

Guide to The Cooper Union School of Architecture Student Work Collection [1939-2018]
The Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture Archive

Collection-level Description:

Collection Number : ARCHSWC

Name and Location of Repository :

The Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture Archive
The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art
7 East 7th Street, Room 235
New York, NY 10003

Title: The Cooper Union School of Architecture Student Work Collection

Date(s): 1939-2018, Bulk 1975-2006

Extent: 65.25 cubic feet

Creator(s): Cooper Union School of Architecture Faculty and Students; The Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture Archive

Access Points: See [Access Points spreadsheet](#)

Abstract: This collection consists of materials documenting coursework produced by Cooper Union School of Architecture students between 1939 and 2018. The collection also includes course-related materials produced by School of Architecture faculty.

Processing Information: This collection was processed by Steven Hillyer, Caitlin Biggers, and Chris Dierks between 2016 and 2019. A preliminary inventory was completed by Chia Chou in 2007. Digitization and processing of this collection was supported by The Institute for Museum and Library Services, The Leon Levy Foundation, The Metropolitan New York Library Council, The National Historical Publications & Records Commission

Accruals: The archive expects an accrual of born digital records created between 2000 and 2019 to be added to the collection between 2020 and 2022. The archive further expects additional accruals on an annual basis from 2020 forward.

Conditions Governing Access and Use: These records are held at 7 East 7th Street, New York, NY 10003, Room 235. On-site research can be conducted by appointment only. For information on research access please visit our [research information page](#).

Other Finding Aids: Digital collection access is available at archswc.cooper.edu

Preferred citation: Courtesy of The Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture Archive, The Cooper Union.

Language of Material: Collection material is predominantly in English. There are a very small number of text documents in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Japanese, Korean, Latin, Farsi, Portuguese, and Romanian.

Administrative History Note: The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art was founded in 1859 by philanthropist Peter Cooper to promote social justice, foster civic engagement, and offer a free and academically rigorous course of study in art, architecture, and engineering to New York City's working class. Architectural education has existed at The Cooper Union since its founding, but the program began to formalize in 1960, when The Cooper Union School of Art formally became The Cooper Union School of Art and Architecture. Between 1960 and 1975 the architectural curriculum developed alongside the art program, until the architecture department formed its own school in 1975. In 1981, the school was named The Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture through a gift from Irwin S. Chanin, a Cooper Union graduate and practicing New York Architect.

Cooper Union's unique approach to educating architects began in the mid-1960s with the appointment of architect John Hejduk, a former graduate of the school, as head of The Cooper Union's Department of Architecture. At that time, most schools of architecture focused on traditional models of design education that emphasized pragmatic technical and analytical skills required for standard professional practice. Cooper Union chose instead to cultivate an alternate approach to developing a student's understanding of space, the human body, and the disciplines and constructed environments that unite them. This new way of teaching architecture embraced cross-disciplinary study and novel approaches to analysis and design that attracted prominent faculty and design critics who continued to shape the School's curriculum between 1975 and 2000, under Hejduk's tenure as Dean.

The School's curriculum remained innovative under the leadership of subsequent deans whose guidance is reflected in the Collection's born-digital works from 2001 forward. Anthony Vidler, who served as Dean from 2001-2013, expanded the curriculum's ethical dimensions with projects that engage the global and environmental challenges facing contemporary architects. The School's current Dean Nader Tehrani, appointed in 2014, has affirmed Cooper Union's investment in "the process of making as a central part of the production of knowledge," and its commitment to the social contract of education. To that end, the school has enhanced digital fabrication technologies in alignment with the existing culture of making at the institution, inclusive of outward facing programs that expose Cooper students to research and construction on a global level.

