



May 29, 2025

Sara Kay, Honorary AIA  
AIA Nebraska  
335 N 8th St. A  
Lincoln, NE 68508

RE: Letter of Nomination for Doug Wignall, FAIA for Harry F. Cunningham Gold Medal

Sara and Members of the 2025 Selection Committee:

It is my honor to write this letter of nomination for Doug S. Wignall, FAIA, my friend and partner in practice for over 20 years. Doug demonstrates the professional standards and leadership skills that Harry F. Cunningham represented, and I am confident that his contributions are worthy of the tradition the Cunningham Gold Medal honors.

Upon receiving his Master's Degree in Architecture from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Doug very intentionally chose to stay here in the middle of everywhere, turning down offers from well-known East Coast firms to build a career in Nebraska. Through his studies and early work on significant Omaha projects like the Joslyn Art Museum addition and the Western Heritage Museum renovation (now the Durham Museum), Doug's passion for design excellence grew. And though he subsequently decided to follow a career path that would take him away from design, he has remained true to that passion in all his practice leadership positions.

In 2012, Doug succeeded Merle Bachman as President of HDR Architecture and began a journey to redefine the 21st-century global architecture practice. He expanded the practice with offices in New York, Los Angeles, Vancouver, Sydney, and London with the certainty that a global perspective and expertise would ultimately strengthen local studios by connecting each to deep benches of expertise and experience. But he also recognizes that success at the local level is greatly dependent upon a deep understanding of culture and attachment to

local communities. For Doug, context is everything: he understands architects must ensure that the buildings they design are appropriate for the climate, cultural, economic, social and political contexts in which they are to be built.

In the past 14 years, Doug has been a founding patron and sponsor of daOMA (Design Alliance OMAha, Inc.), Unicameral Design Magazine and the champion for HDR's sponsorship of the U.S. Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2021 and 2023. Under Doug's leadership, HDR has won four national Honor Awards, had three national Young Architect award recipients, and elevated five members of the practice to Fellow. All of this was accomplished from a seat of leadership that never left Nebraska.

It seems fitting that Doug was the recipient of the Delta Sigma Tau Bronze Medal in 1992, representing excellence in academic and design achievement and signifying professional potential. Looking back on his career, he has indeed lived up to those high standards. He is an extraordinary advocate for architects and a man whose deed followed his word. I believe he is a deserving member of the Harry F. Cunningham Medal.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thomas J. Trenolone'.

Thomas J. Trenolone, FAIA, LEED AP, NCARB  
Senior Vice President and Design Director



## Doug Wignall

FAIA, RAIC, LEED AP

From his 10th-story office in Omaha's Aksarban neighborhood, Doug Wignall proudly leads an 1,800-member global architecture practice. With 42 design studios spread across the globe—including Omaha and Lincoln with 145 staff—the firm has grown exponentially since Doug took the reins in 2012. At that time, the architecture practice was very U.S.- and Healthcare-centric. Under Doug's leadership, it has grown in scale and size and is now ranked as a top global firm in Health, Science, Technology, Education and Civic architecture.

Doug's career journey was not one he planned. Descended from German immigrants who settled on a 1,280-acre farm outside of Liberty, NE, Doug has long embraced the influences of the farmers and preservationists who came before him. Truth be told, he didn't intend to be an architect at all, enrolling at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in chemical engineering. But a serendipitous conversation during his freshman year with a first-year Architecture student

ignited a curiosity and passion that has subsequently informed a 33-year career dedicated to advancing the architecture profession.

### **Designer: Embracing the Tenets of Design Excellence**

Doug also didn't plan to spend his entire career at the same architecture firm. He joined HDR as an intern in 1991 and was hired full-time when he graduated in 1992. He spent those early days in his career doing what junior architects do: details and models.

One of the very first projects he worked on after graduation was the renovation and pavilion addition for Omaha's Joslyn Art Museum. HDR was the local architect for the project, partnered with Foster & Partners (their first U.S. commission). Doug jokes that he was so proud of his work on the project that he would drive his wife and kids to the site to show off the progress.

He also spent a lot of time listening and learning and slowly began developing his own personal point of view about design and its power to improve the human condition.

