# IMPROVING PUBLIC AWARENESS
# OF THE ARCHITECT

## (FINAL SUBMISSION)

COURSE:        MANAGEMENT SEQUENCE

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The issue of public awareness relative to an Architect remains largely untouched throughout Canada. This issue extends through the Architect to include the value of Architectural Design and activities/role of the Architect as both a practitioner and member of the community at large.

Individual provincial associations have created public awareness and interaction campaigns, with some activities occurring on a national scale.

The idea of improving public awareness relative to the profession and its members has been largely left undeveloped in any consistent, sustained manner.

**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The terms of reference relative to this report were derived from the original course outline and independent on-line research.

The overall scope of information was derived from association publications including the Bylaws of the Saskatchewan Association of Architects.

The scope of this report includes first-hand experience of the author relative to public education activities and presentations made for the purpose of promoting the architectural field.

This report reviewed activities of associations within Canadian jurisdictions for their activities relative to public education and awareness programs.

**REPORT METHODOLOGY**

The methodology applied in completing this report included:

- on-line research relative to public awareness/education programs;

- personal reviews and experience of the author relative to activities of practitioners within the Province of Saskatchewan; and

- background information compiled as data for the Thesis stage, recently completed by the author.

The report is presented in a format covering national activities, provincial programs, and independent programs.  The information provided relative to the independent programs relates specifically to activities occurring in Regina, Saskatchewan.
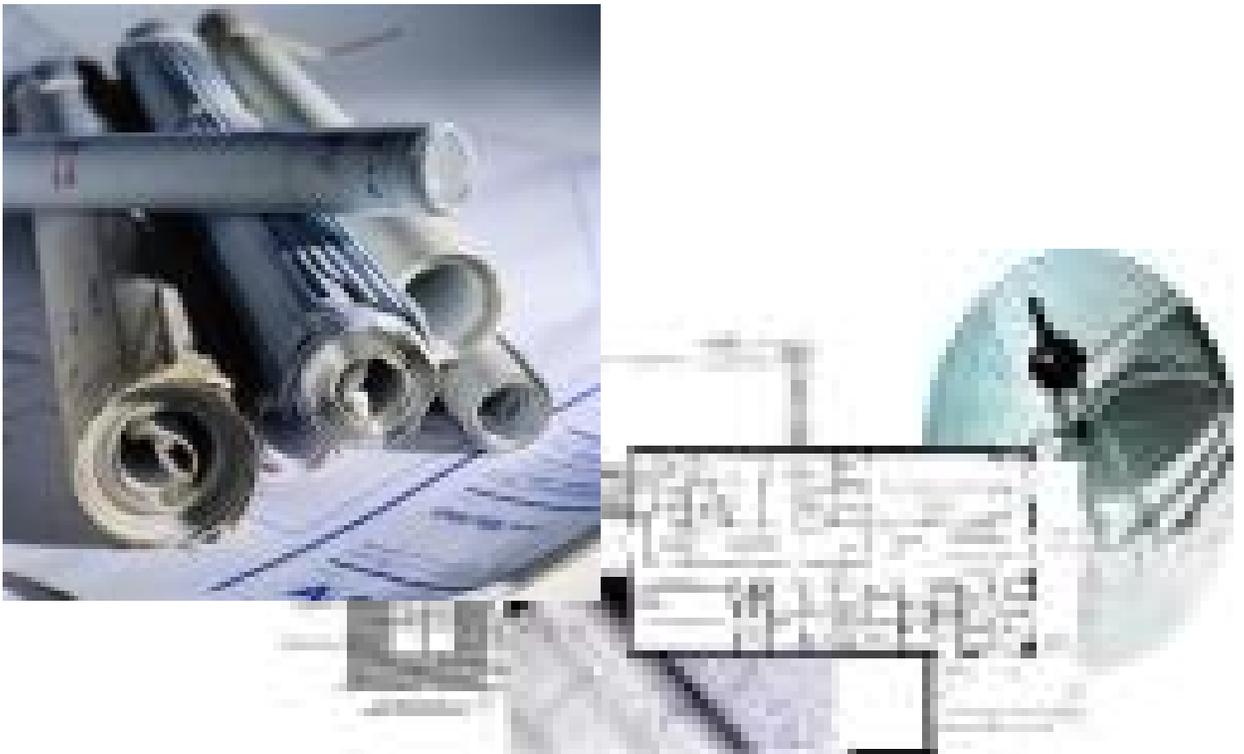
**INTRODUCTION**

"ARCHITECTS MAKE BLUEPRINTS"

This statement outlines the basic misconception of the architectural profession within the general population. The image of the Architect, roll of prints in hand, is the common ideology present.  This image, however, hardly portrays the nature of Architecture and the role of the Architect in society.

