



National Associates Committee

Diversity in the Architecture Profession

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Introduction

“Architecture can never embrace the challenges of the future without infusion of new ideas, technologies and especially diverse individuals and approaches. If we refuse, we are destining ourselves to be suspended in the past.”

Albert C. Smith, AIA, PhD, and Kendra Schank Smith, PhD
20 on 20/20 Vision: Perspectives on Diversity and Design

The AIA National Associates Committee (NAC), representing the associate members of the Institute, believes that diversity in the field of architecture is a topic that must be seriously addressed at all levels of the profession. To this end, we encourage discussion, thought, and action in the schools of architecture, in architecture firms, at all levels of the AIA, and among individual architects, both in traditional and nontraditional roles, to help move us forward in an increasingly diverse direction.

The NAC advocates a position of inclusivity. Our view of diversity is far-reaching. In order to create a culture of inclusion, all people, regardless of their gender, race, age, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or physical ability, must be encouraged and supported both before and after they enter the profession. Beyond that, we also call for diversity of experience, career path, perspective, creativity, and opinion.

The data tell the story. In architecture schools across the country, 40–50 percent of the graduates are female. In the profession, women make up 33 percent of associate AIA members, only 11 percent of the AIA licensed membership, and just 20 percent of all registered architects. People of color comprise 19 percent of associate AIA members, only 6 percent of the AIA licensed members, and a mere 11 percent of all registered architects. Clearly, we have to seek solutions to increase the diversity of the profession so that it more closely reflects society.

Changing Society, Changing Workforce

Population trends indicate that societal and, as an extension of that, workforce demographics are changing. Our society and our workplace are evolving to include more women and people of color. The population that we serve, as well as draw from for future membership in the profession, increasingly does not resemble the current demographics of our field. Architects must be able to provide the technological innovation, creativity, problem solving, and leadership required to meet the challenges of a world increasingly in flux. That requires the full participation of all members of society if we are to fully serve the diverse needs of all client types. A lack of diverse individuals and perspectives will render the architecture profession an anomaly in the global marketplace and threaten our very relevancy.

The AIA Diversity Forum of 2001 concluded that the architecture profession has not experienced an increase in diversity because of “a culture of exclusivity, minimal support, lack of exposure to the profession, and a limited amount of time.” But we know from recent history that time alone will not solve our diversity dilemma. A passive culture of myopic exclusivity is a real barrier to diversification.

Ultimately, a culture of inclusion enriches our profession while it enhances personal and professional growth. A diverse culture includes the unique experiences, knowledge, abilities, and ideas of each individual. Now is the time to create a true culture of inclusion in all aspects of the architecture profession.

Recommendations

The NAC supports the 2004 Convention Resolution 04-2, “To Strengthen the Demographic Diversity of the Design Profession,” with its stated intent to “support research efforts focusing on diversity in the profession, particularly as they relate to access to the profession and career advancement for minorities, women and other groups who bring diverse backgrounds to the profession.” A multiyear effort to compile data on diversity should focus on tracking the profession over time. We see this as an opportunity not only to gather more data but also to draw upon the information already acquired, to make recommendations, and to initiate much-needed action.

Further, the NAC supports the AIA Committee on Diversity and its ongoing efforts to increase membership awareness of diversity issues.

In addition, the NAC supports the following initiatives with the hope that they will be extended beyond their current scope:

- We commend the efforts of members of the profession and its related organizations, such as the American Architectural Foundation, who work to bring an understanding of architecture and architects to children through the schools, scouting, and other organizations. These members introduce the profession to a diverse cross-section of children, with the hope that many of them will pursue a career in architecture.
- We support the attempts to broaden diversity in architecture schools through early, active recruitment of potential students and retention of current underrepresented students through active mentorship.
- We encourage the continuing mentorship of interns through formalized practices, such as the IDP process supplemented by the upcoming *Emerging Professional’s Companion*, as well as the informal mentoring and support network in firms and AIA chapters across the country. This is a vital link in the learning-growth continuum, since many interns, especially those least represented in the field, leave the profession before licensure, thus hindering the ability of the profession to become more diverse.

Finally, the NAC encourages everyone in the profession to address these unrealized initiatives:

- We advocate mentoring and actively supporting young architects; that is, architects who have been licensed 10 years or fewer. Because this group does not have a formal mentorship structure, many young architects ultimately leave the profession for other fields. The demands

on these new professionals must be addressed so that they can be adequately supported to navigate this challenging career phase successfully.

- We challenge the collateral organizations to examine the process of education, internship, and examination to identify obstacles that unintentionally and unreasonably exclude groups from obtaining licensure and succeeding professionally. Although we recognize and support the importance of maintaining established health, safety, and welfare criteria, we believe that the current process would benefit from an honest examination.

Conclusion

The National Associates Committee believes that a truly diverse profession, including both traditionally underrepresented people and those with nonconventional experience and perspectives, is essential for the future of the profession. We encourage, applaud, and support the efforts of many who are already welcoming all members of society into the profession and nurturing them once they join the field. We challenge all members of the profession to address diversity in their own workplaces, educational institutions, and professional networks. All of us play a role in helping the profession become more diverse. The National Associates Committee believes that there is not a single path to pursue or project to undertake that will increase diversity; rather, it will take a multipronged, longitudinal mentality and strong commitment from each of us.

About the AIA National Associates Committee

Formed in October 2000, the AIA National Associates Committee (NAC) grew out of the Intern/Associate Committee, originally formed in 1993. Today, the NAC is a representative body of regional associate directors (RADs), one from each of the 18 AIA regions. The NAC and its RADs are charged to represent associate members of the AIA, both mainstream and alternative, providing information and leadership to every regional, state, and local component. By speaking with one clear and consistent voice, the NAC works to draw attention to the education, dedication, skills, and effort of associate AIA members. For more information, visit www.aia.org/nac.

Data sources:

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