

SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING

The School of Architecture and Planning (SA+P) has supported MIT's mission of meeting the world's greatest challenges since its start in 1865. While advocating the forward-looking, technologically driven optimism of MIT, the School also invests in critically reflecting on technological innovation—its social impact and confrontation with cultural values.

SA+P is made up of six main divisions—the Department of Architecture; the Department of Urban Studies and Planning; the Media Lab; the MIT Center for Real Estate; the Art, Culture, and Technology Program; and the Leventhal Center for Advanced Urbanism. Over the years, the School has embraced a broader range of fields that address and improve human environments.

What binds these fields together is a strong commitment to the deployment of technology toward social good. What also binds them is the use of design and deliberation approaches toward action that are distinct from but complementary to the engineering approach to problem solving.

Design is a main unifying approach of SA+P activities. We believe that design and policy interventions should be grounded in a commitment to improving individual human lives, equity and social justice, cultural enrichment, and the responsible use of resources through creative problem solving and project execution. Our curriculum empowers students with skills that enable them to design physical spaces, policies, and technologies that will shape how those spaces are used, with the goal of sustaining and enhancing the quality of the human environment at all scales, from the personal to the global.

Students

The School of Architecture and Planning enrolls an average of 600–700 students a year in a collection of courses ranging from Renaissance architecture to the cities of tomorrow, digital fabrication, motion graphics, shape grammars, photography, sensor systems, integrative design across disciplines, news and participatory media, and construction finance. By far the largest number of those students enter our graduate programs, and many pursue cross-disciplinary studies and dual degrees among those programs and others at the Institute.

Throughout the years, we have been noted for the diversity of our student body, drawing on candidates from around the world and from all walks of life. The Department of Architecture graduated its first woman, Sophia Hayden, in 1890, and three years later, Robert Taylor became the first African American to graduate from an American architecture program—a tradition of inclusiveness that continues today.

Global Projects

One of MIT's founding principles is the belief that professional competence is best fostered by focusing teaching and research on real problems in the real world. Accordingly, a central aspect of our teaching and research is our ongoing participation in global initiatives—many of them collaborative undertakings among our six divisions, with other divisions of MIT, and with public and private institutions in the United States and abroad.

SA+P is fully committed to the mission of leadership both locally and globally. As a result of this commitment, faculty play a central role in preparing students to be leaders and good global citizens who engage with the problems facing countries at all stages of development by taking part in the public discussion of issues on a global scale and studying, developing, and applying best practices around the world.

History

Our history stretches back a century and a half, providing our current students with a legacy and long tradition of pioneering excellence. The Department of Architecture was the first such department in the nation (1865) and became a leader in introducing Modernism to America. The program in city planning was the second of its kind in the country (1932), later evolving into the current Department of Urban Studies and Planning, the longest continuous planning program in the United States and repeatedly ranked number one in the nation.

The Media Lab, the birthplace of multimedia computing (1985), has come to be known around the world as a world-class incubator of new design ideas; the Center for Real Estate established the nation's first one-year graduate program in real estate development (1984); and the Center for Advanced Visual Studies (1967), now part of the new Program in Art, Culture, and Technology, pioneered the use of technologies such as lasers, plasma sculptures, sky art, and holography as tools of expression in public and environmental art. The Leventhal Center for Advanced Urbanism (2012), established as a premier research center focused on the design and planning of large-scale, complex 21st-century metropolitan environments, aims to redefine the field of urban design to meet contemporary challenges, utilizing interdisciplinary collaborative practices and the most advanced analytical and representational tools.

More recently, the Sustainable Urbanization Lab (SUL) (<https://www.sul.mit.edu>) was established to study behavioral foundations for urban and environmental planning and policies aimed at sustainable urbanization in the most rapidly urbanizing regions of the world. Reflecting the need to examine sustainable development at a global scale, three new projects were introduced to extend the China Future City's analytical framework beyond China to incorporate a global analysis of sustainable urbanization. The SUL will be defined by three "blocks", two of which are interrelated research themes:

Environmental Sustainability and Place-based Policies, and Self-Sustaining Urban Growth; the third block, the China Future City Program educational program, will continue to serve as the MIT's teaching and research center on China's urbanization.

Resources

The Rotch Library is one of the nation's premier resources in architecture and planning, offering extensive depth in architecture, building technology, art history, photography, environmental studies, land use, urban design, housing and community development, regional planning, urban transportation, and real estate. Its visual collections hold more than 60,000 digital images and 380,000 slides.

The School's Wolk Gallery mounts several shows a year in its exhibition space, overseen by the curator of architecture and design at the MIT Museum. The Keller Gallery, a vest-pocket space of about 200 square feet, shows a steady stream of faculty, student, and experimental projects, including work from alumni and friends. The PLAZmA Digital Gallery is an electronic showcase of work and events on display in the School's public areas, featuring faculty and student work.

The MIT Museum frequently features exhibitions on architecture and visual studies in its main galleries at 265 Massachusetts Avenue, as well as in its Compton Gallery, located in the heart of campus under the big dome. The Museum's website spotlights its wide range of collections as well as exhibitions no longer on display in its galleries.

The List Visual Arts Center, three galleries on the first floor of the Media Lab's Wiesner Building, presents 5–8 shows a year exploring contemporary artmaking in all media. Rotch Library also features exhibitions of student, staff, and faculty work, as well as shows drawing from its collections, in its space in Building 7-238.