Public awareness of the individual and the profession is a difficult task to undertake. The primary means by which persons gain a better understanding of the profession is through direct involvement on projects or planning committees.  The unfortunate fact is that only a small number of the general public ever has this opportunity.

Several programs have been initiated and successfully engaged to address the public perception.  These programs are difficult to sustain over the long term due to changes in personnel from both sides of the participant team (the public and architectural sides).

The question exists as to how provincial associates and individuals can address the public perception issue.  A matter of advocacy and responsibility to promote the profession remains to be determined as to who or which association (provincial or national) should lead the efforts.

The opportunities completed, successful efforts and long-range initiatives related to perception and advocacy are discussed within this report.

**REPORT TEXT:**     **THE PUBLIC AWARENESS CONTEXT**

The concern of public perception relative to Architects and their role is a long-standing issue. The reality is that the public rarely has the opportunity to interact and participate with Architects completing their daily duties. Even individuals involved in the development industry often carry misconceptions with regard to Architects and their role. Ross Keith, a local developer in Regina, participated in a design charrette hosted by Architects relating to the City Core. At the conclusion of the charrette, Mr. Keith stood to admit, "In all my years of work, I never knew Architects thought about and dealt with the range of design issues we have discussed." This confession comes from a person responsible for millions of dollars in development and planning.

The perception is being addressed slowly and sporadically on a national, provincial and individual level. These facets of advocacy are discussed in this order within this report.

**The National Level**

The national level of advocacy is managed by the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC). As stated in their literature, the RAIC is "the voice of architecture and its practice in Canada".

The RAIC, as a voluntary national association, represents over 3,200 registered architects, interns and faculty members across Canada. A part of its mandate is to "provide the national framework for the development and recognition of architectural excellence".

The RAIC provides the national and international platform for advocating Canadian architects. Programs developed under their direction include:

- the 'Architects in Schools' initiative; and

- a 'Consultation Paper' on a model architecture policy.

The 'Architecture in Schools' initiative, announced during the Festival of Architecture (1999), was based on a successful program of the Architectural Institute of British Columbia. This program was to facilitate the introduction of architectural education into the Canadian school system. The delivery method intended was to be web-based, known as "architecturecanada.ca", set up as a resource center of materials.

Unfortunately, the program does not appear to be in service at this time. Requests for additional information have not provided any results.

The second known advocacy initiative is more recent. The "Consultation Paper", published in October 2005, provided a wide range of initiatives on a national, provincial and civic scale. Most notably, the specific components related to this project include:

National Level:

***A1 Public Awareness:***

▪ *Establish new architectural grants/awards programs and enhance existing programs offered by the Canada Council for the Arts and other national organizations.*

▪ *Promote excellence in architecture and urban design through media presentation, public forum and symposia, publications put out by national organizations such as the Canada Council for the Arts, and commemorative markings for award-winning buildings.*

▪ *Include the right of attribution of authorship of buildings into the Copyright Act.*

▪ *Issue a series of postage stamps celebrating architecture.*

The Provincial/Territorial Level:

***B1 Education***

▪ *Develop an "Architects in Schools" program in elementary and secondary schools and a web site that includes images, lesson plans, and a database of architects willing to speak in schools.*

▪ *Develop curriculum on ways to add information on architecture to already existing subject areas in elementary and secondary school programs a well as in general arts programs at the university level.*

- *Develop and deliver programs in the construction trades and building crafts to enhance the skill levels of workers.*

### B2    Public Awareness

- *Establish new architectural grants/awards programs and enhance existing programs offered by provincial/territorial arts councils and other organizations.*
- *Promote excellence in architecture and urban design through media presentations, public forums and symposia, and provincial/territorial publications.*

