

CUSE Funding Final Report

Keaton Bloom

A generous grant from the Center for Undergraduate Scholarly Engagement allowed me to conduct architectural research at several historic American college campuses. My travel, during the 2013 fall term break, took me to Virginia and North Carolina, visiting a total of 6 historic sites. These sites included Thomas Jefferson's masterful campus at the University of Virginia, his summer home Poplar Forest, Washington and Lee University, Sweet Briar College, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Duke University. These colleges encompassed a wide range of styles, settings, and student body sizes, as well as different programs of study. For example, the University of Virginia and the University of North Carolina are both very large, public, research institutions. Duke is a medium sized private research institution. Sweet Briar College and Washington and Lee are both quite small, private liberal arts colleges. Some were located just at the edge of towns, while others were located in very rustic, rural settings. However, they all exhibited masterful architecture and planning and are fine examples of the typical American college.

My research was primarily visual documentation in the form of photographs and artistic and analytic sketches, which allowed me to dissect the places I visited and learn what makes them successful, or how they would be improved. Scale is a key part of any architectural space, but especially the quads on a college campus. Quad are often times directly related to the total land and enrollment size of the campus. The Lawn at the University of Virginia, for example, is a beautifully scaled quad in it's original form. However, as the university grew in size, so did this main quad, and now it is stretched out quite a bit longer, perhaps more than it should be. The main quad at the University of North Carolina, however, is almost twice the length or the original Lawn, but is a similar proportion and masks it's huge scale with many large trees. The wide variety of architectural styles employed as the various campuses also allowed me to see how an architectural style can compliment, but also work independently from the masterplan and landscaping.

This funding opportunity was invaluable. It was not only very fruitful and allowed me to capture information that would have been impossible from book or internet research, but it was also a lot of fun. It's rare as a student that you can spend multiple days devoting time to a personal interest, as this funding allowed exactly that. The most important advice I could give another student is that preparation is the key. Do plenty of research ahead of time and understand your subject as much as you can. This way, you can focus on gleaning new information on site, rather than attempting to understand information you could have gained from library research.

This experience has been an overall very positive one. I learned much about my research subject matter, as well as about writing funding proposals and managing a research grant. My senior thesis will benefit greatly from this opportunity!