

***December 12, 2025***

**RESPONSE TO  
Historical Significance Determination Letter for Eaton Residence Hall - 1211  
Dickinson Drive  
Known as  
Eaton Residential College (Formerly Julian S. Eaton Residence Hall)**



***Prepared for:***

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## **I. Overview**

Here's the short version. The City of Coral Gables Historic Preservation Staff ("Staff") correctly determined that Eaton Residential College ("Eaton Hall") does not meet the Coral Gables Historic Preservation guidelines for designation as an individual landmark. That decision should be affirmed for the reasons more fully explained in the sections that follow.

The Local Historic Designation Report (the "Report") filed by the Applicant improvidently argues in favor of designation based on a misapprehension of the historical record and the omission of several important facts. Stripped of its rhetorical flourishes and examined against the facts, the Report provides no basis for designation and the record reveals none because:

- (i) Eaton Hall was not a pioneering essay in Subtropical Modernism and is not a Bauhaus building (see pages 5-7 below);
- (ii) Eaton Hall was not innovative in its design, construction, or adaptation to the local climate (see pages 4, 18-19 below);
- (iii) Neither the University of Miami nor Little were nationally ranked in the influential vanguard of post-War architectural design (see pages 18-19 below);
- (iv) Architect Robert M. Little was not a pioneering Modernist or master architect (see pages 19-20 below);
- (v) The building has been modified to a degree that its design integrity is compromised (see pages 11-15 below).

The longer version follows.

## **II. Summary of Methodology**

We have reviewed documents and conducted research related to Eaton Hall pursuant to the University of Miami's application for determination of significance, the City's finding that the building fails to meet criteria of significance (as set forth in Article 8, Section 8-103 of the Coral Gables Zoning Code), and the responding application submitted to the City of Coral Gables for designation of Eaton Hall as a historic landmark. Set forth below is a more detailed discussion of our findings in the form of a point-by-point summary, explaining why, as preservationists and architectural historians (who meet the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualifications Standards, 36 CFR 61, in Architectural History, Historic Architecture, and History), we find that the City's determination was correct that Eaton Hall fails to fulfill the standards of significance under each specific criteria of the above cited Coral Gables code.

### **III. Eaton Hall Fails to Meet Coral Gables Criteria for Designation**

*The City of Coral Gables Zoning Code, Article 8 (Historic Preservation), Section 8-103 Criteria for designation of historic landmarks or historic districts, defines four main criteria for assessing the potential eligibility of a historical resource for designation as a City of Coral Gables historic landmark. To be considered eligible, a building must fulfill at least one of the criteria.<sup>1</sup> The code also stipulates that the resource must possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, or association. Properties may be found to possess significance at a local, state, or national level.*

**In the case of Eaton Hall, a point-by-point evaluation against these criteria may be summarized as follows:**

### **IV. Historical, cultural significance:**

#### **1. *Is associated in a significant way with the life or activities of a major historic person important in the past.***

*Eaton Hall does NOT meet this criterion.*

Eaton Hall was named in memory of Julian S. Eaton, who was the recently deceased Chairman of the Board of Trustees (1945-1951) but is not directly associated with his life, accomplishments, or service to the University. The posthumous naming of the dormitory was honorific, given Eaton's recent passing and in his bequest of \$37,476 cash donation and \$60,000 worth of property to the University (Eaton Hall's construction cost totaled \$1.5 million). ("UM Building Spree Continues," *The Hurricane*, August 13, 1954:1). Naming a building after a person does not automatically constitute a significant association with that person, as their name can be applied to any structure.

#### **2. *Is the site of an historic event with significant effect upon the community, city, state, or nation.***

*Eaton Hall does NOT meet this criterion.*

Eaton Hall was one of many buildings constructed as part of UM's building boom of the 1950s and one of thousands constructed in the post-World War II era by colleges and universities.<sup>2</sup> While the University's expansion in this period may have impacted Coral Gables, that impact cannot be ascribed to Eaton Hall in particular. In addition to Eaton Hall, approximately 60 other new buildings were constructed at the University of Miami to

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<sup>1</sup> Coral Gables Zoning Code, Article 8: Historic Preservation: <https://codehub.gridics.com/us/fl/coral-gables#/c1f4f4d0-bc9b-4ce7-9858-ad5e499b7cbb>. None of the Criteria listed in the code are applicable to Eaton Hall.

<sup>2</sup> Carla Yanni, Chapter 4: "Dorms on the Rise," in *Living on Campus: An Architectural History of the American Dormitory* (Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

accommodate its soaring enrollment between 1945 and 1970. Eaton Hall does not possess a distinctive or significant association with any specific community, city, state, or national event. Mere temporal association with the period of the University's expansion is not sufficient to meet this criteria. (See Hurricane, August 13, 1954:1, 5).

