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Competition: Berkeley Prize 2022

BY MERLIN FULCHER, COMPETITIONS 18 OCTOBER 2021

Endorsed by the College of Environmental Design’s Department of Architecture at The University of California, Berkeley, the Berkeley Prize is accepting entries for its annual, international architectural writing prize (Deadline: 1 November 2021)

The open three-stage competition – which features a \$35,000 prize fund – invites full-time undergraduate architecture students to write a 500-word essay outlining how they would design low-income housing in their local area.

Applicants are encouraged to team up with a social scientist undergraduate and must also include two captioned photo images as part of their submission. Around 25 semi-finalists will be asked to expand on their concept in an additional 2,500-word essay.



University of California, Berkeley



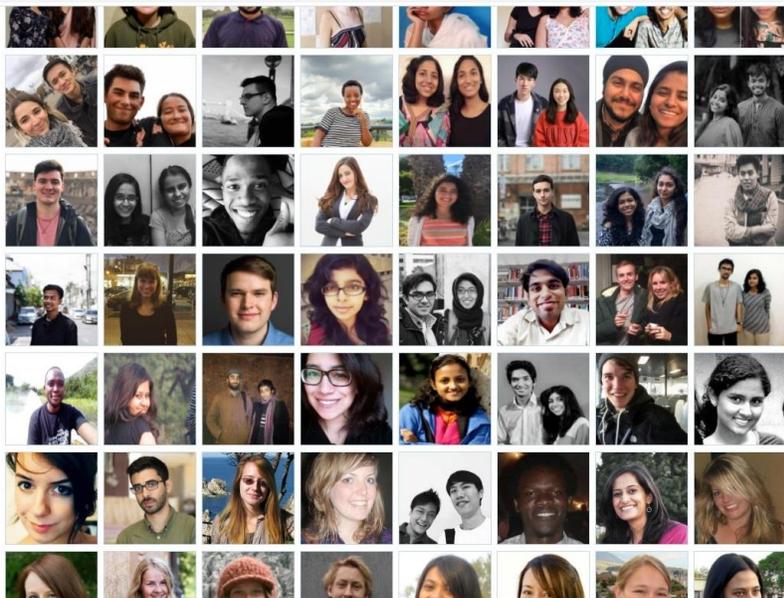
The College of Environmental Design

According to the brief: ‘You have been asked to design a housing project for the disadvantaged in your local community. What do you need to know to ensure that your design will both reflect the lives and aspirations of those for whom you design and for the project to be a proud, long-term addition to the fabric of your community?’

‘Your task is to start the process for the design of housing for 100 low-income families and individuals that in all probability will include children, the elderly, and the disabled. Develop a strategy that will guide you and your selected professional associates in helping make this project succeed and be a model for the social art of architecture.’

Founded in 1868 – The University of California, Berkeley (*pictured*) is a major research institution with 31,000 undergraduate and 12,000 graduate students. Since 1998, the university’s architecture department has hosted the privately-endowed, annual Berkeley Prize to demonstrate to aspiring architects that ‘design can and does play a major role in the social, cultural, and psychological life of both the individual and society at large.’

This year’s Berkeley Prize, the prize’s 24th year, invites architecture undergraduates to team up with a social scientist student to draft a short essay outlining a new method for designing low-income housing anywhere in the world.



Some of the Berkeley Prize winners since 1998

Submissions must be in English, and the competition is open to Students enrolled in any accredited undergraduate architecture program or diploma in architecture program throughout the world. First round essays will be judged on their creativity, response to the question, appeal to a broad audience, writing style, social significance, and potential to be developed into a longer piece of writing.

Judges will include Elli Mosayebi of Zurich-based Edelaar Mosayebi Inderbitzin; Augustine Owusu-Ansah, partner at Accra-based S Tetteh + Associates; the USA-based writer and architect Dorit Fromm; and Aleksis Bertoni, co-founder of affordable housing provider Type Five.

All semifinalists will be invited to compete for a special ‘Community Service Fellowship’ in February next year. The overall winner of the essay competition will be announced in mid-April and will receive a minimum prize of \$8,500. The remaining prize fund will be shared out at the jury’s discretion.

How to apply

Deadline: The deadline for applications is 1 November

Contact details: Email: info@BerkeleyPrize.org

Visit the [competition website for more information](#)

Q&A with Benjamin Clavan, Architect

The coordinator of the prize discusses their ambitions



Benjamin Clavan

Why are you focussing this year's Berkeley Prize on low-income housing for local communities?

How to adequately house 7.9 billion people in the world is a vast undertaking. The dramatic lack of adequate shelter for upwards of 20 per cent of the world's population – perhaps as many as 1.6 billion individuals - is certainly a perennial issue for architects, whether totally socially-motivated or less so. The current pandemic has placed further emphasis on this issue, even among a rising group of formerly middle-class families and individuals who find themselves without adequate shelter as a subsidiary result of the conflagration.

