Dear SALA Leadership and Faculty,

We are writing to you in response to the statement issued in an eBlast from the School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture (SALA) on June 4, 2020, titled “Support for Black Lives Matter”, and the subsequent letter from SALA’s Director titled “# SHUTDOWNSTEM, #SHUTDOWNACADEMIA: A MESSAGE FROM SALA TO OUR STUDENTS.” While these statements are acknowledged as gestures towards a more just discipline, there remains a profound need for a more direct and actionable set of policies to which the school can be held accountable. Further, there is a wave of change in the industry as evidenced by petitions and open letters to various Canadian architectural associations and institutions in recent days, including the OAA, OALA, CSLA, the University of Toronto, and others. The professions of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, their schools, and their problematic histories are rife with long-standing issues of equity and diversity, which have been rebuffed due to widespread negligence and institutional fragility. As a premier architecture school in Canada, SALA remains complicit through its failure to outline steps towards change.

We want to stress that this letter is a critique of an institution that we care deeply about. This is a chance to challenge ourselves and reflect on what we research, how we design, why we work, and who our efforts serve. SALA can be at the forefront of ground-breaking research on how design industries can be decolonized and diversified within the Canadian and North American contexts. We must transparently learn and unlearn from each other, reconciling our beliefs and our actions in the process. While our efforts have been reignited by the tragic murders of George Floyd, Regis Korchinski-Paquet, Chantel Moore, Randy Cochrane, Machuar Madut, and countless others by police, these conversations have been occuring in the SALA community for a long time. The complicity of our industry in creating and perpetuating conditions which dehumanize and place structural barriers in front of Black, Indigenous, people of colour (BIPOC), Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA) community, and all visible minorities is no longer up for any debate.

Capital-A Architecture is now facing a collective reckoning, and an opportunity has arisen for SALA to demonstrate initiative through actions, not platitudes. In lieu of asking SALA’s leadership to amend their original statement, we have provided some urgent demands to steer the school in a direction which prioritizes action over words.

SALA students & alumni demand urgent action on the following items:

1. **Promote institutional accountability and transparency.**
   a. Rename the Frederic Lasserre building and provide formal, public acknowledgement of the racist\(^1\) and misogynistic\(^2\) history of its namesake. Keeping the Lasserre name attached to one of our buildings perpetuates the legacies of white supremacy and patriarchy within our school.
   i. The new name chosen for the building should reflect SALA’s commitment to atonement and egalitarianism. In the event that a new namesake is selected,
individuals who were denounced by Lasserre (including Douglas Cardinal and Esther Marjorie Hill) must be strongly considered.

b. Develop a strategic plan—open and accessible to the SALA community—explicitly laying out a set of concrete goals and policies towards achieving equity and promoting Design Justice.
   i. Develop a diversity task force and/or a paid diversity coordinator to oversee and track these efforts.
   ii. Require diversity and anti-racist sensitivity training for faculty and staff.
   iii. Ensure student and community involvement throughout the drafting and review of the plan report.
   iv. Revise the plan each year, to reflect emerging issues and initiatives related to the policies proposed in this document. Provide an annual report which reflects the outcomes of the strategic plan and delineates statistical data on demographic diversity. This document should be widely disseminated, and made publicly available on the SALA website.
   v. Research and adapt tools used by other institutions (architectural and otherwise) to address equity and inclusion. Compile a report listing examples of best practices and programs; assess the feasibility of implementing them at UBC; and propose a selection of initiatives to be carried out during the 2021-2022 school year.
   vi. Work with BIPOC communities to draft ethical best practices for architectural research and community engagement. When engaging with BIPOC communities, do so on their terms and take the required time to engage in preparatory research and real, thoughtful community consultations. Further, avoid tokenizing BIPOC experiences or diminishing collaborative relationships into architectural voluntourism. Teach capacity-building within the communities you engage in, so that they can continue the work after you leave. Implement surveys after each community-oriented program to evaluate SALA’s successes and failures, and disclose the findings to SALA’s student body.
   vii. This plan should entail a formal mandate and timeline outlining actionable steps that SALA will take to align to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action. Mandate that territorial acknowledgements are consistently read aloud at all SALA events, and take time to understand and teach the direct implications of these statements.

c. Clearly outline the contact information for the University Office of the Ombudsperson on each course outline, allowing students who have seen or experienced discrimination to voice their concerns without fear of retaliation from SALA leadership.

d. Give permanent seats at the table to people and organizations involved in the support of equal representation at SALA, namely the elected representatives of For a Feminist architecture (FaFa) and the National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMAS) when discussing actions which impact institutional culture, such as: hiring, dismissal, and strategic vision for the school.

e. Create policies which promote financial transparency and equity:
   i. Make a commitment to funding research by and for BIPOC communities on an annual basis.
   ii. Implement a study of salaries for existing tenured faculty which includes:
1. Redirecting funds to existing BIPOC faculty who may be underpaid in relation to their workloads and/or the hiring of additional BIPOC educators/practitioners.

iii. Disclose where SALA research dollars are spent, provide a regularly updated list of all active research topics, and begin posting bulletins on research objectives prior to the commencement of new work. Provide diversity statistics accordingly.