**3. *Is associated in a significant way with a major historic event whether cultural, economic, military, social, or political.***

*Eaton Hall does NOT meet this criterion.*

Eaton Hall is not associated with any major cultural, economic, military, social, or political event. Culturally, its architectural form is not derived from, nor does it reflect, a dogma or design philosophy and is rather a functional form selected for its practicality and cost efficiency, in keeping with its architect's self-described, purely practical approach (See: Richard Wallace, "Interviews with Architects: Robert M. Little —Exponent of Economy," *Florida Living*, October 12, 1952, 3-5.) Although Eaton Hall was constructed during the 1950s expansion of the UM campus, it is not an exemplar of any distinctive ideology, belief system, or cultural movement.

**4. *Exemplifies the historical, cultural, political, economic, or social trends of the community.***

*Eaton Hall does NOT meet this criterion.*

Although every building can be said to represent its era of creation, Eaton Hall is not a unique or distinguished exemplar of the mid-20th century in Coral Gables, Florida, or the nation. It was designed to house as many students as possible and was constructed quickly (within 10 months) to serve immediate needs.

Eaton was not the first Modernist residence hall at UM and was preceded by Marion Manley and Robert Law Weed's Modernist-style married student housing complex—a 26-unit housing village built in 1948—that is represented by the locally-designated Buildings 48 and 49 (now the UM School of Architecture). Eaton was not a pioneering essay in Modernist dormitory or campus design. Many U.S. colleges and universities were employing actual Bauhaus-trained or Internationally-prominent Modernist architects to design dormitories prior to Little's design for Eaton Hall. Such examples include Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius' Harvard Graduate Center (1948); Marcel Breuer's Noyes House at Vassar College (1950-51), and Alvar Aalto's Baker House at MIT (1949). Those projects were widely published in nationally circulated architectural journals, such as *Architectural Record*. In addition to dormitories, a quick review of early 1950s architectural periodicals indicates that those publications were filled with examples of the "new" International-style derived Modernist formal vocabulary being applied to motels, hotels, restaurants, and other commercial and residential structures. Eaton Hall was not found among those that were published.

The completion of Eaton Hall was promoted by the local press as a lifestyle feature (“Dorm Worth Writing About!” *Miami Daily News*, September 29, 1954: 4-B; “Ultra-Ultra Dorm,” *The Miami Herald*, September 15, 1954:C1), but research has found no other coverage of the building in either statewide or national architectural journals. This suggests that while Eaton’s design may have been influenced by other, published, Modernist dormitory designs, it was not influential upon others.

Eaton Hall was designed as an expedient, cost-efficient utilitarian structure to house students. The “ultra-ultra” distinction noted in the local press (above cited) appears to have been in large part attributable to the original sleek, modern furnishings (which do not survive) in the dormitory, which included Modernist furniture forms including Platner-like wire chairs and “Danish Modern” Finn Juhl-type streamlined, stained wood tables, and the inclusion of “a recreation hall, two elevators, and a soda shop” (*The Miami Hurricane*, August 13, 1954:1), yet residents bemoaned the lack of in-room telephone phone service (“Phones, Moans,” *The Miami Hurricane*, December 3, 1954:6).

Notably, the generic central corridor plan, common to dormitories and hotels across the nation, was not altered or adapted at Eaton Hall to suit the local climate or environment, unlike other Little-designed buildings on campus such as the Ferré Building, and thus Eaton Hall lacked adequate cross-ventilation. An air-conditioning system has been imperfectly retrofitted into the building.

**5. *Is associated in a significant way with a past or continuing institution, which has contributed, substantially to the life of the city.***

*Eaton Hall does NOT meet this criterion.*

While Eaton is indisputably part of the University of Miami campus, it did not alter or influence the course of the University or have any distinct role or impact on the life of the city. The building did not contribute uniquely to the University's identity or academic prominence but rather provided functional space for practical purposes and is not a significant contributor to the University’s institutional image, rarely and only coincidentally appeared in yearbook images, and was never used in promotional materials for the University.

**V. Architectural significance:**

**1. *Portrays the environment in an era of history characterized by one (1) or more distinctive architectural styles.***

*Eaton Hall does NOT meet this criterion.*

The 1926 Paist-Chalfin-Fink plan for the UM campus, produced under George Merrick's imprimatur, clearly illustrates Merrick's intention that the campus would be designed using Beaux-Arts principles in a Mediterranean-Revival style, in keeping with the historicist vocabulary of Coral Gables (Fink et al, University of Miami campus preliminary study, University of Miami Campus Archives, University Architecture Collection, Collection ASU 0651, Case No. 8, Drawer No. 1, Folder No. 5).

When the University began its post-World War II building boom, architects Marion Manley and Robert Law Weed set out to defy Merrick's intention as flagrantly as possible by ignoring the founder's stylistic signature in favor of Modernism, and very much within budgetary constraints. To associate the buildings they and Robert M. Little designed and built with Merrick's intended Beaux-Arts, Mediterranean Revival campus is misleading (Figs. 1,2). The redesigned campus, by Manley and Weed, largely reflected the idea of building groupings ("zones"). Such grouping of functionally related buildings recalls the planning approach of Clarence Stein, who has been cited as an influence on Manley and Weed's early Miami campus plans (Catherine Lynn and Carie Penabad, *Marion Manley, Miami's First Woman Architect* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 100-101). Although located along the lakeside, Eaton Hall's siting was merely an extension of the 1948 residential zone of the campus established by Manley's 29-unit married student housing village to the south.

