto Rico and experienced architect.
- Vivian López Llamas, Vice-President of Communications, Triple S; a local health insurance company.
- Ivelisse Rivera, Director of Public Relations for Goya, Inc., the multinational food company.
- Carla Haeussler, Local entrepreneur and President of Carla’s Sweets, a local pastries brand.
- Sylvia Soler, Creative Director of Young & Rubicam of Puerto Rico.
- Ana Matilde Bonilla, Chief Financial Officer of El Nuevo Día, Inc.; local newspaper with the largest circulation.
- Enery Rivera, Local entrepreneur and Vice-President of Empresas Rivera Siaca; a real estate and development firm.
- Lic. Luis Terrassa, Local entrepreneur and Vice-President of Empresas Terrasas; a Puerto Rican cement production company

10. Publications: ‘100 preguntas que nos hemos hecho sobre Puerto Rico’ (‘100 Questions We Have Made to Ourselves about Puerto Rico’), a 2005 anthology of student work; the School’s journal, ‘Polimorfos’; and other upcoming publications

Although publications are not a direct way of self-assessing the School, they contribute to disseminate the projects and intellectual work outside the institution. The discussions and feedback they generate provide valuable critical insight.

11. Visiting Critics and Lecture Series:

The constant presence of visiting critics, lecturers and seminar panelists exposes the School to multiple points of view. While their presentations are not always related to the School itself, just being able to listen to their perspective promotes a fertile ground for self-criticism and assessment. A list of visiting critics, lecturers and panelists in the last six years is included as Appendix III.

12. Alumni Focus Group:

For the first time since the School started, part of its alumni base met to assess the program. More than 100 students have graduated from the School, hence the time seemed perfect for gathering their feedback. The results will be discussed further ahead. Alumni are part of the School’s future as they have been part of its past. Some of them teach at the School, others are pursuing or have already obtained their master’s degree. Many of them come to the annual June celebration that the School organizes to greet the new architects that have graduated. The recently graduated student’s career development, inside and outside Puerto Rico, is closely monitored by the School as it is representative of thirteen years of academic efforts. Sample Alumni Profiles are included as Appendix IV.

13. University Learning Goals Outcomes Assessment:

The institution has distributed two self-assessment documents, one for professors and one for students. The objective behind these documents is to help professors establish the goals they would like to achieve for each course and help identify the appropriate assessment tool. As a long-term instrument, these documents provide a basis for comparing previous results, leading to periodic updates; goals may be revised or adjusted in the classroom as a result of disparities seen from year to year. These assessment forms are included in Appendix V, Rating of Learning Goals by Students Form and Appendix VI, Rating of Learning Goals by Professors Form.
14. University Academic Council:

It is the main forum in which faculty, administration and students engage in the creation, development and revision of Study Programs. Through the Council, professors, students, and administrative personnel work closely in the development of academic norms and the study conditions within the institution. Members Ex-Officio of the Council are the President of the University; the Vice-Presidents of Academic Affairs and Enrollment Management; the two Florida Campus provosts; the Deans of Engineering and Geomatic Sciences, Architecture, Management, Graduate School, Arts and Sciences and Academic Support; and the President’s Counselor of Planning and Development. There is also one elected full-time professor for each of the fourteen units and/or programs, and two elected students, one representing the undergraduate program and one representing the graduate school. There are five committees in the Academic Council: Faculty Affairs and Policy, Students Affairs, Curriculum, Honorific Academic Distinctions and Special Affairs. The Council meets at least two times per trimester.

General Conclusions of Student Organizations, Strategic Planning Committee and Alumni

A consensus exists among all self-assessment units that there are three areas of concern: congested school facilities, substandard faculty compensation, and insufficient interaction with other university departments and programs. Another area of concern is the need for a better integration of virtual representation technologies into studio work. New equipment for three dimensional modeling using virtual and material output technologies is needed, as well as the workshop space to accommodate it.

In recent years, as the School experienced a radical growth and transformation, the budget did not reflect the increased enrollment and the financial demands of newer technological paradigms that ask for up-to-date equipment and software. The current formula of tuition and institutional budget needs to be revised, while simultaneously looking for alternative sources of income that would improve the program’s financial health. The School’s ambitious program of publications, lecture series, exhibitions, think-tank research and collaborations with community-based initiative requires institutional support. The School’s faculty, with their enthusiasm and eagerness to widen their scope of research and creative activities beyond the classroom, deserve that support.

Plans for the School’s expansion are currently being developed, but no clear calendar has been set for its completion. The School is very much in need of these space improvements if it wants to maintain its academic excellence. With a diverse student body and faculty, multidisciplinary approaches, innovative curriculum, community and professional support, competitive design work and research, and consistent enrollment growth, the pressure for better physical
facilities is very strong.

On the other hand, there has been a consensus on the quality of the faculty and the positive effects of having professors from diverse backgrounds working in the same academic space. The consistent excellence of the lecture series, the study abroad programs (New York, Buenos Aires, and Barcelona), and the adventurous, experimental quality of student work are three of the most celebrated aspects of the School. The main objective of promoting a critical understanding of architecture beyond its material and technical challenges, but fully aware of social change and emerging subjectivities, continues to be the soul of the School and the source of a shared sense of purpose among faculty and students. Beyond the desire to obtain a degree, a sense of mission runs very deep among students, causing the School to stand out. Perhaps this is something that eludes self-assessment, but as a shared sentiment it becomes very real and even measurable. (See Appendix XXVI, Alumni Assessment Survey).

