

Professor Emeritus Tom Laging, FAIA
2014 Harry F. Cunningham Gold Medal Recipient
Architectural Excellence in the State of Nebraska

Tom Laging, FAIA, Professor Emeritus of Architecture at the University of Nebraska is the recipient of the 2014 Harry F. Cunningham Gold Medal for Architectural Excellence in the State of Nebraska. The Gold Medal is the highest honor the Nebraska Chapter of The American Institute of Architects (AIA) can bestow and is awarded in recognition of the most distinguished achievement in architecture or service to the profession of architecture in the State of Nebraska.



Nominator Wayne Drummond, FAIA, Dean Emeritus and Professor, College of Architecture, University of Nebraska-Lincoln said “In my four decades of engagement in education, I have never encountered a more committed educator and professional. Tom has had a major impact on thousands of students. Even more exceptional, Tom Laging has devoted all forty-six years to the education of future professionals in the College of Architecture at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.”

The Laging family name runs deep in the history of education and contributions to the arts in Nebraska. Tom’s father, Duard, was an esteemed professor and longtime chairman of the Art Department. His mother, Barbara Laging was a professor of interior design at UNL and an accomplished sculptor. Tom’s sister briefly taught Spanish at the university and has become a highly acknowledged bead artist. As the architect of the family, Tom found unconditional support for his work from his wife Mij , a former Soho gallery director and currently a highly skilled counseling psychologist. Tom’s daughter Quinn followed Mij’s interest in psychology and has chosen to use equine counseling as her vehicle of service.

Laging’s early interest in architecture began as a teen with a summer apprenticeship with the emerging firm of Clark and Enersen. As a student his passion for urban design issues began with a conference he attended that featured Ed Bacon, Lou Kahn and an incredible presentation by Le Corbusier. After graduating from UNL, Laging’s first large scale design experience involved parts of an ambitious design plan for 33 square miles of inner city Detroit.

Laging’s desire to teach began with his return to school at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. After graduation he served in the Peace Corps where he helped to develop Lima’s first comprehensive plan and assist squatter communities before joining the UNL faculty.

Engagement, service to communities, and commitment to students have characterized Tom’s four and a half decades of teaching based on these early experiences.

As a highly skilled environmental visualizer, Professor Laging has informed his teaching through public service to the University, the architecture profession, and an urban design consulting practice.

Beginning with a 1973 NEA grant he co-authored with Roger Schluntz the *Nebraska Capitol and Environs Plan*, an award-winning document that launched current public awareness and support for the preservation and enhancement of the Nebraska State Capitol. According to Robert C. Ripley, AIA, Nebraska Capitol Administrator, this study and a design and policy proposal for the south mall of the Capitol done in Tom's studio lead to creating the current Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission, which Tom is a charter member.

Laging's service to the profession is based on leadership of over fifteen of the AIA's national Urban Design Assistance Teams (RUDAT'S) and over 40 state and local based charrette activities. This AIA program promotes understanding of how community dynamics operate. Tom, with Gordon Scholz, adapted it to a student based assistance model offered to numerous Nebraska communities. He was elevated to a fellow in the American Institute of Architecture for his service to communities.

In conjunction with his former colleague Tim McGinty, Laging has been engaged professionally for over twenty years with both environmental graphic design and the design and visualization of urban environments. This national engagement in America's major urban centers has brought experience based teaching to his student oriented teaching style.

Laging's teaching has taken him to numerous universities as an invited critic including a Fullbright at the Simon Bolivar University in Caracas and in 2013 to the Isthmus School of Architecture in Panama.

In the most recent decade Tom has served as the director of the Architecture Program, the Killinger Distinguished Professor and as a 13 year member of the Nebraska Board of Engineers and Architects.

Former faculty member, Roger L. Schluntz, FAIA, Professor and Dean Emeritus, The University of New Mexico said, "I am in awe of his vast capabilities and know well the high regard that the thousands of his former architecture students have of him. Through his instruction and mentorship, the enormous and positive influence Professor Laging has had on the practice of architecture throughout Nebraska is incalculable."

[Click here](#) to view Tom's full submission.

The Gold Medal commemorates the achievements of Harry Francis Cunningham who came to Nebraska as lead architect for Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue's office during completion of the tower phase of construction for the State Capitol following Goodhue's death in 1924. It was Goodhue's revolutionary building design which won the nationwide competition in 1920 for the creation of the state house in Lincoln. Cunningham subsequently established the first school of architecture at the University of Nebraska- Lincoln.