In 1994, Doug had the opportunity to test that point of view during an interview for a project in Michigan that, to be candid, HDR wasn't supposed to win. But he and a senior architect decided that instead of leading the discussion with project management (HDR's strong suit), they would instead engage the client in a dialogue about how *design* could influence the outcome of the project and the future of its health system.

The strategy paid off. HDR won the project—and many ensuing projects—by elevating the tenets of design excellence. This strategy laid the foundation for Doug's career from that point forward.

### **Director: Thinking Beyond Buildings**

This new way of thinking about projects resulted in Doug's promotion to Director of Healthcare Marketing for the Omaha office and a surrounding 18-state territory stretching from the Pacific Northwest to the Rust Belt. His subsequent success in this region led to his promotion to firmwide Director of Healthcare in 2005.

In the following years, Doug championed the evolution of HDR's "non-traditional" architectural services to keep pace with the challenging and diverse architectural field. He oversaw the development of a Consulting Group that integrated clinical, operational and facility planning into the firm's services, as well as the Equipment Planning and Technology groups. He also helped foster the firm's collaborations with manufacturers to design products for healthcare environments. Doug also expanded the Healthcare practice globally, leading acquisitions in Canada and pursuing—and winning—projects in the Middle East, South Korea, Trinidad and China.

### **President: Innovate Across Disciplines, Geographies and Firms**

Fourteen years ago, Doug was named president of HDR's Architecture practice. Since then, he has continued to advance the early lessons he learned about the value of design. In fact, Doug's advocacy of design excellence

has guided the constant transformation of the firm, evolving it from a practice concentrated on technical and planning expertise to a design-driven, 21st-century architecture practice. His strategy of combining organic growth with acquisitions has grown HDR's non-U.S. business from 11% to nearly 35% of revenues. And he embraces the exponential power that comes with the collaboration fostered by alternative project delivery methods.

Under Doug's leadership, the firm's practitioners are empowered to challenge conventional practices and innovate across disciplines and geographies. Their diversity—architects, engineers, interior designers, planners, social scientists, clinicians, strategists, researchers, economists and data geeks—speaks to the design culture that Doug has fostered and to his willingness to invest in development, testing and implementation.

In 2017, Doug was elevated to AIA's College of Fellows by demonstrating how design excellence has been his compass to elevate architects and the profession. Today, he remains an ardent advocate for the power of design, a champion of the idea that architects bring value to the world by applying critical thinking and problem-solving to address pressing social, environmental and economic challenges. In fact, he argues, with the rapid rise in technology, architects' roles as critical thinkers and empathetic designers are more important than ever before.



## Strategies & Initiatives with Significant Local, National and Global Impact

### Elevate and nurture a culture committed to design excellence.

- Doug added a Global Director of Design position at the uppermost management level and design leadership infrastructure at all levels and in all geographies.
- Funds HDR's annual Opacity design review where esteemed jurors from architecture, academia and media critique the firm's recent work and help evaluate its creative output. Opacity's design discourse has helped HDR garner nearly 300 design awards, including 53 AIA Nebraska and 21 AIA Central States awards during Doug's tenure.
- The HDR Great Plains Studio (Omaha and Lincoln) was named AIA Nebraska's Firm of the Year in 2021.

### Expand new service offerings that lead to greater value propositions.

- By expanding non-traditional services that complement and enhance traditional architectural design, Doug has been directly involved in fostering change in how architects deliver buildings that solve clients' complex problems.

### Leverage technology to improve human performance and potential.

- Doug has encouraged adoption of predictive analytics, computational design, an initiative to mine and organize data from Revit models and the creation of AI-driven tools that facilitate the early stages of project development to enhance creativity and efficiency.

### Implement actions to achieve improved human and environmental health.

- Doug championed HDR's early membership in the U.S. Green Building Council in 1992, one of the first architecture firms to do so. HDR is now a platinum member.
- Doug approved HDR's signing of the Architecture 2030 Challenge and the AIA 2030 Challenge and now mandates energy modeling on all projects.
- Doug approved HDR's endorsement of the Health Product Declaration Open Standard to reduce chemicals of concern in the products that HDR specifies and purchases.
- Doug joined fellow architecture firms to encourage the AIA Board to reinstate the Sustainable Design Education requirement.
- Doug petitioned AIA's Board of Directors to make sustainable design metrics part of national AIA Honor Awards.

