

Landscape Architecture Mentoring Programs

Robin Gyorgyfalvy, ASLA – Chair, Mentoring Program Sub-Committee
(Jason Harrington, Wendy Miller, Keith Robinson)

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Purpose

The purpose of this white paper is to demonstrate the value and benefits of mentoring programs in providing outreach to landscape architecture students and emerging professionals, explain what a mentoring program does, and describe how the profession, ASLA chapters, universities, public agencies, businesses, or other organizations would benefit from implementation of mentoring programs. This paper also demonstrates the value added for professional and learning opportunities, highlights existing viable mentoring programs, and provides a matrix that compares existing mentoring programs and gives current contact information.

Introduction

Mentoring programs are successful when professionals or students offer to expend their time, knowledge, and energy to develop professional awareness and skills for entry level interns or to other students. They are also of value when the outcome is licensure, employment, and career decisions based upon guidance from an experienced professional. Students benefit from mentors by receiving valuable experience through interacting with experienced professionals and gain an important resource by exploring the wide spectrum of career options in landscape architecture. Planned interaction can be the best way for students to be open to a wide variety of professional opportunities when transitioning from college to a career, when seeking licensure, an entry level job position, or career advancement.

Mentoring programs can range from a one-time commitment consisting of a 30 minute phone call, a day spent shadowing a seasoned professional, or a longer time-frame such as an internship or a project assignment. It can help a student discover what a landscape architect's work day entails, the pros and cons of the job, and provides opportunity for direct communication and advice toward pursuing a particular career path. It can also clearly portray and reveal the differences between practice in the public and private sectors, design/build firms, larger multi-discipline firms with offices in many locations, planning agencies, and other venues.

Sharing career advice and experiences with a student or emerging professional constitutes an opportunity for practicing landscape architects to give back to the professional community. Long-term guidance for career development as well as networking support make up yet another outcome of a mentoring initiative. Mentoring programs that encourage students to provide feedback to their mentors are very valuable especially when advice from a mentor contributes to a student achieving success in their chosen path. Students who have had positive experiences and received good guidance from mentors may also become excellent mentors themselves.

Audience and Mentor Program Categories

The intended audience are comprised of several categories: professionals, licensed professionals, college students to high school students, upper classmen to peers. Most typical are professionals mentoring students, interns, or recent graduates seeking entry level positions. Additionally, there are seasoned licensed professionals mentoring younger unlicensed professionals. College students mentoring elementary through high school age students can generate and encourage an early awareness and interest in landscape architecture. Mentoring programs are required to maintain accreditation of most landscape architecture programs, although the format or definition may vary.

There are multiple benefits from mentoring programs that occur in landscape architecture programs when upper level students are mentoring lower level students and providing guidance, feedback, and encouragement in their courses and design studios. It is also beneficial when mentoring programs are tailored to the differences between students at the graduate level versus undergraduate level. Mentoring programs play a particularly critical role when young professionals are being guided by more experienced and seasoned professionals when preparing for the LARE exam or other professional certifications.

Other audiences are external to the profession and include those in related or different fields whose interests or work overlap with landscape architecture. These external audiences benefit from being exposed to the range of knowledge and experience provided by seasoned professionals in both private and public practice including the areas of research and education. Sustainability and other projects are typically more successful when design professionals work collaboratively with other related specialists. A mentoring program can be the catalyst for those in related fields to understand landscape architectural design approaches and strategies.

Mentoring Program Concept and Goals

One of the primary reasons for having a mentoring program is the opportunity to pair practitioners with students based upon student needs to develop and expand areas of interest in order to gain a greater understanding of the field of landscape architecture, as well as their own potential. A mentor-student relationship enables students or emerging professionals to gain a better understanding of professional expectations as well as revealing the wide range of application from smaller-scale site design to larger-scale master planning, urban design or public policy making.

A mentoring program gives professionals exposure to developing technologies, recent trends, and emerging issues in the realm of land-use planning and design. These programs also provide valuable connections between alumni and students in landscape architecture programs. Another benefit is good exposure to ASLA chapter activities in the community and access to other professional networking opportunities.

Most mentoring programs involve contact between seasoned practitioners and students considering landscape architecture or a related field as a major. Some students request a practicum or an internship position to fulfill this need. An informal situation as opposed to a

formal working situation can often provide a student with timely information, exposure and guidance when making a decision on whether or not to pursue a degree or career in landscape architecture.

Contact through mentoring programs can range from scheduled interviews by telephone where the student sends his/her questions to the landscape architect and a scheduled interview occurs, to meeting on a regular basis for an extended period of time. Shadowing can occur where a student spends a day at the office with a landscape architect, touring different public agencies, or other activities such as informal meetings to talk about ideas and to network with a variety of professionals. Other ways mentoring can occur is through inviting mentors to design critiques for feedback, or attending events or conferences that interest both.

Mentoring also provides opportunities for offices to recruit students for internships or graduates for entry level positions. Planning ahead for employment and licensure are other opportunities for recent graduates. Students with contacts and connections to the professional world have increased chances for being considered for employment whether project by project, part-time, or full-time with benefits.

The attached matrix displays a variety of current mentoring programs. These programs range from federal, state, and city agencies, local municipalities, universities, ASLA chapters, and ACE mentoring programs. Also included are a list of contacts, websites, and blogs. These programs have provided numerous successful ways to link students with mentors resulting in graduation from landscape architecture programs and higher success rates for entering the job market and securing a position with a design firm (See Exhibit A – Program Comparison).

Best Practices

A mentor and student survey report conducted by one of the programs indicates that a well organized and orchestrated mentoring program requires a program leader providing mentor orientation and guidance, good communication and clearly defined expectations from both the mentor and mentee, and a specific timeframe. Students were often interested in informal interactions in addition to the structured meetings at offices or design reviews. Success with student/mentor partnering was highest when students initiated contact and were consistent in checking in with their mentors. Clarifying roles of each was considered very helpful as well as feedback to assess needs and continuing building of mentoring programs (See Final Draft of NCSU Mentor & Student Survey)

Communications and Outreach

Once finalized this white paper will be posted on the ASLA website's Education - Career Discovery (<http://www.asla.org/CareerDiscovery.aspx>) and Professional Practice - Resource Center (<http://www.asla.org/ContentDetail.aspx?id=14444>). There will be links to existing mentoring programs, postings on ASLA State Chapter websites and blogs, and postings on State Landscape Architecture Board websites and newsletters. There will also be links to ASLA's Facebook page and create an App for students desiring to interact with information and programs.

Other outreach efforts would include customizing a package based upon the audience such as high school guidance counselors, college advisors, or students at LABash. Successful mentoring programs would be models for others and featured in LAND ON-Line with a link to the white paper. An outreach to universities and colleges would be made by the Public Practice Advisory Committee which would include featured articles on newsletters, websites, blogs, twitter, and Facebook.

Updating and Peer Review

ASLA will maintain this paper as a “living document” and will update the matrix and information by contacting mentoring program leaders on an annual basis. Other ASLA groups including the Emerging Professionals Committee and the Membership Committee will provide peer review of this paper. ASLA’s Public Relations Manager will provide direction on how to incorporate this paper with other ongoing outreach efforts.