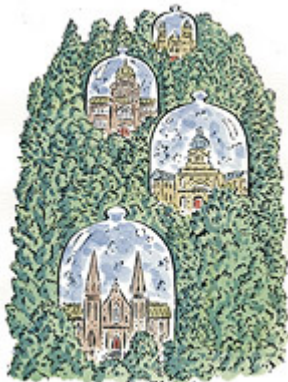


# Architectural Conservation Comes to College Campuses

By CATESBY LEIGH

January 24, 2008; Page D8, The Wall Street Journal

ANNAPOLIS, Md. -- While Uncle Sam foots the bill for the general upkeep of the U.S. Naval Academy campus, known as the Yard, there are certain architectural icons to whose meticulous care alumni can be relied upon to contribute. Heading the list are the domed chapel, the Yard's crown jewel, and the crypt below -- where John Paul Jones's body reposes in a beautiful marble sarcophagus. Then comes Memorial Hall, the spaciously barrel-vaulted, sky-lit ceremonial room fitted out with gorgeous plasterwork ornament and chandeliers as well as lunette paintings of naval battles, portraits in paint and bronze, plaques and flags.



David Gothard

Mainly the work of Ernest Flag, a brilliant Paris-trained classicist, these century-old venues lie in the Yard's historic core and epitomize the midshipman's experience. But the Yard now includes about 400 other structures, ranging from a hospital designed by Flag to '60s-vintage academic buildings by John Carl Warnecke, and until now the academy has lacked an adequate planning framework for their conservation. Thanks to a \$190,000 Campus Heritage grant from the Getty Foundation that the U.S. Naval Academy Foundation -- the USNA's private, nonprofit fund-raising arm -- obtained in 2006, the academy now has a comprehensive catalog of its buildings as well as templates for the detailed evaluation of their historic significance and conservation needs.

After six annual grant-making cycles, the Getty Foundation's \$13.5 million Campus Heritage Initiative has come to a close. The foundation awarded grants ranging from \$45,000 to \$250,000 to 86 American colleges and universities. "We'd been funding architectural conservation all over the world for years, including grants to universities for individual buildings on their campuses," Getty Foundation director Deborah Marrow says. "We found that preservation wasn't very well incorporated into campus planning. Master plans needed to factor in the conservation of buildings more fully. The moment seemed right for the Campus Heritage Initiative. And it took off immediately. Sometimes grant programs take years to catch on."

Historic campus buildings and landscapes form an important part of the nation's cultural patrimony. Campuses of high architectural quality, New Urbanist town planner and University of Miami architecture dean Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk says, have a big impact on students raised in unexceptional suburbs. At the same time, modernism's lengthy postwar predominance has challenged the established character and identity of many American campuses. This has provoked the wrath of alumni, as noted in "Campus Heritage Preservation: Traditions, Prospects, and Challenges," a booklet that served as the foundation for the Getty initiative.

"Campus Heritage Preservation" documents a 2002 Chicago roundtable involving designers, scholars, planners, preservation professionals and administrators. The booklet reflects the academic doctrine that preservation is about documenting what is typical of a given historical period and conserving it for the future. This doctrine casts the campus as a palimpsest, the locus of successive stylistic layers accruing over time.

The historic core campus of the University of California at Berkeley, for example, displays three distinct epochs of development, elucidated in an informative Web site the university has posted about its Getty-funded Landscape Heritage Plan. The Berkeley campus started out, in the decades following the Civil War, as a picturesque landscape sparsely populated with buildings. Then an impressive array of classical edifices in more formal settings was grafted onto that landscape in the first decades of the 20th century. The postwar period, in turn, has brought a more urban, densely built-up campus, including some insensitively designed and sited modernist structures.

As Notre Dame architecture Prof. Steven W. Semes notes, the latent danger in academic preservation doctrine is that *time*, or the evaluation of a building's or landscape's significance within its historical frame of reference, can take precedence over *place* -- whether the building or landscape enriches or detracts from the historic character of its setting. Though Mr. Warnecke attempted to play off elements of Flagg's architecture in designing his four Naval Academy buildings, employing variants of Flagg's mansard roofs for instance, his buildings break the vivid scenographic spell Flagg cast. Stylistically akin to Philip Johnson's "ballet-classical" New York State Theater at Lincoln Center in Manhattan, Mr. Warnecke's buildings may be "of their time," but it is unlikely many visitors to the Yard would say they're worthy of their place.

Ms. Marrow emphasizes that the Getty program was not intended to be prescriptive -- that it was formulated on the understanding that different campus constituencies have different takes on design issues, a key theme of the Chicago roundtable.

As a result, what is most striking about the Campus Heritage Initiative is the range of settings it has covered. These include older, moneyed academies like Brown, Bryn Mawr and Middlebury with stylistically variegated campuses; architecturally distinguished state institutions from coast to coast; and several historically black institutions in the South where simple Georgian architecture has traditionally predominated. New York University, Boston's Emerson College and the Savannah, Ga., College of Art and Design have received grants largely or exclusively targeting originally nonacademic buildings they have acquired in historic districts. The initiative also has funded historical research on and the development of conservation strategies for noted landscapes at numerous schools besides Berkeley -- from Pittsburgh's Chatham College, a small women's institution, to the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

Bronx Community College of the City University of New York, formerly the site of NYU's University Heights campus, received the most significant Getty grant specifically intended to aid the preservation of older campus buildings. The \$238,000 grant allowed the college to develop a conservation master plan for Stanford White's majestic but frayed and underutilized Gould Memorial Library plus the open-air Hall of Fame colonnade behind it, and two adjacent White buildings. Institutions receiving grants targeted at preservation of the "recent past" include the University of Chicago, whose mid-20th-century academic buildings on the city's South Side were designed by the likes of Eero Saarinen and Skidmore Owings and Merrill.

But perhaps the most interesting recipient in the modernist category is Florida Southern College in Lakeland, whose west campus consists of a dozen structures, including a covered pedestrian circulation network 1.5 miles long, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. This complex was erected over a two-decade period starting in 1939. The building material, a buff-colored "textile block" consisting of cement with a sand aggregate, proved problematic both in its composition and in the way it was laid up, according to restoration architect Jeff Baker of Mesick, Cohen, Wilson, Baker Architects in Albany, N.Y. Moisture has permeated the blocks and their steel reinforcement, causing serious deterioration. Many of the little pieces of glass embedded in Wright's masonry to infuse interiors with colored light have fallen out or

been pilfered by souvenir hunters. These problems are daunting but "definitely solvable," Mr. Baker says.

The Getty initiative funds only the planning stage of campus preservation, the idea being that this will serve to leverage funds for implementation. Some recipient institutions will apply their historical research to applications for state, national or even international landmark registers with a view to enhancing their campuses' prestige and fund-raising effectiveness.

Ms. Marrow believes the variety of schools and priorities targeted for grants will yield a range of preservation precedents that will, over time, benefit a far wider circle of academic institutions. To that end, the Getty Foundation is funding a Society for College and University Planning effort to disseminate the lessons learned through the Campus Heritage Initiative. The initiative may not have settled the time versus place issue, but its results will surely be percolating on American campuses for years to come.

Mr. Leigh is at work on a book about monuments.