

JH+P's Intern Development Programs

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SUMMARY

The interns and associates of James, Harwick + Partners (JH+P) have worked together for more than a decade to build the Dallas-based firm's intern-development program. Their efforts have paid off in an IDP curriculum that now includes comprehensive training, continuing education, mentorship, and other incentives for interns to pursue licensure—plus the 2003 IDP Outstanding Firm Award.

The firm is motivated to create such learning experiences for its interns for two reasons—to train its employees properly and as a business decision to retain them—according to firm principal J. Mark Wolf, AIA. The wide-reaching program also instills the importance of licensure early in the careers of JH+P employees.

STRUCTURED PROGRAM

JH+P's programs include a structured mentoring system that pairs interns with more experienced professionals. The intern development program also provides

- Cross-disciplinary learning
- Intern Development Program (IDP) study groups
- Architect Registration Examination (ARE) test-taking strategy sessions
- Weekly project design pin-ups

The firm sponsors guest speakers and two-hour lunchtime supplementary education programs that cover topics such as industry conference reports, best practices from the field, code-related issues, and sustainable design.

In addition, all architecture staff must attend regular seminars on specific practice and design topics, such as project management, CAD standards, and office best practices. These programs give interns credit for IDP topics on which the firm does not focus in its everyday practice. JH+P also provides financial support—no-interest technology loans, travel and study reimbursement, paid time off to study and take

the ARE, and a one-time reimbursement for each section of the registration exam—as well as encouragement to do community-building and volunteer activities. Interns maintain their own records, but their progress is evaluated during semi-annual performance reviews.

Although many interns initiate IDP for their own benefit, it was the principals of JH+P who instituted the firm's education program, particularly after finding that colleges often do a poor job of acquainting students with the IDP process and the ARE. JH+P's nomination for IDP Outstanding Firm of the Year came from Melissa Joesoef, an intern in the firm's program. In her nomination letter, she wrote, "JH+P's commitment to excellence is so apparent in the way that training and sharing of knowledge seems second nature to everyone in the firm, regardless of his/her years in practice or position."

REWARDING CHALLENGES

Despite its success, JH+P faces challenges in administering the intern program. Wolf says motivating interns to pursue licensure can be difficult because it seems that fewer young practitioners want to make the professional commitment to become registered. Like other firms, JH+P works hard to ensure their interns get experience in areas they do not ordinarily encounter in practice. For JH+P, this might mean the firm will take interns into the field to expose them to construction management.

Wolf says, "We recognize that an investment in IDP is fundamental to maintaining a long-term commitment to continuing education in general." JH+P certainly invests heavily in its nearly 20 interns and, by doing so, the firm's principals hope they are giving interns the training and skills they will need to thrive in practice.

RESOURCES

More Best Practices

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

- 03.02.01 Mentoring Interns: A Firm Commitment
- 07.03.01 Definition of Architectural Positions
- 03.02.08 Boston Program Provides Mentoring Alternatives

For More Information on This Topic

See also “Staff Development and Retention” by Laurie Dreyer-Hadley, Kathleen C. Maurel, and Debra Fiori in *The Architect’s Handbook of Professional Practice*, 14th edition, Chapter 7, page 285.



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Key Terms

- Practice
- Employment
- Personnel management
- Staff development
- Intern Development Program
- Licensure