

# Continuing Education at Francis Cauffman Architects

Contributed by Thom Lehman

July 2007

---

*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

The Francis Cauffman firm has developed a well-rounded, multileveled continuing education program that meets both individual and company needs. Interns receive Intern Development Program (IDP) guidance, licensed architects can earn HSW credits, and all employees receive opportunities for professional training.

## OBJECTIVES

The firm's continuing education program seeks to

- Contribute to the profitability of the company
- Develop young design protégés (both interior designers and architects)
- Ensure the firm's professionals are well-rounded experts
- Integrate continuing education with knowledge-based practice
- Create a positive firm culture to retain great staff

## PLANNING THE EDUCATION STRATEGY

The firm assesses professional weaknesses through observation and survey, then designs an education strategy tailored to experience level: intern development (one to three years' experience), professional development (four years and up), and executive education (associate-level and above). A senior associate administers in-house continuing education with some administrative support.

A five-year continuing education plan covers the full spectrum of design and practice, and an annual education series addresses the broadest spectrum of office education needs and fills gaps usually associated with "on-the-job training" of design professionals. The goals are a compressed learning curve for protégés, speedy development of competent professionals, and increased leadership skills for executives.

## DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE

### Intern Development

Design protégés are encouraged to progress through a multi-tiered education approach:

- **IDP/ARE group.** An IDP/ARE group meets at least quarterly to discuss IDP requirements, individual progress, mentoring, Architect Registration Examination (ARE) preparation, and test-taking strategies. An intern, overseen by an associate, runs the group. Participants also meet regularly with their selected mentor.
- **IDP seminars.** In-house experts teach at least four targeted IDP-level seminars per year about specific topics related to IDP completion. The topics cover areas in which interns tend to get the least experience (e.g., contract negotiation and specification writing).
- **Self-directed learning.** The firm makes resources known and available: AIA/CES articles, magazine articles, white papers, and AIA professional-practice publications.

### Professional Development

In-house resources, augmented by outside expertise, provide most of the continuing education. The firm also improves its reputation as a knowledge-based practice by offering the following:

- **Lunch-and-learn seminars.** Seminar topics are selected to address specific real or perceived weaknesses in professional practice. Topics include business, marketing, management and technical topics. Sometimes these are taught by invited outside experts. Twelve seminars are offered a year.
- **Sector-specific seminars.** Seminar topics are selected on specific topics relevant to a person's area of expertise (e.g., lab design, emergency room planning, or training facilities). Eight to 16 seminars are offered per year.
- **Outside seminars and conferences.** With a principal's or director's approval, professionals may attend the educational events of outside

parties, such as university or management-training seminars, including those from the Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD).

- **Product lunch-and-learns.** Outside reps and vendors conduct more than 40 lunch and learn seminars per year. They provide technical and product information for emerging architects and designers at all levels of the firm.
- **Management forum.** This recently added forum, for managers-in-training, focuses on training of new managers. The invited individuals (usually someone with 5 to 10 years' experience from each of five practice sectors) meet about 10 times per year. Study is centered on books about design project management and covers topics such as cost management, accounting basics, work planning, professional correspondence, personnel management, and so on. The loosely styled forum draws on internal expertise in business, management, and negotiation and includes lively roundtable discussions, case studies, and role playing.
- **Design forum.** A principal of the firm conducts quarterly seminars that focus on design of current work and academic design and theory.

### Executive Development

Formalized executive training relies almost entirely on outside expertise—again, relying heavily on Harvard GSD executive training seminars in the spring and summer of each year.

### CONCLUSION

Francis Cauffman intends to make these “best practices” even better. The sector-specific lunch-and-learns, management forum, and design forum currently fall outside the purview of their formal AIA Continuing Education Seminars. The firm intends to draw all of these educational programs under one formalized continuing education umbrella. Other goals for improvement include

- Increasing the number of qualified AIA/CES courses each year
- Greater participation from principals in the conduct and oversight of continuing education
- More individuals involved in designing and administering the overall continuing-education system
- Better assessment of the efficacy of the continuing education efforts

- Becoming a continuing education resource for other architects, consultants, and clients

### About the Contributor

Thom Lehman is a senior associate at Francis Cauffman, an architecture, planning, and interior design firm.

### RESOURCES

#### More Best Practices

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

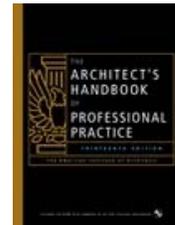
- 07.05.04 Types of Training Programs
- 07.05.08 Sample Performance Evaluation Forms
- 07.05.10 Development of an In-House University

#### For More Information on This Topic

See the *Architect's Essentials of Professional Development* by Jean R. Valence published by John Wiley & Sons, July 2003.



See also “Staff Development” by Laurie Dreyer-Hadley and Kathleen C. Maurel, Assoc. AIA, in *The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice, 13th edition*, Chapter 9, page 242.



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](mailto:bookstore@aia.org).



### Feedback

The AIA welcomes member feedback on Best Practice articles. To provide feedback on this article, please contact: [bestpractices@aia.org](mailto:bestpractices@aia.org).

### Key Terms

- Practice
- Personnel management
- Employment
- Professional development