The Corporate, Local and Institutional Level:

### C1    Public Awareness

- *Establish or expand an Urban Design awards program.*
- *Help commissioning bodies identify interested institutions, individuals, citizens' groups, and community organizations that can assist in early design decisions so that building and other structures will be in accord with public needs and wishes.*
- *Include more architects on planning boards and other organizations to provide advice on physical planning and development.*
- *Support school boards in offering subjects related to architecture in adult and lifelong learning programs.*

*RAIC Model Architecture Policy*

This "Consultation Paper" provides an excellent framework towards developing and enhancing the public perception of Architects and the architectural profession.  Completion and submission of the paper illustrates the role of advocacy that the RAIC plays on a national level.

The next stage for the "Paper" is perhaps the most difficult. This stage is when the potential partners in the process (federal, provincial, municipal governments and civic institutions) have to be convinced of the value related to the policy objectives and goals.  This step is where the public awareness program will gain a foundation for development. The success of the program is dependent on bringing potential partners on-stream.

**The Provincial Level**

Each province has an association of architects that governs and regulates the practice of architecture within their region.  The role of the provincial associations remains the licensing of architects to ensure their competency and ability to provide proper professional services to the public.  Each provincial association may decide to create or engage with public programs for promotion of the profession.  This decision remains at the discretion of the individual associations.
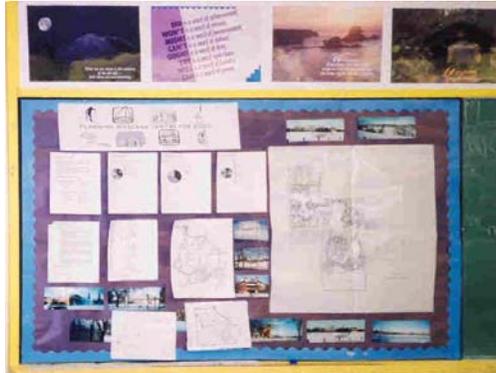


**Figure 1: Architecture Goes to School, Regina (1998)**

Several initiatives have been undertaken by provincial associations that promote architectural design and advocate the engagement of architects for all project types.  One of these initiatives was the AIBS "Architects in Schools" program.  This program was successfully initiated by the AIBC in 1994.  The program was developed in the public interest with a specific focus on student education from Kindergarten through Grade 12.  The program engaged with educators to promote its goals which included:

- *To promote a greater awareness and understanding in the minds of young people of architecture, and human relationships with the built environment, the natural world, and with each other.*
- *To enrich the BC K-12 curriculum by providing learning tools, materials, and activities for educators and students.*

- *To engage and challenge young minds with cross-disciplinary topics relevant to their everyday surroundings.*

- *To encourage the involvement, creativity, and innovation of youth in the future of their community.*

- *To invite dialogue with the public at large on issues related to the architectural profession.*

*AIBC Architect in Schools Program*

The basic theory behind the program's inception was that "the study of architecture, the built environment, and the processes that shape them, cultivates many valuable skills in young people".
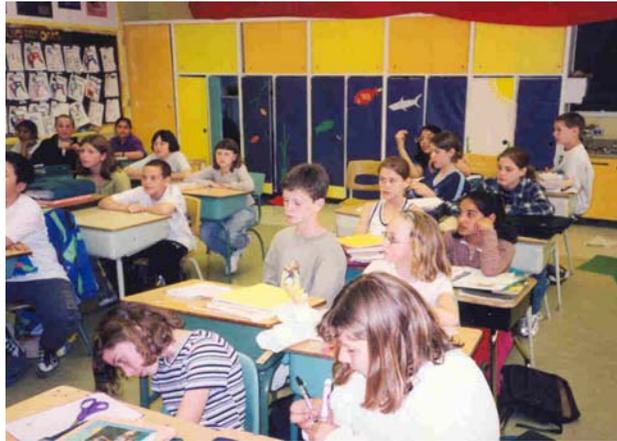


**Figure 2: Classroom Participation**

This type of advocacy brings the reality of architecture closer to students and educators by integrating an architectural thrust in the existing educational curriculum. The AIBC developed a classroom planning and activity resource for Grades I-7. A supplementary resource for secondary level students is noted as being in development. It was this program that stimulated the RAIC "Architects in Schools" initiative, launched in 1999.

