

August 2021

A warm welcome to all new students and welcome back to returning students! We are so excited to have you come to campus for the fall term, at least for some of your classes and activities, and we look forward with hope for a fully in-person winter term. During the last year, the campus has been nearly empty, the halls of the John A Russell Building quiet, and the faculty and staff have missed your energy, laughter, and vitality.

I recognize that the last year has been very difficult in many ways. The pandemic is unprecedented and turned our worlds upside-down. We had to change the way we do almost everything – teaching, learning, socializing. Some of these changes opened up new ways to work and meet with people, but other changes and effects of the pandemic were just plain hard. We also have witnessed another historic shift: the discovery of undocumented graves at residential school sites across Canada has amplified Indigenous voices that previously were not being heard. Throughout North America we cannot ignore the calls for long-awaited racial equity and social justice. These movements require us to look within ourselves, to reconsider our knowledge of history, our privileges and biases, and the power we have to make positive change.

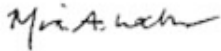
As a student, you might think you are powerless, but student voices are powerful. You understand your own lived experience better than anyone else, and I encourage you to use your voice to share your experiences and ideas. Of course, power comes not just from talking but also from listening. Therefore I urge you to use your ears as well, to listen carefully to others when they describe their experiences and ideas. There is great strength in diversity – in considering views and ideas different from our own and engaging in new experiences. It is imperative that we listen to and learn from each other, support one another, and communicate our shared ideas clearly and widely. If we do so, I strongly believe that the Faculty of Architecture will be a place where each one of us can thrive and that as a collective we can lead positive change in our communities. We often say that students are the leaders of tomorrow, but as a student, you truly can be a leader today.

Designing and planning are both social and political acts. Well-designed buildings and outdoor spaces can make people's lives easier while bringing them joy and inspiration, but they also can demonstrate authority and privilege and create boundaries of exclusion. The thoughtful design of spaces and places can connect us to memory, history, or even places of fantastic imagination. Great spaces can help improve our health and the health of the natural environment – we are capable of designing wall systems that purify the air, “irresistible stairs” that entice us away from the elevator, and policies and landscapes that protect fragile habitats. We are able to design places of sublime beauty, yet so often we fall back on conventional systems that place the highest value on speed, efficiency, and low cost. Our value system is skewed toward the financial bottom line – and away from the very things that make us happy, healthy, and productive human beings. We must reconsider our values and start from a place of respect and reciprocity with each other, the land, and all living beings. As we reset from the pandemic and continue working toward truth and reconciliation, I encourage you to consider health and happiness not just as valid factors but as essential goals for your research and design work.

Your own health and happiness are vital as well, so please take advantage of the services available to you at the university. Visit the Student Support homepage for links to a variety of services: [Student supports | University of Manitoba \(umanitoba.ca\)](#). If you need accommodations for your courses, please see the Student Accessibility Services website: [Accessibility | University of Manitoba \(umanitoba.ca\)](#). Also be sure to stay up to date on the latest COVID-19 protocols: [COVID-19 \(coronavirus\) updates | University of Manitoba \(umanitoba.ca\)](#). We appreciate your flexibility throughout the year, as we may have to adjust building occupancies and teaching methods based on the University's pandemic protocols. To help you prepare for the fall term, we have ways for you to connect to other students virtually and find information through the FAUM Salons and the UM Commons: [FAUM Salons | Faculty of Architecture | University of Manitoba \(umanitoba.ca\)](#) and [UM Commons | University of Manitoba \(umanitoba.ca\)](#).

I hope you are as enthusiastic about starting the new academic year as I am! Please stay healthy and safe. I look forward to seeing you on campus soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mira Locher".

Mira "Mimi" Locher, FAIA, MAA, LFA (she/hers)
Dean, Faculty of Architecture