

Monument Lab-BMC project: Overview of 2021-2022 Activity and an Invitation
April 21, 2022

Dear members of the Bryn Mawr community: I am happy to share this letter from Paul Farber, Director of Monument Lab, providing an overview of this year's partnership with BMC and inviting everyone to a year-end reflection this Friday, 4/22, from noon-1 p.m.

Best, Kim Cassidy

Dear Bryn Mawr College Community,

Sending kind greetings for the end of the year. On behalf of the Monument Lab team, I am writing with a brief overview of this year's progress on our multi-year project with Bryn Mawr College. I am also writing with an **invitation** to join us this Friday from 12-1pm in Great Hall for an **End of Year Reflection** with the fuller project team to discuss what we learned this year.

As you may know, Bryn Mawr College is engaging Monument Lab, an independent nonprofit public art and history studio in Philadelphia, on a multi-year collaboration to design a process for commissioning a campus public artwork that responds to the legacy of exclusionary practices at the College. Working closely with Bryn Mawr's Monique Scott and others, this process is informed by campus research that aims to reckon with, dismantle, and reimagine narratives of the College's history in order to help offer an artistic and reparative vision for its future.

As part of this process, this academic year, the College hired a cohort of paid student researchers to work with Monument Lab to extend an open question to the campus community: What stories are missing from Bryn Mawr College's campus? These students – Annalise Ashman (2024), Linda Chen (2023), Elliot Fleming (2022), Olivia Harkins-Finn (2023), Aaliyah Joseph (2022), and Faryal Khan (2022) – brought criticality, creativity, and wisdom to our work together that will nourish these efforts for years to come.



Student Research Cohort, L to R: Linda Chen, Aaliyah Joseph, Faryal Khan, Elliot Fleming, Olivia Harkins-Finn, and Annalise Ashman. (Daniel Jackson/Monument Lab)

Our work this year focused on gathering a “living history” of the campus through a Monument Lab methodology: during an Engagement Week in February 2022, BMC’s students, staff, faculty, and alums were invited to respond to the research question through paper engagement forms that asked respondents to map the campus according to their own perspectives and experiences. Respondents could draw, sketch, and/or describe their maps. There would be no right or wrong answers. As part of Monument Lab’s approach, it was important to ask questions about the campus within public spaces of the College. (For off-campus alums, we opened the option of virtual engagement through an adapted survey.) In total, over 350 BMC students, staff, faculty, and alums participated in this engagement process.

The student research cohort facilitated these exchanges at sites around campus during an Engagement Week, and then with the assistance of Bryn Mawr College’s Library and Monument Lab, transcribed and coded the forms. This meant delineating unique places named through this mapping, modes of storytelling employed by respondents, and gathering insights gleaned from each and every form. From our initial reflections and analysis, we have witnessed a composite mapping of the campus that highlights its multiplicity: places of trauma and transformation, erasure and memory-keeping, individuality and collectivity.

You can view a full gallery of Engagement forms [online here](#). We will be displaying them in full during Friday’s End of Year Reflection in the Great Hall.

Our work also included a number of interviews with long-serving staff and faculty members and several alums, undertaken in order to provide a longer and broader perspective on the stories and spaces of memory and missing stories on campus. These interviews will also inform the ongoing project.

As we close our activities for the year, our intention is to share what we gathered as an offering back to the campus – to pause on and appreciate the spirit of engagement, generosity, and truth-telling on campus from students, staff, faculty, and alums alike. We extend special thanks to Professor Monique Scott (Associate Professor of History of Art and Director of Museum Studies, and Co-Director of this initiative); Ruth Lindeborg (Chief of Staff and Secretary of the College); members of the History Advisory Group; the Bryn Mawr College Digital Scholarship Support team including Alice McGrath (Senior Digital Scholarship Specialist) and Karina Gonzalez (Educational and Scholarly Technology Assistant); and the President’s Office. We especially wish to thank the remarkable student cohort, the best brain trust we could ask for this year.

Looking forward, further learnings and data from the engagement forms will be shared in several ways – through write-ups and public displays on campus that give further insights into the patterns and themes that emerged from this mode of campus mapping; as a research dossier and companion guide provided to artists invited to propose campus public artwork with Monument Lab; and as a collection available in the College’s archives for further interpretation. We look forward to continue learning with the campus, refining our efforts, and engaging with

those who have long been seeking pathways for reckoning and reimagining the campus and its relationship to the world around it.

Gratefully,

Paul Farber
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