### Develop and share best practices for global expansion as a sustainable business strategy.

- Doug has executed a global expansion strategy that has grown the architecture practice from \$195 million to \$438 million in bookings.
- Through presentations and articles, Doug has candidly shared lessons learned about global expansion, discussing its associated risks and challenges.

### Advance the collaborative process of alternative delivery methods.

- Doug encourages collaborations and partnerships as essential to achieve the highest level of design excellence and actively promotes Integrated Project Delivery models.
- In 2021, Architizer named HDR the most collaborative firm in the profession.

### Create new leadership and career opportunities for architects.

- Doug co-chaired HDR's Talent Management Initiative, authoring a plan enabling growth and development for all staff at all career stages.
- Doug directed the creation of BOOST, a formal mentoring program to build a leadership pool. Over 150 candidates have completed the program.
- Doug funds fellowship-level research initiatives on topics like regenerative design, rural hospitals and bio convergence to support innovation in practice areas.

### Reimagine and support education to foster collaboration, dialogue and innovation.

- Doug led the gift to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to support the new pavilion for the College of Architecture.
- Doug helped establish and provided more than \$500,000 in funding to support a Graduate Program in Healthcare Design (renamed Design Health) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, an avant-garde approach to 21st-century education that partners industry with academia.

### Champion the rewards of giving back.

- Doug was a co-founder and helps lead the HDR Foundation, providing grants to nonprofit organizations that promote education, healthcare and healthy communities. To date, the HDR Foundation has given more than \$11 million in grants to more than 350 organizations—including \$1.4 million to 57 organizations in Nebraska.
- The Design 4 Others™ (D4O) initiative, funded by HDR's architecture practice, has provided pro bono architecture and engineering services to more than 40 critically needed projects in underserved communities to address global health issues.
- The HDR/Gary A. Spring Scholarship provides funding to a third-year Architecture student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

## Serving the Profession and the Community



**Wight & Co.**  
Board of Directors, 2025 – present



**Georgia Institute of Technology,  
School of Design**  
Guest Lecturer, “Entrepreneurship in  
Professional Practice,” 2023 – present



**Cramer Center for  
Design & Innovation,  
Northern State University**  
Board Member, 2024 – present

**Hadrian Manufacturing**  
Board of Directors, 2019 – 2021



**American Institute of Architects**  
Professional Member, 1992 – present  
Elevated to College of Fellows, 2017

**Large Firm Group Roundtable**  
International Task Force, 2012 – 2020  
Advocacy Task Force, 2012 – 2020  
Dean’s Forum, 2012 – 2013



**Design Futures Council**  
Executive Board Member, 2013 – 2018  
Named Senior Fellow, 2015



**Royal Architectural Institute of  
Canada (RAIC)**  
Member, 2007 – present



**National Building Museum**  
Board of Trustees, 2014 – 2019

**HDR Foundation**  
Board of Directors, 2013 – present



**HDR, Inc.**  
Board of Directors, 2012 – present



**daOMA (Design Alliance Omaha)**  
Founding Sponsor and Member,  
2007 – present



**Joslyn Castle Foundation**  
Member, 2004 – 2006

**City Council, Glenwood, Iowa**  
Chair, Funding Subcommittee,  
1998 – 2004  
Chair, Construction Subcommittee,  
1998 – 2004