Additional efforts of the AIBC include special activities or events centered on the education system. These events include "Made For Shade", "The Green Building Challenge", and a festival of "Architecture, Kids and Community".  These activities bring students and educators together with Registered Architects and Interns to share ideas, explore the environment, and educate relative to the architectural profession.

A similar initiative has been developed by the Ontario Association of Architects (OAA). This initiative, launched in the fall of 2002, was known as "Architecture in Schools". The basis of the program comes from a manual of instruction entitled 'The Architecture Education Resource Guide'.  This manual was intended for use by educators, "to help integrate the elements of architecture into their lesson plans".

The guide is divided into four categories as a resource to be used in development of educational lesson plan.  Each category contains a selection of subjects that will facilitate the integration of architecture into the learning level of the specific grade level.

- *Kindergarten to Grade 3*
- *Grades 4 to 6*
- *Grades 7 and 8*
- *Grades 9 to 12*
- *Web Resources*

*Ontario Association of Architects, Services and Resources Section*

As noted in the outline of the guide, its objective is not to turn the students into architects, but "to infuse the process of design throughout the curriculum".

Additional efforts by the OAA include an annual event in the fall of each year known as "Architecture Week".  This event is designed to raise awareness of the profession through individual events in Ontario communities.

Provincial associations consistently host annual events which are intended to promote, educate, and inform individuals about the architectural profession. These types of events are like the Banff sessions sponsored by the Alberta Association of Architects, bringing in national and international resources to discuss, debate and further promote the practice of architecture.

The Saskatchewan Association of Architects has also developed several initiatives, both independently and in cooperation with adjacent associations. These initiatives include the "Prairie Design Awards" (an annual event typically promoted with "Architecture Week" activities in each province) as well as participation in a regional newsletter of 'Elevation West'.

Specific initiatives that are coordinated by the SAA include:

(1)     Participation in "Habitat for Humanity", 1992 – a program where practitioners participated with elementary schools in Regina to discuss architectural design and assist each class in developing a model house for HFH.



**Figure 3: Student Display, Architecture Goes to School (1998)**

(2)     "Architecture Goes to School", 1998 – a program developed in Regina as an adjunct to the RAIC Festival of Architecture of 1998. This program involved architects and elementary grade 7 & 8 students and educators on a problem of urban design and context. Students completed research and reports relative to the Wascana Centre Park and then participated in "visioning" a new design for the park's various areas. This program culminated in a public display of student works in a local mall during "Architecture Week".

Provincial associations play a major role towards enhancing the public awareness of Architects and Architectural Design. Their position relative to associative professional groups (Engineering and Sciences), as well as municipal and provincial legislators, allows the opportunity to discuss issues and opportunities for development within the local framework. Associations represent the local voice of architects and have a responsibility to ensure that that voice is heard on a provincial administrative level.

**The Individual Architect**

*"Every architect has the obligation to improve the image of the profession by earning respect from clients, contractors, and the general public through their service to clients and society."*      *CHOP, 1.1.1, 1999*

The responsibility for raising public awareness falls primarily to the individual architect. As noted in the Canadian Handbook of Practice, the image is improved by earning respect through service which includes actions, approach, and engagement with outside agencies and the general public.



**Figure 4: Student Display on Design (1998)**

This responsibility is not often equally shared between professionals, either by choice or circumstances.  A group of professionals in Regina set out in 1995 to change the public perception through the formation of "Forum Architecture".

"Forum Architecture" established independent events which engaged the general public a well as civic leaders, practitioners, and associative professions.  These events included:

- The Downtown/Core Design Charrette (1997)

- The University of Regina Master Plan Design Charrette (1998)

- Participation and organization of "Architecture Goes to School" (1998)

These events stimulated public debate while greatly increasing the knowledge within the participants regarding the skills and role of the Architect within the community.