At the core of the prize is our conviction that better architecture only happens as a result of close interaction, dialogue, and research with the people who live, work, and interact with the buildings architects design. Six years ago, housing was at the forefront of the 2016 Berkeley Prize. That year's topic was 'SHELTERING THOSE IN NEED: Architects Confront Homelessness.' The Question was in two parts:

- *Who is doing what in your community to confront the issue of the men, women, young people, and children without any shelter?*
- *As both an individual and as a professional, how do you see yourself assisting in providing shelter to those in need?*

This year it seemed to us that the students needed to confront the housing issue straight on, not as simply academic researchers, but as the future architects who would need to work directly to help resolve the housing deficit. How would they, albeit early in their education, begin to confront the realities of this issue in their own communities? In the process, how would the students' proposals – their outline, so to speak – reflect not only the specific building issues, but more importantly incorporate the human element(s) that would elevate shelter into home.

What is your vision for the future of the affordable housing in local areas, and what would you like to see in submissions to the competition?

The Berkeley Prize is focused on enabling undergraduate architecture students to enter the professional world of architecture with a worldview that is probably much different from many of the architects and associated professionals with whom they will be working and interacting. This worldview suggests that housing is not a commodity, nor can it be approached with cookie-

cutter, form-based solutions. This requires not only an understanding of the technical aspects of the building issue, but a close understanding of the people who will reside there.

At the very least, those who will live in the housing need to play an active role in the design of their habitat. Architects are not meant to be social scientists, but they need to learn how to work with those involved in the social sciences such as sociology, anthropology, psychology in order to provide a people-based solution. This year’s Berkeley Prize offers the opportunity for undergraduate architecture students to display both an understanding of how this cross-disciplinary interaction might occur and a glimpse at how the results of the interaction might, in fact, change the currently accepted approaches to providing affordable housing and perhaps even its form.

To stimulate innovative thinking about a liveable and sustainable home, for African cities. The quest here is to produce a aesthetically pleasing eco-friendly home, that is easy to construct, with a budget of **5000** dollars.

State of African Cities
 According to the African development bank nearly 40,000 to 50,000 people are added to African cities every day. Our intervention takes a holistic view of the widespread housing deficit and poor living conditions in cities. For us, housing is a process, grounded in the fact that, among a majority of urban migrants in Africa, a house is a lifetime endeavour in which the house undergoes several modifications over a long duration, especially where there is upward income mobility.

Dwelling Space + Support Space Dwelling Space + Support Space + Future Expansion

60%
OF AFRICAN CITY DWELLERS LIVE IN POOR HOUSING CONDITIONS IN SLUMS

- Household Utility as part of street life
- Household commercial activity as part of street life
- Use of recycled materials (timber and aluminium sheets)
- Household refuse on the street
- Poorly defined and unpaved walkways

Sketch Design 0 1 2 3 4 5 m 5000 for 5000 Housing Competition

Winning submission submitted by 2022 Berkeley Prize juror Augustine Owusu-Ansah of S Tetteh + Associates for an international design competition organised by Shelter Afrique in 2017.

What role do you see this competition playing in the development of new local, international and underrepresented architectural and design talents, and helping to address the underrepresentation and engagement of many communities in our interpretation of the built environment?

For our 2018, twentieth anniversary year, we asked all of our top winning students from the preceding years to tell us in 500 words and a few illustrations what their subsequent professional lives were about. We received 28 responses.

If there is one common thread to the Berkeley Prize's winning students' submittals, it is that each and every one of the students is committed to a social life, one in which other people's needs and desires are at the forefront of what they do. A better, people-centered architecture is the ultimate design goal of the Berkeley Prize. A better, people-centered worldview is equally if not more important as the past student winners' professional lives demonstrate. What is particularly striking from these responses is how the past student [prize winners integrate an evidence-based approach to design into their personal and professional lives in a variety of different ways.](#)

Are there any recent similar essays or projects, either locally or internationally, which have delivered impressive results?

As you know, architectural competitions and housing proposals and projects are ubiquitous today throughout the world. We have chosen this year's jurors because of their direct involvement with some of these efforts. You can see the [Introductions to our Question](#), which this year have been prepared by these four, for some very interesting projects and perspectives on the subject.

How do you see the prize evolving in the future and what competitions will you hold next?

We are continually looking for ways to make the prize even more interactive. Certainly, architecture faculties around the world need to become more engaged. Our successfully, but short-lived teaching fellowship was one such effort, but the time, energy, and resources it required were at that point beyond our reach. We are constantly attempting outreach to make the prize and its message a part of the curriculum of the architecture schools worldwide. Certainly, if the prize could become an independent study course for their students, we think many more students would respond.

At the same time, we look to our evolving roster of fellowships to enrich the architecture education experience. Each has had its plusses and minuses, but we believe that the student winners have almost to a person shown enormous intellectual growth as a result of these out-of-the-studio experiences. It might be that more focus should be placed on the Fellowships themselves, rather than try to keep the many moving parts of the Essay competition at full speed.

From a technical standpoint, we have never been happy that all submissions must be presented in English. There is a wide world where English is not the first, or even second or third language. The design issues that the prize explores, however, are present everywhere. Unfortunately, to date, no language interpretation program has been adequate to place English-speaking with non-English-speaking students at the same level for competition purposes. Even though we tell our readers to try to overlook language inconsistencies even in English, we are waiting anxiously for a breakthrough in online language interpretation.

Having just started the 2022 prize cycle, planning for the 2023 prize has not yet begun, including any possible changes to the current prizes.
