



May 21, 2024

*Winston L. Thorne, AIA
2024 President*

Dear AIA Delegates,

On behalf of over 4,100 emerging professionals in California, we are writing to express our opposition regarding the proposed introduction of new membership categories within the American Institute of Architects (AIA). While we appreciate the organization's efforts to evolve and adapt to the changing needs and demographics of the profession, this proposal raises several concerns across all of AIA's membership categories. It is essential to carefully consider the potential impact of the new membership categories on existing member benefits, resources, and programming and communicate a plan for implementation across all levels. It is essential to thoroughly evaluate the unintended consequences and impacts before proceeding with any changes.

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Our concerns include:

- **Potential for Confusion and Resentment:** The addition of new categories risks creating confusion among members and diluting the value of existing membership tiers. Current members may feel alienated or resentful if they perceive that their benefits are being diminished to accommodate new groups.
- **Impact on Public Perception:** The public already struggles with understanding what constitutes an architect. Introducing additional titles could further complicate this perception, leading to more confusion and potentially undermining the credibility of the individual and the profession.
- **Lack of Transparency and Detail:** There has been insufficient communication regarding the specific benefits for each new category. Without detailed information, it is impossible to assess the true impact on existing members. These details must be shared with delegates well in advance of the Annual Business Meeting.
- **Financial Viability:** There has been no comprehensive fiscal analysis presented to date to determine how these changes will affect the organization's budget and programming. It is crucial to understand the financial implications across all components, National, State and Local and ensure that resources are not being diverted away from current members.
- **Infrastructure Concerns:** AIA's existing infrastructure may not be equipped to sustainably and responsibly handle a significant influx of new members. If the organization is not prepared to support these additional members, the overall quality of services and support could suffer.

As the representative body for members in California, we would like to offer specific feedback on the proposed changes to each of these categories:

May 21, 2024

Page 2

Academic Membership

We agree academic professionals have long been missing voices within this organization. However, the introduction of the "academic membership" raises concerns about its appeal to faculty members. Without a clear incentive structure and with the minimal benefits outlined, it's challenging to justify the investment into this category. Faculty members are likely to question the value proposition: what tangible advantages does this new membership offer? Without a designation or robust benefits package, it risks being perceived as a superficial addition rather than a meaningful enhancement to their professional development and institutional engagement.

International Associates and International Architects

We welcome the distinction made between international Associates and Architects, though some concerns have surfaced regarding the role of International Associates. Presently, internationally licensed individuals qualify as International Associates. As we move towards International Associates being unlicensed members, concerns arise about fee adjustments to reflect this change.

- International Associates will continue to pay higher dues, even though many are working towards licensure in the United States, just like their American counterparts.
- AIA has not clarified how it will operationally distinguish between those actively pursuing licensure and those who are not within this category.
- There will be no clear distinction, similar to the proposed Associate/Senior Associate categories.

Clarity on these matters is essential for ensuring fairness and transparency within our membership structure. Until these issues are thoroughly addressed, we firmly oppose the introduction of the new International Associate and International Architect categories, as they currently pose more risks and uncertainties than benefits to our organization.

Associate/Senior Associate Membership

We appreciate the interest in differentiating between these two groups and we recognize customization of the member experience is critical given the expectations of different generations. However, we question if perhaps this could not be accomplished without utilizing a new title that may be confusing within some firms' structure/titling hierarchy.

In addition, while we have heard there are currently no plans to set different dues rates for the Senior Associate level, we oppose this proposal as it is highly likely that differing dues rates will be introduced in the future if closing a revenue goal is a key driver in developing these new categories.

Student Membership

We acknowledge the intention behind introducing the student membership category - to foster a connection between AIA and the future of the profession - and we support this goal wholeheartedly. However, we must emphasize that we cannot endorse this new

May 21, 2024

Page 3

structure without a clear outline of benefits for students and an improved/direct link to AIAS. We believe the introduction of the new student membership category poses several obstacles, including discrepancies in member benefits and inconsistent communication between AIA and AIAS, and a potential for confusion and division within the two organizations. Specifically, we have noted challenges in member contact information and membership number synchronization that currently exists; how will this new structure improve this disconnect?

Furthermore, for local components with nearby AIAS chapter(s), this poses questions about the duplicative efforts and several concerns have been raised with no or limited response:

- There are concerns regarding the specific benefits for a student joining AIA in addition to AIAS.
- It is unclear whether AIAS chapters will be held accountable for providing the same benefits to Student members of the AIA, such as extending member pricing for AIAS programming.
- Ensuring that the database for AIAS feeds into the AIA database, particularly for accessing the AIA transcript to track credits for AxP prior to graduation, is a significant concern.
- There is a potential threat to the financial health and future of the AIAS organization if students opt to join just AIA (free membership opportunity) instead of both AIA and AIAS.
- Confusion about AIAS and AIA amongst students is a concern that needs to be addressed.

Therefore, we oppose the introduction of the student membership category as it currently stands, due to the significant unresolved issues and potential negative impacts on both organizations.

We remain committed to the success and longevity of the AIA, and we are confident that, by working together, we can address these concerns thoughtfully and constructively. We welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters further and contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding a clear way to support the membership of the AIA.

Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on these potentially transformational changes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Winston Thorne". The signature is stylized with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Winston Thorne, AIA
President