

Clemson Mentoring Program Bridges Academia and Practice

Contributed by the Clemson Architecture Center

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SUMMARY

The Clemson Architecture Center understands the importance of mentorship as a part of education. Over the past five years the CAC Mentorship Program has placed more than 100 students in 32 firms in the Charleston area. They attribute much of the success to the school's support and the flexibility of students and participating firms.

DEGREE PROGRAMS INCLUDE EXPERIENCE

Graduate students attending the Clemson Architecture Center (CAC) in Charleston, S.C., can fulfill the professional practice requirement for the MArch degree through the school's mentorship program, which places the students in 13-week internships at local firms that run simultaneously with the semester.

The mentorship program is one component of the CAC Internship Program, which seeks to provide educational work experience, with pay and academic credit, for students attending the center. The other component is the internship program, a work/study program for both graduates and undergraduates. Together, they advance the CAC's goal to create a bridge between academia and practice.

During the mentorship program, local architecture firms sponsor students by employing them and assigning each one to a mentor who works with the student daily. The students maintain journals to describe their day-to-day assignments and the lessons learned from those assignments. The CAC monitors the progress of each student's internship by reviewing their journals three times during the semester and conducting periodic reviews with the sponsor and student.

HOW IT WORKS: COOPERATION AND FLEXIBILITY

About 25 architecture firms participate in the CAC Internship Program as a whole, in addition to several landscape architects, contractors, and urban design/planning firms. The program typically places 10 to 15 students with firms each semester. Over the

past five years, the CAC has placed about 100 students with 32 firms. The design firms in Charleston have embraced this program as an opportunity to give back to the profession as mentors. In addition, the professionals remain connected to academia while gaining affordable part-time help in their offices.

Clemson has allowed the CAC to challenge the traditional class structure and schedule to allow mornings to be available for internships. Students have been willing to take fewer credit hours to allocate time for their internships. Design firms also have been flexible when students had studio and class deadlines.

The CAC learned that the program needs to be flexible enough to work with the ever-changing makeup of students each semester. It set standard pay rates that are below market value so the competition among students for positions is based on the value of the internship and not the financial gain. The center also navigated the bureaucratic nuances within the university by providing educational credit and pay to students. The CAC screened the sponsoring firms to ensure that each student receives a true mentoring experience in the office rather than a "grunt" job.

The enthusiasm and support of all the participants in the internships and mentorships have driven the program's success. While both of these components of the CAC Internship Program capitalize on a design school's interaction with the professional community, some of the guidelines described above could be applicable to mentoring programs that do not have an academic component. Any internship or mentoring program could employ the same requirements—assigning mentors within each office, retaining a professional to administer and monitor the program, and setting standard pay rates for prospective interns.

RESOURCES

More Best Practices

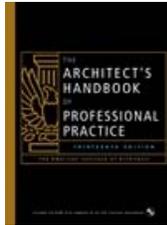
The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 22.02.02 BSA ARE Success Teams
- 03.02.08 Boston Program Provides Mentoring Alternatives
- 07.05.06 Providing EPC Seminars in Your Firm

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.



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Keywords

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