The UM campus is intentionally diverse in architecture and is not defined by a single stylistic era. The campus is emphatically not a monocultural-built environment with a single period of significance.

2. ***Embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction.***

*Eaton Hall does NOT meet this criterion.*

While Eaton Hall loosely conforms to the style parameters collectively known as Miami Modernism (MiMo), or Subtropical Modernism, those design principles did not guide its expedient design and construction. To characterize Eaton Hall as an expression of Bauhaus design principles conflates design philosophy with applied elements of an architectural style. Eaton Hall is only distantly and superficially aligned with the Bauhaus. The Bauhaus was not an architectural style, per se, but a philosophy of design, established by a manifesto written by Walter Gropius upon the founding of the Bauhaus School (Staatliches Bauhaus, 1919). That document prescribes no formal stylistic characteristics, but rather states:

*Let us strive for, conceive and create the new building of the future that will unite every discipline, architecture and sculpture and painting, and which will one day rise heavenwards from the million hands of craftsmen as a clear symbol of a new belief to come (<https://bauhausmanifesto.com>).*



Thus, the guiding principles of Bauhaus architecture were a unity of architecture with the fine arts of sculpture and painting as well as an emphasis on individual craftsmanship. Eaton Hall contains no sculpture or sculptural programme, features no mural or other paintings, and was constructed of mass-produced materials and elements that did not require specialized artisans to assemble. Eaton Hall does not fulfill the principles of the Bauhaus as defined by its founder.

The Bauhaus also advocated for design to respond to contemporary culture and technology. This was interpreted, especially in the United States, by many architects who developed variety of styles under the umbrella term “Modernism” or, following the 1932 landmark exhibition at the Museum of Modern in Art, “The International Style.” The exhibit’s accompanying and highly influential catalogue featured architects from many countries and schools. It is reasonable to describe Little’s work at Eaton Hall, influenced by the established plan of Marion Manley and Robert Law Weed, as a regional variation of International Style Modernism, but one that does not align with the (socialist) political, (collectivist) social, or artistic goals of the Bauhaus movement.

It is also worth noting that Eaton Hall’s architect Robert M. Little (b.1903) was trained at the T-Square Club in Philadelphia ca. 1919-21. At that time, the curriculum of the T-Square Club followed the very Beaux-Arts (and thus, classical) course of study that the Bauhaus opposed. Upon leaving school, Little worked for Philadelphia architect John T. Windrim, whose designs exhibited a variety of traditional styles well into the 1930s, most notably the temple-porticoed Franklin Institute (1932). After 1930, long after Little had left, the T-Square Club turned its curriculum toward Modernism (although never specifically Bauhaus Modernism) but Little’s training as an architect – unlike the Sarasota School’s Paul Rudolph, who studied under Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius at Harvard - was instead entirely traditional.

Little’s early work in Miami—illustrated in the nine buildings credited all or in part to Little on the City of Miami Beach’s register of Historic Properties—was not doctrinaire in any sense and not even exclusively Modernist. An example such as Española Way, largely executed in the Mediterranean Revival style and to which Little is cited as a contributor, suggests an architect of pragmatic flexibility and one who was conversant in revivalist styles. Little himself, in an interview, described his practical approach without once invoking formal or philosophical principles.

*A building is purely and simply God-given space inclosed [sic] against the elements to perform certain functions, like living, worshipping, playing, studying and working. Use the materials provided by modern technology to inclose [sic], and that's all it is, from that you'll arrive at a pleasant form.*

Robert M. Little, as quoted in Richard Wallace, “Interviews with Architects: Robert M. Little—Exponent of Economy,” *Florida Living*, October 12, 1952:3-5.

3. ***Is an outstanding work of a prominent designer or builder.***

*Eaton Hall does NOT meet this criterion.*

While Robert M. Little was a well-respected local architect in South Florida whose work reflected various styles of architecture, Eaton Hall is not among his most distinguished works. In addition to the Modernist buildings on the UM campus his other constructions have been categorized as Mediterranean Revival, Vernacular, Garden Style and Streamline Moderne, confirming that he was not a visionary architect driven to introduce a specific new vocabulary but rather an expedient designer willing to work to the client's goals regardless of style.<sup>3</sup> Both Miami Beach and Coral Gables have designated other Little designs, however Miami Beach categorizes several Little works as non-contributing structures within a historic district, perhaps indicating that other nearby communities have determined that not every Little building is of equal merit, not all are significant, or some have lost their integrity.

Manley, Weed, and Little are noted for ushering in a period of postwar Modernist design at the University. Marion Manley, more specifically, was hired by President Ashe in 1923 and “a modernist vision for the campus originated with Manley and Ashe before any other architect was brought in” (Lynn and Penabad, 93). Manley and the subsequent University architects executed numerous designs in several variations of Modernism and the more localized MiMo/Subtropical Modernism. There are over a dozen standing buildings at the University designed by Little.

