COALITION OF USC FACULTY TO EXAMINE THE HISTORY AND FUTURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN AT JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL PARK

USC Faculty From Architecture, Heritage Conservation, Building Science, Engineering, Geology and Archaeology Join Forces With National Park Service Specialists

January 14, 2013, Los Angeles  The University of Southern California (USC) School of Architecture will host Joshua Tree: Seeking the Spirit of the Place / Crafting Design Guidelines for Joshua Tree National Park, the first of two interdisciplinary conferences on Saturday, January 19. The conference will feature 10 speakers, including National Park Service (NPS) specialists from Yosemite National Park and the NPS Headquarters. A coalition of USC faculty are working with the NPS staff at Joshua Tree National Park to examine the history and future of environmental design in the Park. Joshua Tree, located 140 miles east of Los Angeles in the Mojave Desert, was first established as a National Monument in 1936, and then became a National Park in 1994. The park protects 501 archeological sites, 88 historic structures, 19 cultural landscapes, and houses 123,253 items in its museum collections.

“As a former USC graduate student, I am delighted to have the opportunity to work with the University on a project that has the potential to improve the architectural quality of the structures and facilities at the park.” Said NPS Superintendent and USC alumnus Mark Butler, a 32-year veteran whose team includes specialist staff in historic preservation and archaeology.

The USC coalition includes faculty from architecture, heritage conservation, building science, engineering, geology and archaeology. Architecture Professors Douglas Noble and Karen Kensek organized the group and are leading the research examining future buildings for the park. Geology Professor Scott Paterson has worked at Joshua Tree in the past, and has coordinated groups of students examining the unique geology and seismic conditions at the park. Lynn Swartz Dodd, curator of the USC Dornsife Archaeology Research Center, will help the team understand the contributions and value of past human activity in what is now the park. The director of the USC Heritage Conservation program, Trudi Sandmeier, is working with graduate students to analyze and document the buildings from the more recent cowboy and mining eras of the park.

“[This] is a ‘win-win’ scenario for both the NPS and the students.” Said Trudi Sandmeier, “Not only will students have the opportunity to put their classroom lessons to practical use, but the NPS staff will be able to cultivate the next generation of cultural resource professionals while accomplishing mission-specific tasks.”

“This is an instance of USC Architecture and Archaeology making a difference at the national level, in the very parks set aside to protect irreplaceable U.S. natural and cultural heritage.”-- Lynn Swartz Dodd

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Architecture students will be designing for the park based on a broad set of environmental design guidelines developed by the entire faculty and NPS team. The goal is to test whether the guidelines can result in a form of powerful architecture that fits in the park and does not overwhelm the natural environment. The desert of Joshua Tree will test the students’ ability to design sustainable architecture in an extreme climate. Heritage Conservation students will measure and document the old Silver Bell Mine ore shafts and prepare documentation for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS).

Joshua Tree: Seeking the Spirit of the Place / Crafting Design Guidelines for Joshua Tree National Park will be held Saturday, January 19, 8:30 am to 5:00 pm in the Gin D. Wong, FAIA Conference Center, Harris Hall on the USC University Park campus. Contact Professor Douglas Noble for more information, dnb@usc.edu.

The USC School of Architecture, which began as a university department in 1916, was the first accredited school of architecture in Southern California. Its 3,000 graduates include two Pritzker Prize winners, Frank Gehry ’54 and Thom Mayne ’69, and an array of other important figures who are advancing modernism, prefabrication, sustainability and innovative urban design.

The School is committed to studying and supporting the city of Los Angeles, recognized as a center of tremendous creativity and diversity that claims a double frontier in both America and the Pacific Rim.

The School offers bachelor’s degrees in architecture and architectural studies, and both master’s degrees and certificates in architecture, building science, heritage conservation and landscape architecture. A Ph.D. in architecture also is offered.

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January 14, 2013
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