Throughout the school's history and under each of its three deans, the school has sought to prepare students to enter professional architecture through training in drawing, structures, and professional practice. At present, the school aims to "provide for its students the finest

professional education available within an intellectual environment that fosters and expands their creative capacities and sensibilities and establishes the foundation for a creative professional life.”¹

Immediate Source of Acquisition Note: Initially, the School of Architecture solicited student projects produced between 1964 and 1971 for documentation in *Education of an Architect: A Point of View*, a compendium associated with a 1971 exhibition at MoMA by the same name. Additional documentation of projects produced between 1972 and 1985 was collected for the second volume of *Education of an Architect*, published in 1988. From 1988 to 2016, the Student Work Collection grew through annual accrual. Since 2017 the collection has grown through biannual accrual. At the end of each semester, faculty members identify student work for inclusion in the Student Work Collection. The student authors then submit original work to the archive for photographic documentation. The original work is largely returned to the student authors, though a small amount of that content exists in the collection.

Scope and Contents: This collection consists primarily of photographic documentation of coursework produced by students in the School of Architecture between 1939 and 2006. The coursework itself, grounded in design studio work across the five years of the undergraduate program, relates to a wide range of topics including, but not limited to, architectural history and analysis, structural analysis, drawing, housing, scale, biology, physiology, linguistics, light and shadow, global history, local history, religion, music, conflict, political science, inhabitation, adaptive reuse, urban redevelopment, city planning, and building typology.

The collection also includes course-related documents produced by faculty members between 1981 and 2018, such as course descriptions, project briefs, memoranda, schedules, and syllabi.

The material is largely image-based, depicting student drawings, sketches, models, reference images, and site photos. A small amount of textual material is also available, including project descriptions, abstracts, and transcripts of thesis reviews. These are complimented by faculty documents that include design studio prompts, course syllabi, reading lists, and related materials.

Physically, the material exists in the form of silver gelatin prints, negatives and positives in 120mm, 35mm, 4 x 5 in and 8 x 10 in formats, as well as 35mm slides, polaroids, and line negatives in a range of sizes. Born-digital material exists in pdf, jpeg, and tif formats. The collection also includes a limited number of audio recordings of Thesis reviews made between 1991 and 2006. The audio is stored on cassettes.

Arrangement: The Student Work Collection is arranged into eight series based on either the course for which the material was produced or the document type. Within each series, staff archivists arranged materials alphabetically by the project author’s surname, numerically by

¹ Cooper Union, About, <https://cooper.edu/architecture/about>, accessed November 25th, 2019.

course number or chronologically by academic year. Please see arrangement notes on the series level to determine which arrangement scheme is used.

Series I: Architectonics, 1964 – 2003, undated

Series II: Design II, 1966 – 2004, undated

Series III: Design III, 1964 – 2004, undated

Series IV: Design IV, 1965 – 2003, undated

Series V: Thesis, 1964 – 2003

Series VI: Non-Studio Courses, 1967 – 2007, undated

Series VII: Pre-1963–64 Coursework, 1939 –1964, undated

Series VIII: Faculty Course Documents, 1970 – 2018, undated

Series IX: Final Review Audio Recordings, 1991 – 2006

Series Level Description:

Series I: Architectonics

Date(s): 1964 – 2003, undated

Extent: 7.5 cubic feet

Scope and Content: This series consists of materials produced in ARCH 111, the first-year design studio. This course introduces students to the study of architecture by investigating the interrelationships of space, structure, and visual composition, and by exploring the syntax of architecture through models and orthographic drawing. Note: from 1961-62 through 1971-72 Architectonics was assigned course numbers 131 (fall) and 132 (spring). The material is largely photographic and includes photos of models, drawings, sketches, reference, and site images. There is also some textual material.

Arrangement: This series is arranged alphabetically by author surname.

Series II: Design II

Date(s): 1966 – 2004, undated

Extent: 7.5 cubic feet

Scope and Content: Material in Series II was produced in ARCH 121, the second-year design studio. This studio requires students to sustain their formal investigations from first year while integrating the complexities of program, context, and site. The studio integrates spatial, structural, material, environmental, and visual design, emphasizing the communication of concepts through drawings and models. Note: from 1961-62 through 1971-72 the second-year design studio was named Architectural Design I and assigned course numbers 231 (fall) and 232 (spring). The material is largely photographic and includes photos of models, drawings, sketches, reference and site images. There is also some textual material.

Arrangement: This series is arranged alphabetically by author surname.