Little's Fellowship in the AIA noted his University work, but he was specifically hailed for his regional residential designs and open classroom designs for public schools. Little has garnered mention in some publications on the MiMo movement but, perhaps unjustly, he is not as widely known or academically studied outside of South Florida as other prominent Modernist architects of the time such as Morris Lapidus. Little was a respected and prolific designer who captured current architectural trends but did not set them.

4. ***Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship of outstanding quality or which represent a significant innovation or adaptation to the South Florida environment.***

*Eaton Hall does NOT meet this criterion.*

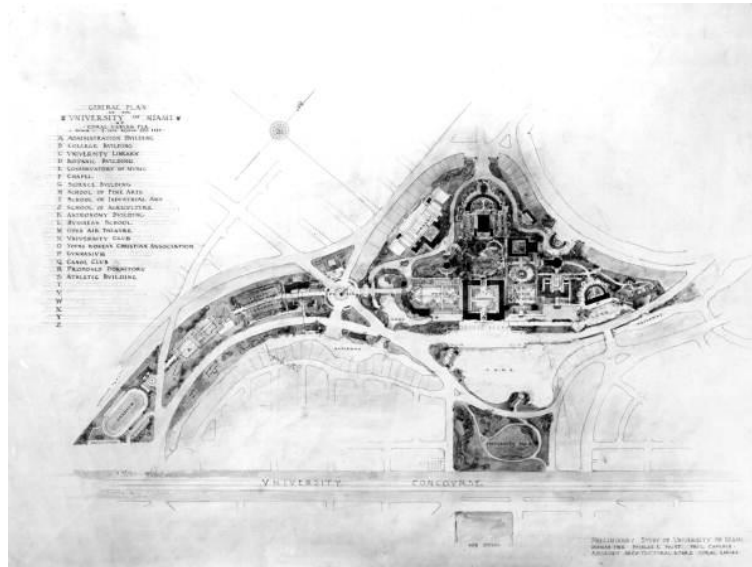
The center-corridor plan of Eaton Hall was a standard form for group housing, appearing even in Beaux-Arts hotels and tenements. It was not well-suited to the South Florida environment in the era before air-conditioning, as it failed to allow adequate cross-ventilation. Exterior stairs, while appearing to be a climatic consideration, were an efficient

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<sup>3</sup> <https://apps.miamibeachfl.gov/histpropviewer/>



means to free up much needed interior space. The use of structural reinforced concrete and mass-produced aluminum awning windows was suited to, but not unique to, South Florida construction and Little's use of standardized materials was not an innovative step but, rather, were based on his own stated principle of cost-efficiency. In addition, the building does not contain any examples of specialized artisanship or regional craftsmanship.



**Fig. 1:** Merrick's unbuilt original campus plan by Phineas Paist et al envisioned Beaux-Arts derived axial and symmetrical orientations that were abandoned in the Manley-Weed plan. <http://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/30753>



**Fig. 2:** The original building conceptions were consistent with the Mediterranean Revival design vocabulary used throughout Coral Gables.

<https://digitalcollections.library.miami.edu/digital/collection/asuo651/id/7/rec/85>

#### A. Aesthetic significance:

1. ***By being a part or related to a subdivision, park, environmental feature, or other distinctive area, should be developed or preserved according to a plan based on an historical, cultural, or architectural motif.***

*Eaton Hall does NOT meet this criterion.*

As noted above, Eaton Hall's design and placement bear no relation to the original 1926 Merrick plan for the University of Miami. Instead, the building appears within the footprint designated for the dormitory grouping displayed on the Manley and Weed plan of 1943, which rejected the formal layout of the Merrick vision, as well as the Mediterranean Revival architectural motif.

Manley and Weed's plan, which was influenced by Clarence Stein's "zone"-type planning, was not the earliest Modernist campus designed for a U.S. university. In Florida, Frank Lloyd Wright had already been hired to design the Florida Southern College (now University) campus in 1938. In 1937, the College of William and Mary, Goucher College, and Wheaton College each held competitions for campus designs that attracted entries from pre-eminent Modernists including Walter Gropius, Eliel and Eero Saarinen, and Richard Neutra. Due to wartime delays, only Goucher built its competition-winning plan, but the competition and its entrants indicate that Modernism was making in-roads into campus design several years before World War II, including in Florida, and in places other than Miami (Marni Epstein-Morris, "How Three Colleges Brought Modernist Design to the U.S.," *Curbed*, September 24, 2014. [curbed.com/2014/9/24](http://curbed.com/2014/9/24)). Although the University campus is a distinctive area within Coral Gables, its plan and individual buildings do not appear to have been precedent-setting for the community as a whole, or for other campuses, but was, instead, influenced by other campus plans and general planning techniques that appeared nationwide, as noted above.

