

Colorado Component and University Create Mentoring Program

Contributed by Christopher G. Nims, FAIA, AIA Colorado and the University of Colorado College of Architecture and Planning
Revised December 2006

The AIA collects and disseminates Best Practices as a service to AIA members without endorsement or recommendation. Appropriate use of the information provided is the responsibility of the reader.

SUMMARY

AIA Colorado and the University of Colorado College of Architecture and Planning developed an undergraduate mentoring program for fourth-year architecture students. The success of the program warranted the creation of a new position in the college to administer the program. Future plans for the mentoring program include making the college a clearinghouse for statewide architecture mentoring activities.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The University of Colorado (CU) College of Architecture and Planning began an undergraduate mentoring program in 2000. Faculty nominate outstanding fourth-year students to participate in the program for the last year of their undergraduate studies. With all administration and mentoring handled on a volunteer basis, the program was so successful and well received that it accepted all fourth-year students desiring a mentor. The program has grown from 24 students to more than 60 last year—almost 60 percent of the fourth-year class. In addition, based on the success of the undergraduate mentorship program, the AIA and the college expanded the program in 2004 to include graduate students and postgraduate alumni. Both students and practitioners received this program expansion with great enthusiasm.

The newly established AIA Colorado Professional Development Committee assumed oversight for the mentorship program in 2002. This group is responsible for disseminating information about architecture careers from high school through undergraduate and graduate school and even through the Intern Development Program (IDP), the Architect Registration Examination (ARE), and practice. The committee comprises Fellows, past chapter officers, IDP coordinators, and intern advocate committee members. Its motto takes after the slogan, "You've got questions, we have answers!"

CREATING A NEW POSITION

It became clear that the program was growing so quickly that it could not maintain quality and effectiveness if it continued to be administered on a volunteer basis. As a result of numerous discussions with the College of Architecture and Planning and its dean, Mark Gelernter, Assoc. AIA, the college created a new position, for a director of mentoring and internship programs, who would report directly to the dean's office. The responsibilities are college-wide, covering all degree programs on both undergraduate and graduate levels. The position was announced in December 2004, and Gelernter appointed Christopher G. Nims, FAIA, as director of mentoring and internship programs. Nims is the creator of the undergraduate program and chair of the AIA Colorado Professional Development Committee. In addition, he is an adjunct associate professor at the college and a principal at David Owen Tryba Architects in Denver (AIA Colorado Firm of the Year and AIA Denver 2004 Firm of the Year).

In the future, the program will focus on expanding the mentorship program within the college as well as the architectural design community at large. The college will become the clearinghouse for all mentoring activities statewide and serve as a liaison between the college and AIA Colorado.

IMPACT

Currently the program is in its embryonic stage, mentoring approximately 60 undergraduate, 50 graduate, and 30 intern architects. The mentor roster includes more than 150 architects, representing 40 firms in the Front Range. The new promotional efforts and support structure are expected to help the program expand substantially. The potential constituency is approximately 500 undergraduate students, 350 graduate students, and 1,200 associate AIA members or intern architects. The challenge will be to recruit and train enough mentors to serve the demand.

The program's other significant achievement has been to strengthen the communication and cooperation between the college and the AIA as well as to create a point of communication with AIA local, state, and national components.

ANALYSIS

Clearly the biggest breakthrough for the AIA Colorado/CU mentorship program is the move to create a paid staff position within the college to serve as a clearinghouse for recruiting and training qualified mentors, tracing protégé requests, monitoring the success of the program, maintaining communication between the college and the AIA, and keeping mentors and protégés informed about activities and mentoring opportunities. In addition, the budget for mentoring activities is shared between the AIA and the college.

RESOURCES

More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 03.02.01 Mentoring Interns: A Firm Commitment
- 03.02.07 New York Program Goes "Beyond IDP" for Exceptional Mentorship
- 03.02.08 Boston Program Provides Mentoring Alternatives

For More Information on This Topic

See also "Participating in Architecture Education" by Eugene Kremer, FAIA, *The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice*, 13th edition, Chapter 7, page 177.

See also the 14th edition of the *Handbook*, which can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by email at bookstore@aia.org.



Keywords

- Leadership
- Disciplines
- Architectural disciplines
- Architecture education

Feedback

The AIA welcomes member feedback on Best Practice articles. To provide feedback on this article, please contact bestpractices@aia.org.