1. Conduct open student surveys which value student input on where student tuition dollars are spent.

2. **Create policies and initiatives which support diverse faculty contributions.**
   a. [Uphold UBC’s HR10 hiring policy](#), which commits to “advance the interests of women and Indigenous, disabled, and racialized persons; ensure that fair and equal opportunity is afforded to all who seek employment at the University; and treat equitably all faculty and staff.”
      i. To this end, SALA should strive for fair representation of race, self-disclosing gender, PWDs, and self-disclosing LGBTQIA for all faculty members, of all SALA departments. SALA’s recent lecture series have been diverse and have offered a variety of worldviews to students; this thinking should extend to SALA’s hiring practices.
      ii. Revise SALA’s Faculty Search surveys for students at candidate lectures to address the above.
      iii. Broaden the range of institutions from which SALA hires, extending the search beyond the usual pool of North American Ivy League universities.
      iv. Place a greater importance on practical experience and ties to local communities as employment prerequisites.
   b. Promote a diversity of faculty members to leadership and decision-making positions in order to foster a culture which represents a variety of views.
   c. Ensure an equal possibility of tenure for all faculty members, regardless of their race, disabilities, self-disclosing gender, or self-disclosing sexuality.
   d. Develop an annual research fellowship for BIPOC researchers and practitioners.

3. **Teach course content and support student research that engages a variety of backgrounds and histories.**
   a. Ensure that mandatory courses critically engage with the settler colonial histories which have shaped the city we call Vancouver and the country we call Canada.
      i. Course content should include, but is not limited to the following: Indigenous history and contributions, the reservation system, Japanese internment camps, formation of Chinese, Japanese, Punjabi, Black and other ethnocultural communities in Canada and their contribution to urban development, and practitioners who have been complicit in perpetuating settler colonial structures (see: MoA), etc.
      ii. Mandate that (required) history courses include architectural histories of architects, communities, and regions outside of the western canon. Focus on projects, writing, and theory created by BIPOC. Engage critically with the western canon and situate it within the context of colonialism and systems of oppression when discussed in these history courses. This is especially
appropriate given SALA’s diverse student body which includes many international students, BIPOC, and other visible minorities.

b. Expand and critically frame the architectural canon.
   i. Work with the library to acquire resources which extend beyond canonical content and allow for BIPOC authors and critical theory to be more readily accessible to students, making the acquisition of new media and resources accessible to everyone.
   ii. Contextualize problematic architectural theorists who are embedded in the western canon by immediately acknowledging their dubious words and actions (Frank Lloyd Wright, Philip Johnson, Le Corbusier, Adolf Loos, Frederick Law Olmsted, etc.).

c. Use the mandated Research Methods course to expose students to critical tools which allow them to find and evaluate the efficacy and diversity of their academic sources.

d. Teach students about the struggle for equity in architecture as well as their rights as architectural workers. Discuss tools and methodologies for equitable practice, including ethical issues which extend beyond mandated CACB and CSLA content.
   i. Mandate the inclusion of issues including but not limited to: gender pay gaps, labour exploitation, and the environmental footprints left by our projects. While some efforts have been made in the past to expand the curriculum to address these issues, such critical classes remain the exception, and not the norm.

4. Establish diversity in outreach and research.
   a. Promote relationships with local and global institutions that are not predominantly white. Explore research and models of practice that diverge from histories written by white men of the western architectural canon.
   b. Financially support architectural research which is undertaken by BIPOC students and faculty. Allocation of SALA research funding should be more equitably allocated between technological and social research streams. This action could include establishing relationships with industry or other cultural entities to ensure the social stream is adequately funded and represented.
   c. Create an additional research theme within SALA which extends beyond the four current topics listed on the SALA website—one explicitly centred on socio-spatial justice, critical practice, decolonization, race, and diversity.
   d. Work with NOMAS and FaFa to create and fund critical publications, events, and exhibitions that engage justice, diversity, and equity within architecture today. This work could constitute a regular course offering and/or paid research positions.
   e. Work with NOMAS and FaFa to develop a regularly maintained and readily-accessible repository of resources (readings, organizations, precedents, and more) on Design Justice, decolonization, race, and diversity, to be accessible to both students and faculty looking to supplement their course content, independent learning, and thesis projects.
   f. Equip students and faculty with training and tools for responsible community engagement.
      i. Develop a formal and accessible ethics process and coaching strategy within SALA for students and faculty who are considering doing community engagement, rather than solely referring to the Office of Research Ethics. The skills developed through community engagement are essential to our profession, and this process is often seen as a barrier to furthering these efforts.
ii. Work with the School of Community and Regional Planning’s Indigenous Community Planning Concentration, and/or the Social Justice Institute’s Ecologies of Social Difference (ESD) Research Network, and/or The Indigenous Pedagogies Research Network, to develop course content within SALA that teaches students to understand the importance of Indigenous consultation, engagement and participatory design.