"Forum Architecture" evolved in 2000 to become the Regina Society of Architects, a chapter of the RAIC.  The Regina Society (RSA) carried on with the initiatives established by hosting an event in 2001 called "The College Avenue Campus Design Charrette".  This event was very successful and led to the creation of the Regina Sound Stage, an active and vibrant element in professional film and video arts.



**Figure 5: College Avenue Campus Building Charrette**

Each of these endeavours, combined with individual efforts (Trade instruction, educational seminars, "Town Hall" meetings) furthers the understanding and education of the general public.

The difficulty in maintaining these endeavours is the volunteer nature of the groups. Professional practice is a demanding, time-consuming effort; often not leaving sufficient time or availability of personnel necessary to engage in public education campaigns.



**Figure 6: Student Presentation (AGtS 1998)**

It is a component expected of architects that they hold themselves to a high standard of performance, conduct and excellence in carrying out their activities. It should also be expected that architects be responsible as individuals and associations to promote good public relations within their community.

Potential activities for the individual include those outlined in the CHOP:

*Community involvement, such as:*

- *giving lectures and speaking in public on architectural topics;*

- *conducting seminars;*

- *sitting on volunteer boards;*

- *joining service clubs;*

- *providing "pro-bono" architectural services to community organizations;*

- *conducting design charrettes; and*

- *sponsoring community events.*

*RAIC Canadian Handbook of Practice, 1999*

**Figure 7: Classroom Participation**

It may be that activities such as those noted may not be readily available, or the architect may not be in a position to denote time and energy to another commitment. There remains a responsibility on every registered architect to represent the profession and engage with the public to promote and advocate the role of the architect at any opportunity.

**CONCLUSION**

The public awareness of the role and practice of architecture requires dedicated efforts towards improvement.  The impact of design and benefits in using skilled architects must become fully understood by the general public in order for communities to create environments that stimulate the public experience.

> *"Architecture is the profession which endeavours to identify the <u>public need</u>,*
> *and to serve the <u>public interest</u>, in matters relating to the built environment."*
>
> CHOP, Ch.1.1.1

This broad definition, taken from the Canadian Handbook of Practice, specifically refers to the public need and interest.  The discontinuity exists in that the public is not fully aware of the need and interests of architects in attempting to create the built environment.  If the public does not understand the role of the architect, they will be unable to use and assist the architect in performance of their duties to create a successful built environment.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is the recommendation of this report that a national strategy be developed to increase public awareness and promote the role of architects and architectural design within communities.  This recommendation is nicely "global" and may appear quite generic; however, the foundation for a national strategy has been laid in the form of the "Model Architecture Policy".

The MAP, combined with individual association efforts on education, may be used as the basis to develop a series of architectural education workshops or classes.  These events will start the process of engaging with the public and increasing the awareness and understanding of architecture in society.
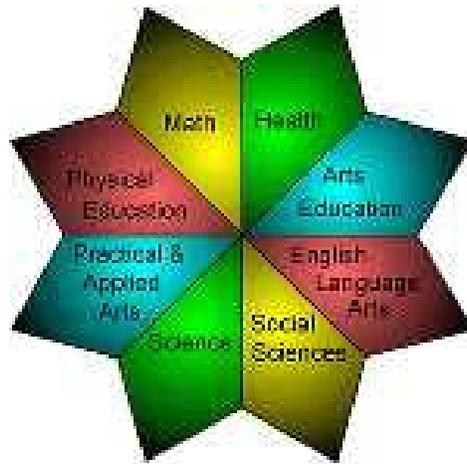
**Figure 8: Curriculum Graphic, Regina School Division #4**

The AIBC and OAA have developed educational models, and as well, a curriculum has been formulated in Saskatchewan for architectural design instruction. These elements provide the basics to develop a national education model. The opportunity to integrate a national education model with each distinctive provincial curriculum would be a daunting, likely insurmountable task; however, a model of this type could be used annually as special events. It is also noted that a model policy of this type would create consistency in the approach and content, forming a common voice across Canada.

A further recommendation is to engage practitioners, with the public, as a part of the Mandatory Continuing Education program. By creating a responsibility of architects to promote the profession, and be recognized with MCE points, there is a greater likelihood that architects would extend additional efforts as a group or individual to promote the profession.

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