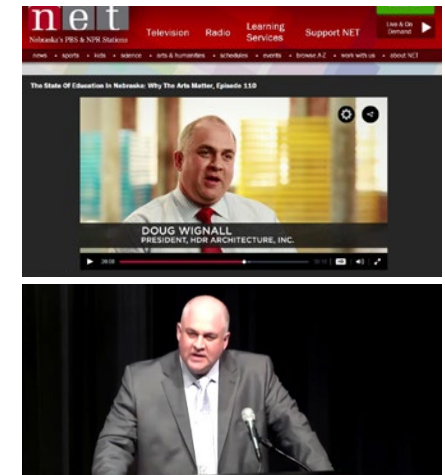
Obviously, in my role now, I am not a practicing architect—but I still feel like I am even though I serve primarily as an advocate for architects. I think I am doing what I was meant to do. I designed a few projects early on in my career and I was okay at it, but I am not nearly as talented as others. I’ve never had a problem saying that out loud. I think my superpowers are aligned with what I’m doing. I can advocate not only for HDR, but for the entire industry about the importance of great design. I have always believed that design matters, and now I focus on championing that idea.”

– Doug Wignall



## Selected Presentations & Podcasts

- “Achieving Technical Excellence in Engineering and Architecture,” panelist, Engineering Influence podcast, American Council of Engineering Companies, October 4, 2024
- “Spikes and Plateaus,” commencement speaker, College of Architecture, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, December 2017
- “Resiliency,” Leadership Summit on the Business of Design, presenter, November 15, 2015
- “Strategic Imperatives for Architecture and Design,” co-presenter with Jack Diamond, World Design Forum, Design Futures Council, September 15, 2015
- “Innovation in Education and Practice,” panelist, Design Futures Council Leadership Forum for Institutional Affiliate Members, May 13, 2015
- “Large, XL, & XXL Architectural Firms: Design Creativity,” presenter and panelist, Architectural Record’s Innovation Conference, April 30, 2015
- “World Design Forum,” moderator and sponsor, Design Futures Council, February 3-5, 2015
- “HDR Case Study and Strategic Model,” presenter, Design Futures Council Executive Board Meeting, May 22, 2014
- “The State of Education in Nebraska: Why the Arts Matter,” Net Television, Nebraska’s PBS NPR Station, November 21, 2013
- “Adjusted Contours,” presenter, event for AIA students during AIA national conference in Denver, CO, June 20, 2013
- “Keynote Address: Beijing International Medical Center Global Launch,” presenter, September 17, 2012
- Panel Discussion: “A/E/C Firm Success Stories,” SMPS Foundation Think Tank, October 12, 2010
- “Envisioning Healthcare Paradigms in the 21st Century,” presenter, Engineers Ireland Annual Conference, April 18, 2007
- “Architecture...Bricks and Mortar with Not a Lot of Money,” co-presenter, Association of Cancer Executives Annual Meeting, April 9, 2002
- College of Architecture, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, guest lecturer, 1999
- College of Architecture, Guest Lecturer, University of Iowa, 1998



UNL Commencement, December 2017

## Selected Articles & Blogs Authored by Doug Wignall

- “Educating Our Future,” *Design Intelligence*, December 3, 2015
- “Design with Social Conscience,” *World Health Design*, July 2014
- “Where are the Architect Heroes?,” *ArchDaily*, May 2013
- “Ten Things to Consider When Building a Global Practice,” *Design Intelligence*, November 2012
- “Health Design Interventions,” *Live Better*, October 2011
- “The Healing Process of Design,” *Live Better*, January 2011
- “Sustainable Strategies,” *World Health Design*, October 2009
- “Design As a Critical Tool in Bariatric Patient Care,” *Journal of Diabetes Science Technology*, March 2008
- “An Important Population,” *Inside ASHE*, March/April 2007
- “Keeping Hospitals Safe: Disaster Preparedness Plays a Role in Health Care Construction,” *Construction Executive*, November 2006
- “HealthCare: Seek Cure for Projects,” *Design-Build Magazine*, September 2002
- “Shared Vision Leads to Success for Portage Health System,” *The Academy Journal of the Academy of Architecture for Health (AAH)*, July 1999
- “The Art of Lighting,” *Architectural Record Lighting*, May 1995
- “Joslyn Art Museum,” *Iowa Architect*, Winter 1995

## Reimagining Education to Support Collaboration, Dialogue and Innovation

Graduate Program in Healthcare Design  
**University of Nebraska-Lincoln**

From 2008 to 2013, Doug partnered with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) to establish the Graduate Program in Healthcare Design, an avant-garde approach to 21st-century education that links professional practice with an interdisciplinary healthcare studio. Renamed Design Health, Doug sponsored and funded this focus area (approximately \$500,000) within the College of Architecture, which has impacted the education of more than 400 students.

