

## Clcs/Art 120: Collegiate Gothic (aka Spires and Gargoyles); Itinerary

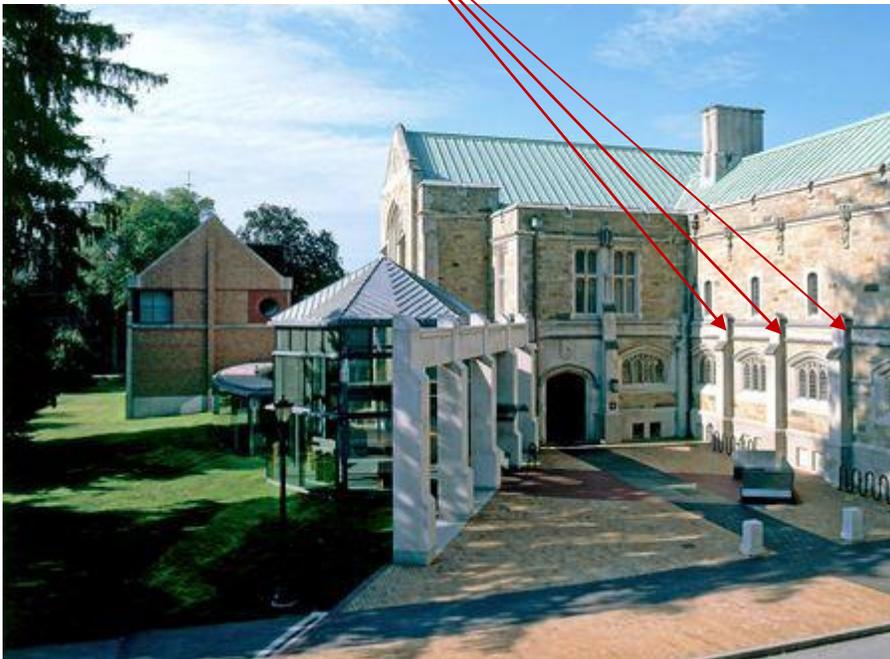
In this class discussion, we will turn to the subject of architectural style and its meaning; and in particular, the way American educational institutions borrowed forms from English and European medieval cathedrals in the Gothic style, to forge a style known as Collegiate Gothic. We have all heard remarks to the effect that Vassar looks like Hogwarts; why was this Gothic style chosen for prominent buildings at Vassar, and why its enduring appeal – or not?

As always, it will be useful to do the reading before you do the site visit. You might enjoy sitting in the Loeb Sculpture Garden to do your reading this week – while looking at the south side of Gothic-style Taylor Hall; note this requires access through the Loeb, open to the campus W-Th-F only.

Then start your visit by considering structural and decorative aspects of Taylor Hall. Begin in the courtyard behind Taylor, by the entrance to the Loeb galleries.

-Look closely at the stone façade of Taylor: would you guess those are structural blocks of stacked up stone, as a building would have been built in the middle ages? Or a revetment – a kind of thin veneer of stone, installed over a modern steel structure?

-What do **these vertical elements** appear to be, or do? Note they are echoed along the “façade” of the Loeb; what is going on there?



-Consider the roofline of Taylor Tower, with its saw-toothed crenellations or battlements. What is the function of battlements – and why would they be designed on a college tower? (Take a look at the Library roofline while you are at it, and consider the same question.)

-Walk under Taylor arch and consider the vaults overhead, which may bring to mind the vaults of Gothic cathedrals, if you have studied them. Look at the clusters of columns that appear to support the vaults; do you think these are actually structural? These tile vaults were made by the well known firm of the Catalan artist and architect [Rafael Guastavino](#), who pioneered this style known as “Catalan vaulting”. You may have seen his firm’s work in the Oyster Bar at New York’s Grand Central Station, or in the Brooklyn Bridge/City Hall stop on the 4,5, 6 subway line in NY. (For those interested in architecture, [here](#) is an interesting site on the construction of these vaults by MIT Professor John Ochsendorf and students.)

-Taylor is decorated with a considerable freight of sculpture. Circle the building, and see what you can spot. Please take lots of pictures of sculptural details; we can ferret out what some of them mean for our class discussion. Consider the following sections:

-roofline of the tower

-the figural sculptures on the east and west sides of the building, and also the south side, visible from the Loeb Sculpture Garden (open W-Th-F only)

- the crest over the door to Taylor Auditorium

-the sculptural decorations over the arch as you approach the main entrance from Raymond Avenue; and on the inside of the arch, visible from Main Drive.

Finally, walk over toward the Library and look at its east-facing main façade; what about sculptural decoration there? Look closely at the downspouts – what is going on there? What about the ornament over the front door? Or just inside, in the entrance lobby/vestibule space under the tower?

-In your everyday movement around campus, where else do you notice this Collegiate Gothic Style?

\*\*It would be a great help if you could post your photos to the moodle site in advance of the class meeting – ideally the night before – so I can plan our class discussion starting with your photos, and supplement as needed. Thanks!