2. ***Because of its prominence of spatial location, contrasts of siting, age, or scale, is an easily identifiable visual feature of a neighborhood, village, or the city and contributes to the distinctive quality or identity of such neighborhood, village, or the city. In case of a park or landscape feature, is integral to the plan of such neighborhood or the city.***

*Eaton Hall does NOT meet this criterion.*

The University of Miami campus is emphatically not a monocultural-built environment reflecting any single "period of significance" but rather displays a chronologically and stylistically diverse vocabulary of architectural styles that trace the University's historic and ongoing pursuit of contemporary excellence, progressive architecture, and innovation.

## **B. Archaeological significance:**

1. ***Has yielded or may be likely to yield information important in prehistoric history or history.***

*Eaton Hall does NOT meet this criterion.*

There are no known archaeological deposits or features at the Eaton Hall site.

**C. Criteria considerations:**

Not applicable

**Other works consulted**

Hochstim, Jan. *Florida Modern: residential architecture 1945-1970*. New York: Rizzoli, 2004.

Klepser, Carolyn. "Designation Report: Arnold Volpe Building." September 5, 2011.

Little, Robert M. *Architectural Drawings, Julian S. Eaton Residence Hall, 1953*. Courtesy of the archives of the Office of the University Architect.

Marina, William and Charlton W. Tebeau. *Rendezvous With Greatness: The University of Miami at the "Edge" of the 21st Century, A 75th Anniversary History, 1926-2001*. Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 2001.

Nash, Eric P. and Randall C. Robinson, Jr.. *MiMo: Miami Modern Revealed*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2004.

Parks, Arva Moore. *The Pathway to Greatness: Building the University of Miami, 1926-2001*. Miami, FL: Colonial Press International, 2001.

University of Miami, on site research.

---. Coral Gables Campus Tour, February 2017.

---. University Archives, UM Historical Photograph Collection.

---. University Archives, Ibis Yearbook Collection.

## **VI. Additional Considerations**

The building has been altered since its original construction in attempts to bring it to current standards that have significantly compromised its design integrity. These efforts have included:

- (i) Significant modifications to the exterior stair enclosure and ground floor window bays for enhanced safety and security (Figs.4,5).
- (ii) An original color variation between the grid faces and ends of the “H” legs that was expressed with the use of glazed brick on the ends and exposed concrete on the grid faces has been lost (Figs. 3,5).
- (iii) Changes of the entire first floor glass curtain walls, in which the original aluminum windows and blank panels have been replaced with a modern storefront façade that no longer matches the awning window design on upper floors, including the width and profile of mullions and extent of the exposed glass (Fig.9).
- (iv) Those remaining original windows have been compromised as one top pane per bay on each floor has been replaced with a sheet metal panel to provide an HVAC duct to each bedroom (Fig. 7).
- (v) Vertical pipes running from the second floor to the roof have been added to the exterior of every other window bay, possibly tied to a non-functioning hurricane screen system or simply as decorations to enliven the drab grid (Figs, 7-9).
- (vi) An orange painted concrete frame has been constructed before several façades that penetrates the original awnings and does not align with the building grid (Figs, 6-9).
- (vii) A dropped ceiling in the center halls on floors 2-4 to hide the HVAC ductwork, the only location where it could be installed without further compromising the building integrity, is so intrusive that even room numbers at the heads are obscured (Figs, 10,11).





**Fig. 3 (left):** View of Eaton Residential College on the Coral Gables campus as built. Note color variation between exposed concrete grid on window walls and end that are faced with glazed brick.

UM Library, University Archives, UM Historical Photograph Collection.

**Figs. 4,5 (below right & left):** Conditions in 2025. Note the color variation has been reversed with whitewashing of the concrete. Also note the addition of handrails on the exterior and inexpert security grills at the stairs and ground floor window bay.

Photos: History & Conservation Associates, 2025 except where noted





**Fig. 6 (above): Eaton Hall 2025.** Note overall white paint, visually intrusive orange grid, and metal bars applied to grid.

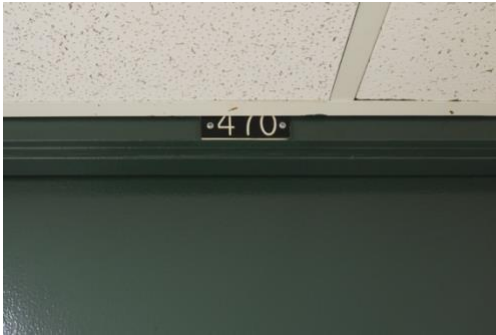
**Fig. 7 (below): Eaton Hall, center wing east façade 2025.** Note blank metal panels replacing original glass panes within awning windows on 2<sup>nd</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> floors, non-historic window walls on the first floor, vertical metal bars of uncertain use, and the orange grid penetrating original awnings.