Doug was resolute that the program confront pertinent issues and conduct research in order to address stewardship, public health, and projective models for healthcare environments. It was a studio-led experience with research-informed design at its core, so that graduates entered their professional careers with critical knowledge and specialization, creating value and relevancy within the design professions. Studios explored a variety of healthcare facilities, from large hospitals to small clinics in the Great Plains region, as well as healthcare environments in the developing world. The program also conducted a number of healthcare seminars in Evidence-based Design (EBD), Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE) and core research methods for healthcare.

One of the few programs of its kind, a Master of Architecture, BSD in Interior Design or Bachelor of Landscape Architecture degree can be informed by collaborations with Public Health, Planning, Building Science, and other collateral areas of study. Design Health involves faculty and students from Architecture and Interior Design. Professionals from diverse backgrounds, including HDR practitioners and representatives from HDR client organizations, lent expertise and engaged in the dialogue.



“

You learn just as much from each other as you do from the faculty. I appreciated the collaborative effort because it's something we are not usually given the opportunity to see in school. It opens your eyes to the real world. I also really enjoyed the benefit of witnessing cross-disciplinary work. Seeing how their [interior design, outside professionals] thought process works alongside our own was great. I found out that it takes more than one person to get a job done. Our peer reviews also helped with this because our studio was a place of mutual dependence.”

– Kendra Thompson  
 Fifth-year MArch candidate

## University of Nebraska-Lincoln, College of Architecture HDR Pavilion

The new addition to University of Nebraska–Lincoln’s iconic Architecture Hall has been named HDR Pavilion, honoring a gift to the project from HDR that Doug championed and the firm’s deep connection to the College of Architecture and generations of alumni.

“With generations of alumni in integral roles at all levels at HDR, from interns to company leaders, the University of Nebraska–Lincoln College of Architecture significantly contributes to our top-ranked, award-winning practice,” said Doug Wignall, architecture president at HDR. “This new addition will greatly enhance the spaces students have to design and create. It also provides HDR an opportunity to give back to a program that has made such a positive impact on our firm.”

“This is a tremendous investment by HDR into our College of Architecture and its students,” said Chancellor Rodney D. Bennett. “Our experiences are shaped by the environments in which we live, work and grow, and HDR Pavilion is a leading example of how collaborations with industry leaders can enrich UNL’s educational experience.”

Design and construction of the HDR Pavilion was led by HDR, Boston’s NADAAA and the Whiting-Turner Contracting Co. Its resilient, exposed mass timber structure and infrastructure will provide students with embedded learning opportunities in mass timber design and construction, which is increasingly a preferred construction method in Nebraska and around the world.

A portion of HDR’s gift also provided funding for courtyard enhancements, a roof deck terrace and a deployable wall in the lobby that will allow the space to accommodate multiple uses.

“Naming the HDR Pavilion is a testament to HDR’s unwavering support for Nebraska’s College of Architecture, our faculty and our students,” said Kevin Van Den Wymelenberg, dean of the College of Architecture. “This expansion will spark innovation, inspire creativity and collaboration, and help our faculty and growing student body to design and build a brighter future.”



# “Design Always Matters”

In his many roles at HDR, Doug’s influence on project work locally, nationally and globally has been far-reaching. For some, he has been highly visible. For others, he has quietly worked behind the scenes, guiding and moving them forward. In Nebraska, the culmination

of his efforts is a portfolio of individual and studio work that has deeply informed the architectural vernacular throughout the state, elevating and reinforcing his long-held personal belief that “design always matters.”