5. **Expand the range of ideas at SALA by inviting a diverse group of external guests and lecturers.**
   a. Pay all guest critics, acknowledging that not all people share equal levels of privilege, and require compensation for their time and absence from work and/or families.
   b. Invite BIPOC guests to speak about their work, communities, and past experiences working in design, and/or with other designers. These guests should be appropriately remunerated for their time and labour.
      i. Utilize NOMAS’s and FaFa’s extensive networks in and beyond Vancouver to ensure critics from diverse backgrounds are available to offer a variety of perspectives at all reviews.
   c. Balance visits for architectural lecture series with guests from local BIPOC communities.

6. **Combat structural barriers in the profession from the ground up.**
   a. Make a commitment to increasing the recruitment and graduation rate of BIPOC students from SALA’s programs.
      i. Investigate current obstacles, discriminatory cultures, application processes, and gaps in bursary/scholarship funding.
      ii. Create sustained long-term relationships with elementary, middle school, and high school students in less affluent communities to combat structural barriers into SALA (see: Taubman College’s ArcPrep program).
      iii. A locally-based initiative SALA can implement immediately is supporting the establishment of Project Pipeline: a series of free weekend summer workshops offered by NOMAS which would allow middle and high school students in Vancouver to combat structural barriers into design disciplines, while offering mentorship.
   b. Improve computer facilities in all campus buildings used by SALA to ensure equitable access to technology—an issue which disproportionately affects students with limited privilege. This includes access to both equipment and software required to complete coursework, and equal opportunities for training on all tools and equipment purchased with school funds.
   c. Improve access to all SALA facilities to ensure equity for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). Further, offer virtual classes and meetings as well as flexible scheduling to PWDs to improve accessibility, as proven effective by the COVID-19 pandemic.
   d. Clearly advertise all student teaching and research positions and allow equal access to student jobs, eliminating the existing system of favoritism which reinforces covert power structures. This applies to both academic assistant and work-learn positions.
   e. Eliminate all advertising in the eBlast (and by other means) for unpaid competitions, internships, and positions. These create unequal access to opportunity, disproportionately impacting less privileged and BIPOC students and reinforcing the exclusivity of the discipline.
i. This includes, but is not limited to: unpaid short-term internships and “volunteer opportunities” for students by local firms, and “pay to play” schemes / programs / design-builds which do not provide students with monetary compensation for labour performed.

ii. For co-ops and similar programs, ensure that students are paid prevailing wages for their labour before granting academic credit. Blacklist firms that do not pay fairly or adhere to ethical labour practices.

f. Actively seek out and advertise external funding opportunities for BIPOC students at SALA. These should be provided in addition to the list of internal scholarships, grants, and awards already on the school website.

The transition towards equitable institutional practices can draw upon an extensive network of engaged students, interns, practitioners, and educators for support. Students look to SALA for mentorship and perspective on the industry. SALA has prided itself on its reported position as the top architecture school in Canada, and the largest architectural institution in Western Canada. These positions place an additional responsibility on SALA to commit to institutional reform through concrete action and will create a transformative precedent for other schools and the industry to emulate.

As Whitney M. Young said in his 1968 AIA address, “We are going to have people as committed to doing the right thing, to inclusiveness, as we have in the past to exclusiveness.” We recognize that these demands underscore the need for a significant culture shift within the school—and, by extension, the profession at large. Although the actions outlined in this letter represent a significant undertaking, they also highlight a latent potential in our field which can only be activated with a diversity of voices, and a variety of worldviews. We must work together to achieve these ends.

This letter was collectively drafted and co-signed by a group of students, alumni and practitioners seeking academic and cultural output which reflects their diversity. We look forward to discussing the above items with SALA Leadership and Faculty to create and maintain an actionable plan together—ideally during the course of the Summer 2020 semester.

Sincerely,

FaFa (For a Feminist Architecture), NOMAS (National Organization of Minority Architecture Students), ARCHUS, LASA, and the undersigned;

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Sources
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