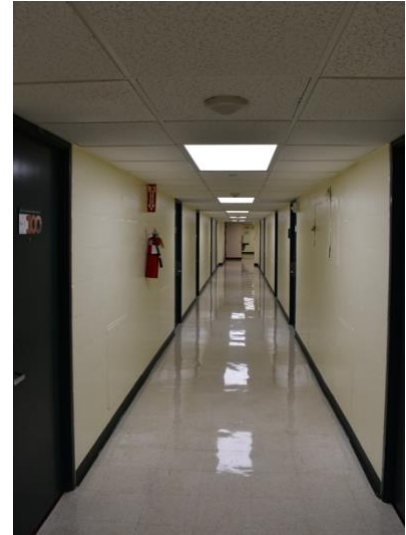
**Figs. 8,9 (following page):** Other elevations of Eaton Hall façades showing how much the changes in the first floor window walls, the addition of the orange screen and metal bars, and the disruption of the pattern of the glass in the upper floors has changed the building's original severe and stark grid.







**Figs. 10,11: Typical interior conditions at center halls.** Dropped ceilings to accommodate duct work barely clear door heads. This is necessary due to the unforgiving concrete slab construction. The result is cramped, confining, and unpleasant.



**Fig. 12 (below right): Typical student room.** The barracks-like conditions are inconsistent with any current standard for college housing at UM or elsewhere.

In addition to the historic preservation concerns, the University, as stewards of a large collection of resources, must also take into consideration its mission to transform lives through education, research, innovation and service and its paramount academic and other goals that necessitate all requisite facility upgrades to attract and retain students and provide facilities that are similar to, or better than, comparable peer institutions.

Just as a pressing need for student housing pushed the construction of Eaton Hall, so, too, does the current demand for additional, and upgraded, facilities, push for the University to reconsider its current student housing stock. With campus-wide limitations on buildable square footage; which is constrained by required buffer setbacks, height restrictions, tree coverage, utility easements, athletic fields, waterways, and designated or other potentially eligible buildings, the University must maximize the use of its present campus layout to provide world-class amenities for its students and faculty.





The design work necessary to adapt Eaton Hall so as to address the deficiencies and shortcomings listed previously, including: the addition of spaces for socialization, correction of dimensional deficiencies and sizing of spaces, retrofitting the floor plan to correct ADA concerns, etc... require the material reconfiguration of floor plans, thereby, diminishing the existing dorm room counts and continuing to efface, as previous changes have, the original appearance of the architecture of Eaton Hall. Eaton Hall's concrete modular grid that establishes the cellular rhythm of rooms resists adaption; moreover, it's double loaded corridor which admits daylight from only one side of the bedrooms would make adaptations even more challenging. There are sufficient statements in this report which establish that Eaton Hall does not comply with the standards for historic designation. The additional considerations stated in this section of the report address how Eaton must be adapted if retained, and make clear that such action would be punitive to the University of Miami, by only compounding the existing shortfall towards its mission: to house a greater percentage of its student body on campus and thus remain competitive with its cohort institutions.

1. The University of Miami is wrestling with a dire shortage of on-campus housing and cannot address that shortage within the existing, highly limited, space available without replacing older, low-density structures with new construction.
  - (i) In the fall of 2022, a UM survey found that there is a shortage of rooms to house 2,500 undergraduates who wish to live on campus. If graduate students — for whom there is currently no on campus housing — are included, the total number of students who would choose to live on campus if rooms were available is 4,000.
  - (ii) Of the students who are registered in the existing housing system, 700-750 are on the wait list at any given time. Many students are not even in the system.
  - (iii) This means that at least 6,500 — and probably closer to 7,000 — individuals are competing with local Coral Gables/South Miami/Coconut Grove residents for available rental housing, contributing to the shortage of affordable and market rate rental housing in the community at large.
  - (iv) If the University of Miami is going to continue to grow (both by retaining and by adding more incoming students) and to continue to support the economy of the surrounding community, it needs more and better quality on-campus housing.
  - (v) The last year for which data are available (2011) summarizes the economic impact of students UM on its community: \$200 million (approx. \$288.5 million in 2025) in direct local spending by students each year. Students benefit the economy of Coral Gables and its neighbors.
  - (vi) 80% of residential first-year students currently live in newer dormitories with superior utilities and amenities. The disparity in standards between these new dorms and Eaton are cited by both students and parents as unfair and inequitable.
  - (vii) The footprint occupied by Eaton, which houses 394 students, could potentially house as many as 1200 students in a new building, thus substantially easing the current on-campus housing crisis.

