

Reversing the Implosion: An Analysis of AIA and Collateral Data to Develop Effective IDP Incentives to Increase the Demographic Diversity of our Profession

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Abstract

The American architectural profession is shrinking at a rate of about 1.5 to 2% every year. Some licensed practitioners argue that producing fewer architects helps their businesses, while some educators argue that the decline of architectural graduates entering “traditional” practice acknowledges increased alternative design career paths. Most agree that the current Intern Development Program (IDP) does little to encourage design school graduates to become licensed practitioners.

A trend toward theory in design education has discouraged many more diverse, pragmatically oriented aspiring professionals from entering our profession. In the early 1970s, many women and minorities entered our profession to “make a difference” in the lives of actual individuals. Today we must develop ways of making the IDP process more relevant to the aspirations of these diverse groups.

This research tests the hypothesis that the current IDP internship process, by failing to adequately connect academic theories to the pragmatic vicissitudes of professional practice, actually discourages women and diverse minorities from becoming licensed practicing professionals. By thoroughly examining and analyzing the extensive demographic and qualitative data collected from thousands of respondents to a 2004-05 AIA-sponsored research project, and cross-correlating this with recent studies by other architectural collateral organizations, this new research seeks to determine specifically what might encourage more women and minorities to complete the IDP and become licensed practicing professionals.