Within the discourse of historic preservation the college campus represents a difficult preservation issue; it is perpetually in use, it serves a wide audience, however it is ultimately a transitional space. The significance of the campus is widely accepted however, establishing a link with the campus community that exceeds graduation is a challenge. In this paper I am aiming to address the issue of historical significance in the context of this transitory community by invoking Dr. Ned Kaufman's concept of “Storyscape,” a strategy developed to pin point overlapping and diverse forms of historical information, including original campus buildings, historical texts, physical documentation and oral history and combining it with Charles Birnbaum's definition of Cultural Landscapes I am coming to define the Smith College campus as a "cultural storyscape". This serves as a methodological template for ongoing historical research which captures the evolving persona of the campus. This method responds to a pressing need to capture historical significance as it unfolds and in places that might otherwise be lost as the communities to whom they mean the most are disengaged after graduation and frequently never return.

This thesis will use the case study of Smith College, an institution whose physical embodiment has mirrored prevailing ideas about the role of education in the life of the American woman. A primary historical pretext will be that the buildings we see today are the result of both institutional conviction in the appropriate pedagogy for women as well as the actual experiences and use of those spaces by the students, many of whom went on to become leaders in the transformation of the very stereotypes about womanhood that the college trustees were intent on advancing. What the "Storyscape" reveals within structures from the college's inception through dormitories of the nineteen fifties, is not only the primary historical record of design and institutional intention but also the important transgressions, modifications, re-packagings, etc. that these spaces were subjected to by a community of young women who, over time, transformed the identity of the college and thus the historical significance of the spaces created to house the institution. By using this more comprehensive way to interpret the history of the built environment at Smith College I hope to shed more light on the significance of campus buildings and advocate for their preservation.