2. Eaton is not functionally adequate for current student housing needs and cannot be upgraded to meet current standards without near-total loss of integrity.
  - (i) Eaton was built in 1954 without air-conditioning. Retrofitted air conditioning is intrusive and cannot maintain air quality comparable to more recently built structures.
  - (ii) Eaton does not meet 2020 Florida Building Code hurricane standards requirements and retrofitting it to comply would entail extensive destruction of character-defining exterior features. The 1954 windows do not comply with Florida Building Code requirements for hurricane safety (FBC2020), which requires impact-resistant windows or approved protective coverings for all glazed openings in designated Wind-Borne Debris Regions (WBDRs), with higher standards in High-Velocity Hurricane Zones (HVHZs) such as the Miami metro region. Eaton's original windows that remain are set into pre-cast concrete openings and would thus require complete exterior wall demolition to replace.
  - (iii) Eaton is not fully ADA compliant due to dimensions fixed by its unalterable concrete pier and slab construction.
  - (iv) The concrete slab construction of Eaton is not well-suited to wireless networking, an essential utility for learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
  - (v) The design of Eaton, with a central hallway flanked by barracks-like dorm rooms and double-use baths, is obsolete and ignores and fails to promote the important social functions of communal space for fostering interaction, well-being, and community, which ironically were espoused by Little. Today's dormitories, designed with more communal spaces, are proven to be more conducive to learning and student wellbeing.
  - (vi) Students and parents lodge hundreds of complaints per year with UM administration over both real and perceived inadequacies in functionality and comfort at Eaton. To ensure students do not transfer to other universities with better facilities and, instead, stay at UM and support the local economy, UM must be allowed to provide housing comparable to other top-tier universities.
  - (vii) Retrofitting Eaton to meet current requirements would not only result an unsatisfactory outcome with further loss of integrity, but would incur an undue financial hardship that would exceed the current new dorm construction costs projected to run \$593 per sqft including all hard and soft costs.

## **VII. Response to Application for Designation**

The local designation report submitted in support of Eaton Hall contends that the building's significance hinges on three key assertions. For the reasons explained in this section, the assertions do not withstand scrutiny and should be rejected.

1. The report argues that Eaton Hall is a significant example of Subtropical Modernism (pages 11-13) which is, in turn, significant as a style that embodies the post-World War II era in Coral Gables, historically and culturally.

*Response:* While Subtropical Modernism is undoubtedly an important moment in the architectural and cultural history of the region and, indeed, the nation, the authors fail to find that Eaton Hall is, indeed, a suitable example of the style at all. In fact, the report concedes that Eaton Hall fails to include the essential ingredients of Subtropical Modernism. (page 13, “*Although few of these elements appear on the Eaton Residential College, it is obvious that the [Eaton Residential] College pioneered a unique Subtropical style which will reach its zenith in the next years ....*”).

On page 11, the report states that Eaton contains many elements of MiMo (Miami Modernism) which is specifically noted as distinct from Subtropical Modernism on page 12. This indicates, once again, that Eaton Hall is **not an exemplar of the Subtropical Modernism** which the report notes earlier as a key point of its proposed significance.

Additional discussion on pages 11-13 seeks to link Eaton Hall to the Bauhaus, which is misleading. The Bauhaus was founded with a manifesto and was, first and foremost a philosophy of design, not a specific “style.” Buildings by Bauhaus architects were included alongside works by many other European and American Modernists in the 1932 Museum of Modern Art exhibition, “Modern Architecture: International Exhibition,” colloquially known as “The International Style Show.” The exhibition and its accompanying publication drew on a stylistic range of works by over three dozen architects in 15 countries — including Frank Lloyd Wright, George Howe, Raymond Hood, and Bowman Brothers from the U.S. — to distill a handful of shared formal characteristics which they dubbed “The International Style.” Those formal elements, extracted from Bauhaus architects and many others, may have supplied a basic design vocabulary for Miami Modernism and Subtropical Modernism, but to draw a straight line from the Bauhaus to Eaton Hall is a misleading oversimplification.

2. The report contends that Eaton Hall is an innovative and influential use of Modernism on the UM campus. In fact, Modernism was well-established at UM and several more innovative Modernist buildings were constructed on campus before Eaton Hall was built. Also, as outlined herein, Eaton Hall was only loosely associated with Modernism and those design principles did not guide its expedient design and construction.

The report contends, “*As demonstrated, Eaton — and in the following years the Pearson-Mahoney complex — played an important role in shaping the architectural identity of the University of Miami in a postwar context.*” (p.11) Yet the following sentence of the report itself acknowledges that the University’s Modernist Post-War identity was established by Marion Manley and Robert Law Weed’s campus plan of 1948. In fact, several Modernist structures by Manley and by Little himself, most notably Merrick Hall (1949), were built on

campus before Eaton Hall. Eaton Hall was not “*pivotal*” (p.8) and did not mark new stylistic territory for the University.

Also on page 11, the report contends, “*Eaton reinvents modern student housing architecture for the postwar era.*” In fact, Modernist student dormitories existed at many U.S. colleges and universities that pre-date Eaton. Notable, widely published examples by internationally-known architects include: Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius’ Harvard Graduate Center (1948); Marcel Breuer’s Noyes House at Vassar College (1950-51), and Alvar Aalto’s Baker House at MIT (1949). At UM, residential Modernism had already been established at Marion Manley’s graduate student complex and further expanded in her (unbuilt) design for a dormitory on the site later occupied by Eaton.

