



Message from the OAA President

Fair Treatment for Architecture Interns and Students

I hope your autumn is going well, both professionally and personally. These continue to be unique times for us all, but I am heartened to see the resiliency and adaptability displayed by those in the architecture profession. Today, I wanted to reach out to OAA members, as well as those on the path to licensure in Ontario, about a critical issue affecting us all.

The practice of unfair compensation for—or outright not paying—students and interns (whether Intern Architects or OAAAS Technologists) remains a great concern. While the Association has clearly voiced its opposition for a number of years, I will take this opportunity to once again unequivocally state that the use of unpaid students or interns is not condoned. **The OAA strongly believes it is incumbent on architectural practices to pay their employees fairly and to provide reasonable working conditions.**

I am proud to say this position is one shared by our profession at large. **In the 2018 Annual General Meeting (AGM), 96% of members in attendance supported a motion to remove professional exemptions coded within outdated provisions in the *Employment Standard Act*.** These exemptions currently prevent architects and students in training from having basic workplace rights, including minimum wage, daily limits on hours of work, rest periods, time off between shifts, overtime pay, sick leave (including bereavement leave), public holidays, and vacation with pay. This prohibits the modern and equitable profession we need architecture to be.

While these professional exemptions can affect all members of our profession, it is interns and students—and often the newly licensed—who are particularly vulnerable despite their valuable contributions. **The way interns and students are treated early in their careers can have lasting impacts on the profession as a whole, and their contributions must be recognized and fairly compensated.**

During the previous provincial government's *Changing Workplaces Review*, the OAA was recognized for its leadership in recommending the removal of these professional exemptions for architecture and other related professions. We have continued to advance this position to Ministry officials, and will continue to do so until the necessary changes have been made. This is a critical step to bringing fairness to the profession. (You can read an example of one such letter by [clicking here](#).)

Until this important change is done, I ask all architectural practices to adopt the ethical approach of properly compensating their teams, and to treat all employees equitably regardless of their architectural status. **If we want society to value the work we do, we must start by first valuing the work all of all students and interns—not just licensed members.**

Finally, it has been brought to our attention that some firms may be using exclusivity clauses within contracts for Intern Architects. While their use may serve a legitimate purpose for some members of the profession, it is particularly concerning to see them applied to interns. If Intern Architects are unable to pursue employment, they cannot gather the experience and hours necessary for licensure. Practices are reminded that it is only the regulator—not individual firms—who can determine who is eligible for licensure and who can practise architecture.

The OAA is aware of a Ministry of Labour announcement yesterday regarding its desire to ban the practice of imposing non-compete clauses on employees. While the legislation has not yet been introduced and we will need to study it carefully before coming to a final determination, I certainly support this move in principle. Regardless of whether this proposed legislation passes, **exclusivity clauses should not be utilized within intern contracts.**

By working together, I know that we can create not only a respectful and equitable profession that benefits all employees, but also a profession that embraces and upholds the value of architecture.

I thank you for your support in this important endeavour. If you have any questions or comments, I encourage you to reach out to the OAA as we work together to regulate our profession in the public interest.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Speigel', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Susan Speigel, Architect
OAA, FRAIC
President

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