## 1992 – 2000

Joslyn Art Museum Addition  
(in association with Foster + Partners) ✨



First National Bank  
Technology Center



Children’s Hospital  
Replacement Hospital



Holland Performing Arts Center  
(in association with Polshek Partnership) ✨



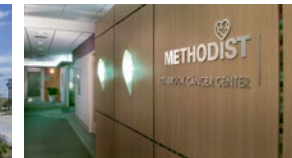
Western Heritage/Durham  
Museum Renovation



Fremont Health Cancer Center



Methodist Estabrook Cancer Center



## 2000 – 2010

Baxter Arena, University of Nebraska at Omaha ✨  
Do Space ✨  
Siena Francis House Emergency Shelter ✨

The Salvation Army Ray &  
Joan Kroc Community Center ✨



Lauritzen Gardens Marjorie K. Daugherty  
Conservatory ✨



HDR Global  
Headquarters



Johnny Carson Center for Emerging Media  
Arts, University of Nebraska-Lincoln ✨



## 2010 – 2020

University of Nebraska Medical  
Center Project Health



Omaha Central Library



Kiewit Luminarium



HDR named AIA Nebraska Firm of the Year (2021)

Northstar Foundation Facility Addition\*

Douglas County Juvenile Justice Center

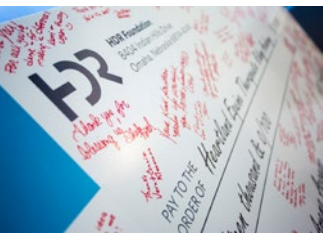
UNL College of Architecture HDR Pavilion

National Center for Resilient and Regenerative  
Precision Agriculture

## ← 2020 – 2025

✨ AIA Nebraska Award

\* AIA Central States Award



## The HDR Foundation

Doug helped co-found the HDR Foundation and serves on its board of directors, safeguarding its mission and all final grant-making activities. Philanthropic funds support community organizations in in the communities where staff live and work. Since its inception, 57 organizations in Nebraska have received \$1.4 million in funding, a few of which are noted here.

### Foster Love

A \$50,000 grant funded furniture and equipment for this organization's new location, meeting the basic needs of nearly 7,000 children placed in state custody or out-of-home care.

### Heartland Equine Therapeutic Riding Academy (HETRA)

Three grants totaling more than \$20,000 helped upgrade facilities and animal care for this group who offers equine-assisted activities to adults and children of all ability levels.

### Girls Inc.

A \$15,000 grant upgraded the North Omaha center's classrooms and computer lab into age-appropriate makerspaces.

### Partnership 4 Kids

Two grants (\$34,290 and \$45,266) helped expand the immersive elements of an existing STEM curriculum, engaging and inspiring students from preschool to high school.

### RADIUS

A \$32,950 grant supported the purchase of a new vehicle to transport vulnerable youth to appointments, home visits, college classes, jobs, and outings.

### Applied Information Management Institute

A \$38,838 grant expanded internet access and upgraded a laptop lending library to low-income participants, while a \$29,837 grant helped purchased equipment for students to explore coding, robotics, 3D modeling and design.

### Boys & Girls Clubs of the Midlands

A \$40,676 grant provided 108 new tablets to youth participating in the Readers to Leaders program.

### Project Harmony

With a \$5,070 grant purchased materials for HDR volunteers to make 150 tie blankets for children entering this regional advocacy center.

### Veterans Health Administration

A \$10,000 grant helped purchase food and sundry items for 100+ homeless veterans served by the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System.

### Hot Shops Art Foundation

This \$30,000 grant supported the purchase of an ADA-accessible passenger elevator, advancing equity in arts accessibility.

### Omaha Astronomical Society

A \$19,350 grant helped implement the nationwide Library Telescope Program at 50 libraries in small towns throughout Nebraska, Iowa and South Dakota.

### Metropolitan Community College Foundation

A \$11,260 grant funded solar panels at the Yates Illuminates farm to allow year-round growing and add sustainable education programs on urban farming.

### ASHRAE Nebraska Chapter

A \$3,000 grant purchased copies of the children's book "Lucy's Engineering Adventure" for local elementary schools.

### Heartland Family Service

A \$11,319 grant helped purchase and install artificial grass in a sensory atrium designed to calm young people experiencing a behavioral health crisis.

### Waterloo Volunteer Fire and Rescue

A \$100,257 grant helped expand the cadet program, designed to equip youth and teens with essential skills for emergency response.

