

Community Engagement for Architecture and Design

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At Gensler Austin we spend our time designing and building the city we live in. It's why we also take the time to make sure we give back to the community in as many ways as we can.

Gensler's Community Impact Program is a global network of architects and designers across our 46+ offices. As a large firm with global presence, our leadership wanted to focus on meaningful partnerships that allows us to better scale our efforts across the platform.

We identified three organizations to further connect, network and expand our engagement with: National Organization for Minority Architects (NOMA), CityYear, and the ACE Mentor Program of America. With active participants in over 15 Gensler offices, ACE helps mentor high school students and inspires them to pursue careers in design and construction.

The more we get involved with ACE, the more we learn about the benefits of mentorship and community engagement. Here are a few of the things we have discovered over the years.

Working with youth is a way to build a better future.

In 2014, Gensler Austin was instrumental in launching the city's chapter of the ACE Mentor Program, a national mentorship program that partners high school students with professionals in the Architecture, Construction, and Engineering fields. Students in the program are introduced to the skills necessary to excel in the architecture and design industry through a model which combines the potent ingredients of mentoring and real-world project based learning.

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The curriculum for the program changes from year to year, and is written by affiliate leaders in collaboration with the University of Texas School of Architecture and the Cockrell School



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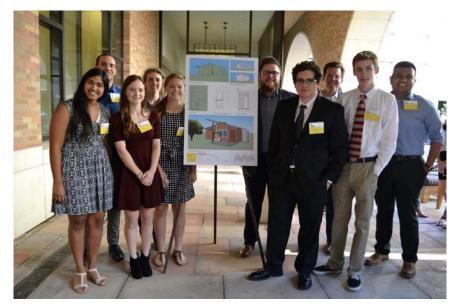


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and designers both in Austri as well as around the world.

In 2016, ACE students designed micro home for the chronically homeless as part of Mobile Loaves and Fishes' Community First! Village. Beyond the design challenges, students had to take a deep dive into issues surrounding Austin's homeless population, the organizations addressing it, and the city policies and laws affecting the issue.





In the second year, students were challenged to design a sustainable skyscraper located in various urban centers around the world. In this case, the final project gave students an opportunity to look beyond their backyard and explore distant corners of the globe, research different people and cultures, as well as connect with industry experts working in other geographical markets.

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This year, amid escalating concerns regarding climate change, students are designing midrises that are resilient to natural disasters such as floods, wildfires, and hurricanes. As designers of the built environment, it is important to inspire a future generation of industry leaders to design buildings that not only can withstand natural disasters, but more importantly help our communities bounce back stronger afterward.

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Pairing experts and students creates a unique symbiosis that benefits both the mentor and the learner. By working in a collaborative environment students are challenged to find solutions to design problems. In working to find these solutions, students develop important skills such as public speaking, time management, and sketching.

Interacting with students can also expose mentors to fresh perspectives to problem solving. Students often approach design problems with an open-mindedness and a willingness to listen to other ideas an opinions. They approach issues with a 360° approach, allowing them to explore more than one way to solve a problem. For mentors, this is an important lesson in learning the importance of having the patience to step back and see the problem at hand through broadened observation.

ACE students also learn to use new software and are exposed to the cutting edge technology used within the A-E-C industry. This is important when trying to recruit into our ranks a generation that has grown up on the internet; even more so even more so in an industry where an overrepresented baby boomer population has a created a reliance on outdated project management processes. From 3D-printing buildings using flying drones to BIM modeling and digital punch lists, our industry is in the middle of a digital revolution, and there has never been a more exciting time to be a part of it!

Seeing people working together is proof that we can achieve a common goal.

Community engagement is also a great lens through which to see the power and result of many people working together to achieve a common goal.

Over the past two years, the ACE Mentor Program of Austin has worked with hundreds of area high school students and awarded almost \$20,000 in scholarships to support our industries' next generation. We enter our 2018 program with more than 80 registered students from 14 Austin area high schools and nearly 40 mentors Austin's top A-E-C firms.

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But there's more to it than the satisfaction of a job well done. Running an program of this size requires serious project management skills, often requiring our board to touch uncharted territories for the average architect, contractor, or engineer. We have to employ dexterity and utilize a wide range of skillsets to make our vision a reality. There are legal issues, bylaws governing not-for-profit entities, budgeting, scheduling, donor relations, and more.

These challenges however tend to bring out the best in both individuals and organizations. Whether you are a contractor, lawyer, architect, civil engineer, or somewhere in-between, you have the experience to become an ambassador of talent, grit, and transferable skills, and our program is a great example of what can be achieved through teamwork and industry cross-collaboration.

Mentorship builds stronger relationships within our industry.

On a typical job site there is a natural weariness among the various disciplines even on the most well-oiled team. In volunteer work, everyone shares a sense of united purpose and the atmosphere is congenial and playful.

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ACE also helps build better relationships with industry peers and partners. The unique environment created by the program also us to see things from different perspectives. Those of us who work at a drafting table (per se) are able to get a glimpse into thought process of a contractor, a structural engineer, or a landscape architect. This new vantage point allows us to better understand how our industry counterparts make decisions, in turn making us more empathetic when it comes to our day-to-day work.

As mentors, we get an opportunity to expand our horizons by partnering with people who think along different algorithms. ACE helps has helped us become better listeners, build stronger networks, and become more well-rounded collaborators.

An investment today, is an investment in tomorrow.

ACE hold a unique power to transform a student's life. By connecting mentors - educ

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industry professionals with expertise and knowledge - with mentees - young adults who lack experience and in some cases role models in their lives - we are beginning to shift the



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being maie-dominated, reactionary, and innextole. we ve noticed, nowever, that when there's active outreach in our community, many are eager to get involved in architecture and design.

Programs such as ACE empower young women and support minorities to pursue a career in the A-E-C industry, helping to evolve our profession into one that is more reflective of the many facets of our society. As these barriers are broken down, architecture gains from the inclusion of more and different viewpoints and value systems. There's a true sense of empowerment when we bring more diversity to the table, and more of us are able to participate in purpose-driven work.



We are able to see evidence of this widespread change within our affiliate, with women encompassing the majority of both our student and mentor base, as well as when it comes to representation within our organization's leadership. We could not be more proud of this!

The numbers speak for themselves, see some of the insights which emerged from ACE National's recent survey.

- According to ACE's 2017 survey of mentors, 48% report that mentoring for ACE gave them greater understanding or appreciation of aspects of the A-E-C industry outside their field.
- 65% report satisfaction in helping recruit the next generation of A-E-C professionals.
- 68% say they enjoyed mentoring because it allowed them to help young people explore their futures in ways the mentors themselves never experienced.
- 73% said they were pleased to be able to share their passion for the industry and their career.

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