The University of Miami was not in the vanguard of Modernism, and Modernism itself was already an established architectural style nationwide. The 1953 Museum of Modern Art exhibition (and widely circulated accompanying catalogue), “Built in U.S.A.: Post-War Architecture,” surveyed achievements in American Modernism since 1945. A year before the construction of Eaton Hall, the organizers described the exhibition as a document of, “... *a great Post-War flowering of architecture, and for the fact that the battle for modern architecture has long been won.*”<sup>4</sup> The exhibition checklist included 3 college dormitories (by Aalto, Breuer, Gropius), and one additional campus building by Mies van der Rohe, all of which predate Eaton Hall. While it is tempting to ascribe Little’s omission to regional bias, Twitchell and Rudolph’s work in Sarasota was included (2 examples), while Miami was represented in the exhibition by Igor Polivetsky’s indisputably Modernist 1948 Heller House on Miami Beach.

UM and Eaton Hall were not pioneering essays in Modernist campus architecture, or even the first Modernist campus design or buildings in Florida. Frank Lloyd Wright was hired to design Florida Southern College (now University) in Lakeland in 1938.<sup>5</sup> The first Wright building at FSC (of thirteen eventually built) was completed in 1941. Five additional buildings by Wright were completed at FSC and three more were under construction by the time Eaton was built in 1954.

3. The report contents that Eaton Hall represents a unique achievement of a “master architect.”

While Robert M. Little was a respected figure in South Florida architecture, the term “master architect” typically implies that the architect originated a style or movement and/or left an influential legacy of students or followers. Little was not an innovator, but rather an adept mimic of diverse architectural styles. When he retired, his office closed, he did not teach

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<sup>4</sup> [Built In USA: Post-War Architecture \(Press Release\)](#) Museum of Modern Art. January 18, 1953.

<sup>5</sup> Dale Allen-Gyure, *Frank Lloyd Wright’s Florida Southern College*, Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2010



and, as noted above, he was not included in influential publications or exhibitions such as the 1953 MOMA show. It seems hyperbolic to call him a “master.”

The Sarasota School, led by Ralph Twitchell starting in 1942 and, after 1946, Paul Rudolph, wedded International-style Modernism’s contemporary materials and pronounced grids with shade-producing overhangs and other regional adaptations mistakenly attributed in the Eaton Hall designation report as unique distinguishing features of MiMo/Subtropical Modernism (pp.12-13). Sarasota School examples such as the Revere Quality House (1948, Twitchell and Rudolph) and Rudolph’s acclaimed Umbrella House (1953), among numerous others, predate Eaton.<sup>6</sup> Paul Rudolph, unlike Robert Little, better represents the idea of a “master architect”. Rudolph studied with Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius at Harvard (M.Arch 1947) and later was appointed Chair of the Yale University School of Architecture from 1958-1965.

Eaton Hall is not a unique achievement. There is a robust presence of Little designed buildings on the UM campus, some of which represent far more impactful examples of his work such as Merrick Hall. In fact, 12 other buildings by Little (including one co-credited with Manley) remain today and are protected by the same process of review by the City of Coral Gables as the process currently underway for Eaton Hall.

## **VIII. Summary and Conclusions**

For the reasons set forth above, Eaton Hall does not satisfy the Coral Gables Historic Preservation guidelines for designation as an individual landmark. The determination by Staff should be affirmed and the designation report offered by the applicant dispatched.

- I. **The design of Eaton Hall was not innovative and its architect Robert M. Little was not a thought-leader. The proposed designation report omits crucial architectural context that contradicts its assertions.**
- II. **Eaton Hall was not innovative in its design, construction, or adaptation to the local climate. The attributes ascribed to Subtropical Modernism in the proposed designation report (pp. 13-15) were not specific to or created for Eaton Hall, UM, or the Miami region. The report itself acknowledges Eaton Hall contains few hallmarks of this style.**
- I. **Neither Little nor The University of Miami were ranked in the influential vanguard of Post-War period architectural or campus design.**

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<sup>6</sup> John Howey, *The Sarasota School of Architecture: 1941-1966*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995

II. **We find no evidence that Eaton Hall held any significance to the community beyond its function of housing students**, who might have resided in any on-campus structure to the same effect.

VIII. **Our research on Eaton Hall’s architect Robert M. Little found no evidence that he was a Bauhaus architect** or that he espoused any cultural, aesthetic or political philosophy of design but rather was, in his own words, trying to build as cheaply and quickly as possible.<sup>7</sup>

In addition.

- I. Eaton Hall, which was quickly and inexpensively built to serve immediate needs seven decades ago, is now functionally obsolete, and fails to meet Florida building codes for hurricane and wind resistance as well having only limited accessibility as per Federal ADA standards.
- II. Its concrete construction produced fixed structural elements and features that cannot be altered for compliance or adaptive reuse without undue and unreasonable capital investment and would require eradicating any remaining integrity of visual or material features.
- III. The building has already been unsuccessfully modified in previous attempts to upgrade its systems and appearance to a degree that the integrity of its original design is compromised.

In sum, we concur with the City’s finding that Eaton Hall does not meet the criteria for significance required for designation as a local historic landmark and, furthermore, is not integral to the preservation of the Mid-Century era, as documented in architecture, at the University of Miami.

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<sup>7</sup> Interviews with Architects: Robert M. Little —Exponent of Economy,” *Florida Living*, October 12, 1952, 3-5