### Youth Emergency Services

A \$37,185 grant enhanced an Emergency Shelter Program with a new van to transport homeless and near-homeless youth to appointments, work and school, as well as enable emergency shelter placements.

### Project Pink'd

A \$10,000 grant provided 90 surgery complementary kits to breast cancer survivors in Nebraska and Western Iowa.



May 28, 2025

Dear Cunningham Gold Medal Committee Members,

It gives me great pleasure to support Doug Wignall, FAIA, for the Harry F. Cunningham Gold Medal. Not only is it an honor for me to write this letter, but it provides a heartfelt opportunity to reflect on his leadership skill as an exemplar and pathfinder. Doug has inspired self-confidence and artful management skills for young people including emerging professionals, as well as women in the profession and innovators. So much of his work as an officer and volunteer has encouraged others to achieve new levels of practice success. I would like to emphasize the value of his people-centered skills as a transformational leader and mentor. Doug drives the mission and vision of our profession to new levels of relevance by demonstrating true entrepreneurship with giant steps forward.

I have had a 20-year-plus opportunity to watch Doug in action in leadership roles at the AIA including the AIA Large Firm Roundtable, the Design Futures Council Executive Committee, and the Cramer Center for Design and Innovation at Northern State University in Aberdeen, South Dakota where he sits on the Board of Directors. Moreover, I have had an opportunity to hear Doug teach the course on Entrepreneurship in Professional Practice on three occasions at the Georgia Institute of Technology, College of Design. I am impressed by Doug's careful consideration of his words and advocacy as well as Doug's keen sense of direction not only for his firm but also for the future of our profession. He very intentionally works to make architecture more valuable, and thus more valued, in this ever-changing world.

As a contributing author to *Lessons from the Future*, published by Wren Editions, Doug joined with other leaders – including architect Moshe Safdi, TED founder Richard Saul Wurman, SCAD president Paula Wallace, and architect

Norman Foster – to share reflection on their careers with future leaders. The book is gifted to architecture and design graduates at commencements in the United States, Canada and Great Britain. Doug's penetrating bottom line is this message:

*“Dear students: Here is an important truth to remember: Someday you may very well be ranked according to three very simple yet important qualities – and in this order: 1. You have to be nice. The world needs a lot more nice people. 2. You have to be smart. You need to make smart, thoughtful, intentional decisions and 3. You need to be ambitious. Ambition is fine, so long as it comes third and not first. Those three qualities lay the foundation for a great career in architecture.”*

Doug follows this introduction by addressing the agenda of the moment, but young architects and professionals never forget “the three.” Nice. Smart. Ambitious. It is the playbook upon which Doug himself has built a significant career with an enduring legacy.

Thank you for your consideration of Doug Wignall for the Harry F. Cunningham Gold Medal.

**James P. Cramer, Hon AIA, Hon IIDA**

Co-Chair, Cramer Center for Design and Innovation, Northern State University  
Lecturer, Entrepreneurship in Practice, Georgia Institute of Technology  
CEO Emeritus, American Institute of Architects



May 29, 2025

AIA Nebraska Selection Committee  
Harry F. Cunningham Gold Medal

Dear Selection Committee,

I am writing today to support the nomination of architecture leader Doug Wignall, FAIA, for the Harry F. Cunningham Gold Medal.

One of the most important aspects of being an impactful leader is anticipating and preparing for the future, a future where design of the built environment has never been more important in improving the quality of life for individuals. Successful leaders leave a legacy of passion for purpose, confidence in direction, understanding of the individual's responsibility and joy in contributing to making a difference while inspiring a collective spirit.

In this increasingly complex world, architects and designers today (and well into the future) must possess a variety of abilities including the ability to coalesce widely disparate groups of information and knowledge through research and meaningful application, understand and distill trends versus longevity; a scope of knowledge including sustainable implications of material choices to the awareness of global concerns; demographic and social challenges of the 21st century to opportunities for global engagement; and, the confidence for an intentionally rigorous pursuit of design quality as an expectation. These abilities are underpinned by the respect for (and ability to work seamlessly with) a wide variety of professionals, disciplines, consultants and expertise, while responding to pressures of time, resource, and changing technology.