For a place that is experiencing an economic recession, of both psychological and structural dimensions, to keep the passion for design and its possibilities is a moral imperative. The pessimistic environment that is affecting the construction industry and the architectural profession is pushing architectural education into two very distinct directions. On the one hand, there is an interest in economics and how it affects architecture beyond a sustainability rubric that represents only a fraction of major global economic issues. On the other, the speculative, theoretical aspects of the discipline, and its imbrications with other fields, acquire a renewed relevance as they open new territories for architecture beyond its traditional framework of action. Both directions emphasize the reevaluation of current practices and an urgency for new forms of knowledge. They also raise questions regarding the forms of knowledge that are pertinent and the very notion of education as information exchange.

The pressure to eliminate certain forms of knowledge in architectural education, and even the radical tendencies to embrace the obsolescence bandwagon, are globally affecting the assessment processes, sometimes in ways that seem neurotic toward the future rather than reflective. The commodification of architecture and architectural education, and the race for newness that such processes impose do not promote the best intellectual environment for a reevaluation of architectural pedagogy. The now standard claims of deterministic logics that promote change for its own sake – while hyperbolizing it in spite of obvious historical continuities – are polarizing architectural discourse. Planned obsolescence, the true logic behind the post-Fordist cultural model, is disrupting architectural discourse, which seems more than ever incapable of resisting the market forces that it should be analyzing instead.

The search for an antiseptic “exteriority” in architectural discourse, or a neutral, protected niche, seems no longer possible. The uncritical embracing of hype and marketing as rectors of architectural education is a dangerous path. Under such
premises, *History* could suddenly be considered irrelevant when so much weight is given to present challenges and a not-so-bright future. *Technology* would then face the risk of being misunderstood as the sole realm of hyper-experimentation with the unprecedented, or as a hypothetical bottom-line of innovation and progress, while simple, even banal, technological paradigms and the current need for innovative use of what is already available remain unaddressed. *Composition* would also be discarded, in favor of computer software that promises to produce a virtual object without the “linear logic” of traditional architectural representation, thus endangering the relevance of geometry and even sketching. To uncritically embrace the displacement of what used to be standard in architectural education, responding to an abstract sense of obsolescence or a mediatized environmental crisis that puts pressure on fast decisions and iminent actions, could turn out to be the most destructive force in architectural education today. Consequently, the School is acting responsibly by questioning the critical aspects of what is consistently represented in the architectural media as an imminent transformation of current professional practice that will inevitably seep into architectural education. The future of the School is perhaps embedded in the outcome of this conceptual but also very pragmatic skepticism toward the current rhetoric of change.

### The Future

The institution has shown interest in establishing a four-year program in interior design, sharing some of the faculty and physical resources of the School. Space constraints are the first obstacle that needs to be addressed if this plan persists. However, there is a perceived advantage in creating such a program, in the sense that it could open an option for students who have a vocation for design but are not interested in the complexities of architecture as a profession. It is also attractive for the School to look at the critical possibilities of interior design, a field that has been frequently neglected by the architectural community in the country. To bring the critical standing of the School of Architecture into a program in interior design, including the strong emphasis on theory and research as design tools is a logical extension of the School’s previous successes. Something similar occurred with the landscape architecture program, which grew out of the School’s interest on the subject and exists now as a separate entity.

The prominence of environmental concerns in the media is fostering collaborative efforts between allied disciplines. This is an opportunity for the School to join efforts with the engineering schools on a common objective. A first initiative has already been identified: the retrofitting of an existing university property into a guest house using sustainable principles. Another instance for collaboration between schools is the connection of the *Media Lab* to a high-performance computer cluster that belongs to the Electrical Engineering Department. It is the School’s goal to develop more projects for students and faculty from architecture and engineering to work together in a collaborative matter.
The current interest that the School is generating from both local and foreign programs and institutions is a tendency that should result in more exchanges of students and professors and joint efforts such as publications, exhibitions and workshops. So far, there are several initiatives scheduled for this year that reflect this trend: a publication with the Instituto of Arquitectura Avanzada de Catalunya (IAAC) documenting an urban analysis workshop of Tunisia; a design workshop with a faculty member of IAAC this fall; a creative workshop with photographer Daniel Mordinsky, co-hosted with the Salón del Libro Hispanoamericano; a University of Pennsylvania collaboration with the School's Conservation lab research project on the early uses of reinforced concrete in Puerto Rico; the 2009 lecture series that is being curated by renowned writer Mayra Santos, director of the Salón del Libro Hispanoamericano; and a design charrette co-hosted with the Colegio de Arquitectos de Puerto Rico.

The future of a school that has invested so much in design as research (and in a critical revaluation of architectural practice) cannot be reduced to physical expansion, more equipment, and funding. At the core of the School's successes lies a continuous examination of cultural affairs and their implications on architecture. If there is something to which the School remains loyal, it is the constant revision of its areas of interest, colonizing new fields of research and attracting professionals and intellectuals from other disciplines. The architect is a cultural critic as well as the technician it has always been. The School refuses to sacrifice any of these subjectivities, in spite of pressures that would like to concentrate the architect's scope of work within the realm of the firm. The deliberate contamination of architectural education with the rubrics and preoccupations of many other fields is a part of the School's present that will be projected into its future. There is no need to align the program to the sole interest of developers and the construction industry if that implies detachment from the social sciences, cultural criticism, the liberal arts, or the most experimental aspects of technology. The School contributes to the country by constantly renovating its critical edge and maintaining links with the peripheries of architectural discourse.

If something should be expected from the School's future, it is a better recording of those special instances where progress has occurred, whether it is a capstone project, a journal, a book, a research paper, or an exhibition. The creation of the Media Lab, with its capacity for information storage, should improve the School's documentation of its past as to facilitate an informed scrutiny of its present challenges.