Series III: Design III

Date(s): 1964 – 2004, undated

Extent: 7.5 cubic feet

Scope and Content: This Series contains student work produced during ARCH 131, the third-year studio. This course studies and analyses historical precedents, which are followed by a sequence of design problems of increasing complexity. The studio emphasizes the planning of buildings and the interrelationships among form, structure, detail, and technologies. Note: from 1961-62 through 1971-72 the third-year design studio was named Architectural Design II and assigned course numbers 331 (fall) and 332 (spring). The material is largely photographic and includes photos of models, drawings, sketches, reference and site images. There is also some textual material.

Arrangement: This series is arranged alphabetically by author surname.

Series IV: Design IV

Date(s): 1965 – 2003, undated

Extent: 7.5 cubic feet

Scope and Content: This series includes material produced for ARCH 141, the fourth-year design studio. Design IV investigates urban programs and sites that require the integration of form, structure, and space. Students examine the complexities implicit in resolving urban problems. Analytic studies and explorations generate specific programs for the development of each project. Emphasis is placed on large-scale integrations and the impact of transformations to the existing urban fabric. Note: from 1961-62 through 1971-72 the fourth-year design studio was named Architectural Design III and assigned course numbers 431 (fall) and 432 (spring). The material is largely photographic and includes photos of models, drawings, sketches, reference and site images. There is also some textual material.

Arrangement: This series is arranged alphabetically by author surname.

Series V: Thesis

Date(s): 1964 – 2003

Extent: 23 cubic feet

Scope and Content: Series V contains work from ARCH 151, the fifth and final design studio. Thesis synthesizes four years of the educational experience. Each student chooses his or her area of study, scope of problem, and method of exposition. Students analyze and study their chosen problems with the aid of faculty, visiting critics, and advisors. Note: from 1961-62 through 1971-72 the fifth-year design studio was named Architectural Design IV and Thesis and was assigned course numbers 531 (fall) and 532 (spring). The material is largely photographic and includes photos of models, drawings, sketches, reference and site images. There is also some textual material.

Arrangement: This series is arranged alphabetically by author surname.

Series VI: Non-Studio Courses

Date(s): 1967-2007, undated

Extent: 5.8 cubic feet

Scope and Content: This series is comprised of material produced for courses outside the core design studios. Courses represented include: Freehand Drawing, History of Architecture I, Computer Applications & Descriptive Geometry, History of Architecture II, Structures II, Building

Technology, Structures III, Structures IV, Landscape Architecture, Advanced Drawing, Cut-Outs, Advanced Concepts, Computer-Aided Design & Descriptive Geometry, and Color. Material is primarily photographic, consisting mainly of photographs and reproductions of drawings. There are also photos of models and a limited amount of textual material.

Arrangement: This series is arranged by course number, then alphabetically by author surname.

Series VII: Pre 1963-64 Coursework

Date(s): 1939-1964, undated

Extent: .5 cubic feet

Scope and Content: This series is comprised of work produced in the School of Art and Architecture up to and including the 1963-64 academic year. This work cannot be associated with any course, as the school was formalizing its curriculum and coursework collecting practices. The items are photographic, and most projects include descriptive text documents as well.

Arrangement: This series is arranged chronologically, with undated material at the beginning.

Series VIII: Faculty Course Documents

Date(s): 1970-2018, undated

Extent: 1.2 cubic feet

Scope and Content: Series VIII is made up of documents produced by faculty members for the courses they taught. These items include course descriptions, project briefs, schedules, syllabi, and memoranda. The documents are text based.

Arrangement: This series is arranged by course number, then chronologically with undated material at the beginning.

Series IX: Final Review Audio Recordings

Date(s): 1991-2006

Extent: 5.25 cubic feet

Scope and Content: This series includes audio recordings of final reviews in the thesis year and recordings of final reviews for Freehand Drawing. These recordings include the voices of students presenting their projects and the voices of faculty members and guest critics offering their feedback. The media is stored on cassette tapes.

Arrangement: This series is arranged by course, then chronologically.

Container List:

See [Container List spreadsheet](#)