The legacy of Doug Wignall as an impactful leader and champion of design is felt not only by HDR or the various industries and locations of its clients, but by the impact to all firms who hire UNL graduates of the College of Architecture. His leadership and sustained commitment, interest and investment in the college and shaping the future, through his support of architecture and design education, will provide the focus for my comments here.

Doug is an example of a successful leader who seeks to prepare future leaders, provide opportunities for mentorship and professional growth, and invest in the future of our respective professions. Leaders like Doug put what they know is best for the profession and society ahead of personal accolades. Sometimes these leaders are laying the groundwork and encouraging from behind the scenes, while sometimes they are necessarily in front, quite visibly casting vision and inspiring confidence. Doug's support and aid in the formation of the Healthcare Design Studio (Design Health) experience was phenomenal and set the stage for a model of education for the future where industry and the academy work hand in hand to prepare future design professionals. The studio experience incited a passion in students to pursue meaningful design, impacting people at arguably the most vulnerable and stressful times of life. The offsite studio setting encouraged a bonding of the students (approximately 2/3 architecture, 1/3 interior design) as they researched, developed in-depth programs, and pursued a rigorous agenda of innovative design solutions incorporating the complex array of significant issues in a wide array of scales of healthcare facilities.

Additionally, the studios researched and explored solutions for healthcare needs in the developing world. The impact and value of the multidisciplinary team approaches for students and the faculty should not be underestimated. The investment in consultants from around the country working with the students and faculty, the investment in time and expertise from the firm, the field trips to facilities, and a wide array of resources made available was, quite simply, an amazing contribution to the success of the program and studio. Each student and student team grew immensely in several ways – in the capacity to respect each other (even though different disciplines), to enter discourse with common language of design and to articulate ideas in more than jargon, to delve into not only the large-scale context and overview, but the intricacies of detail providing consistency and clarity to their design work. The mutual respect generated in the studio was profound. Instructors (architecture, interior design, HDR) modeled collaborative behavior as a team – we did not always share the same views, and students gained from our mutual respect even with differing perspectives. That we won a North American award for excellence and innovation in teaching was affirmation of the novel approach and exceptional output of the studio. Indeed, teaching collaboratively in this studio remains the highlight of my teaching career.



Shortly after becoming Dean of the College of Architecture and recognizing Doug's Nebraska roots coupled with a story of success in leadership, I invited him to be the speaker for our graduation celebration ceremony. I wanted our students to be inspired to maintain a strong work ethic; maintain their values; to give back, become involved, see beyond themselves; and, to say "yes" to all sorts of opportunities. Doug did not disappoint, and graduates were able to see firsthand and relate to the person, not merely an unreachable industry leader.

While many other examples of the support engendered by Doug Wignall exist, there are two additional examples I'll focus on here.

The first is an example that preserves the legacy of an individual through a competitive scholarship and reflects the enduring value and impact of one person on others. The HDR/Gary A Spring Scholarship represents an opportunity for a 3rd year architecture student to understand the embodiment of qualities of someone who was loved as an architect and as a person – thus the most-cherished honor of this scholarship. This scholarship is special because it awards on two levels: the student's architectural work quality, and the student as a person.

Secondly, and one of that is so important to the College, University, and profession, is that Doug led the gift to name the new pavilion for the College of Architecture. This addition features a living laboratory of mass timber design and construction, studios with adjoining classrooms and support spaces, and inspiring spaces that exemplify the power of design.

Doug Wignall represents the qualities deserving of the highest award from AIA Nebraska, the Cunningham Medal. His impact on current and future generations of architects demonstrates a steadfast commitment to and investment in empowering individuals with the experiences and surroundings to operate in a manner that respects the complex array of human condition, sustainable solutions, diversity in design culture and collaboration, technology and systems. He embodies not only the fostering of design excellence in all its aspects, but the work ethic, leadership, generosity, and care for humans we expect (and wish to continue to foster in our students) of Nebraskans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katherine S. Ankerson".

**Katherine S. Ankerson**

Senior Advisor to the Chancellor  
Professor and Dean Emeritus, College of Architecture