



2006 IDP Coordinators Conference Highlights Mentoring Best Practices

Among the highlights of the 2006 IDP Coordinators Conference were presentations about mentoring's best practices. Learn more about the ways in which mentoring is being re-envisioned in one firm and in three university settings.

Mentoring is alive and well—both in practice and educational settings. This was the message drawn from four highly imitable programs that were featured during the 2006 IDP Coordinators Conference. With a near standing-room-only crowd on hand, the 2006 gathering provided an energetic and receptive audience for the most current ideas in mentoring best practices.

SMMAcademy

First to address the group were representatives from Symmes Maini & McKee Associates, a multi-disciplinary architecture/engineering firm based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, who provided a detailed overview of the SMMAcademy. This well-wrought, user-friendly program emphasizes formal facilitated mentoring by matching employees, known as protégés, with senior level colleagues. Its goal is to develop mentoring partnerships that will provide personal and professional growth.

The SMMAcademy is open to all employees within the firm. Assisted by the Framework Committee, potential protégés identify their goals for mentorship as well as the colleagues with whom they would like to work.

The Framework Committee meets with all interested parties in order to discuss the qualities that lead to a successful mentoring partnership. Individually, a successful protégé “possess[es] an eagerness to learn” and is a “risk taker with a positive attitude and outlook,” while “the best mentors are supportive, secure in their position, and both effective teachers and good motivators.” Protégés and mentors also need patience, respectfulness, and a shared value for work and for the firm.

After reviewing protégé goals and preferences, the Framework Committee matches each protégé with a mentor. The program officially begins with a kick-off gathering that

helps to “jump-start the ‘getting to know you’ phase” of the mentoring partnership. Subsequent meetings follow, with the Framework Committee suggesting that they take place at least once a month and, if possible, outside of the office.

Quarterly gatherings of protégés and mentors also are scheduled in order to share progress reports about successes and obstacles. A final informal reception takes place at the end of the year, which “sets the tone for the continuation of many partnerships beyond the limits of the program.”

Through the volunteer-based SMMAcademy, the firm has found a way to support their employees’ professional development and career goals.

MAKING THE LEAP FROM EDUCATION TO PRACTICE

For more than five years, the Clemson

Architecture Center in Charleston, a Clemson University satellite campus, offers an intensive mentoring program for both undergraduate and graduate students.

Program Coordinator Ashley Jennings explained that the Center's Intern Program provides students with an educational work experience where they earn both academic credit and a salary. Two options are available. Undergraduate and graduate students may take part in the *Internship Program*, which is built around a work/study model. The *Mentorship Program* is specifically geared toward graduate students; their successful participation in this educational work-place-ment program fulfills the professional practice requirement of Clemson's M.ARCH degree.

Through the Mentorship Program, students interview for a 13-week internship that runs concurrent with the academic semester. Firms taking part in this initiative—at last count more than 30 representing a full range of the design professions—provide a mentor who works with the interns on a daily basis. Students maintain a journal throughout their experience and provide details about their daily assignments and the subsequent lessons learned.

That students earn wages through the Center's Internship Program is a unique—and potentially daunting—benefit. As Jennings noted, the program not only has “navigated Clemson's bureaucratic nuances” in order to provide students with both academic credit and a salary; it also has carefully screened participating firms “to ensure that each student receives a true mentoring experience in the office rather than a ‘grunt’ job.”

ENHANCED CONTRIBUTIONS FROM ACADEMIA

Mixing pragmatism, enthusiasm, and humor, University of Oklahoma Assistant Professor Marjorie Parry Callahan, AIA, LEEDS, next described her four-pronged approach to intern development and mentoring.

Guided by a “perpetual interest in making the professional practice class more interesting,”

Professor Callahan introduces her third-year students to leadership development roles by primarily relying on a most unusual and unexpected collaborator—the Pentagon.

Detailed PowerPoint presentations breakdown efforts by the Pentagon to define leadership development, which is a key factor in the mentoring process. Related slides also introduce the U.S. Army's mentorship concepts, which include the definition of a supervisor and an emphasis on voluntary mentorship.

Callahan next incorporates the current edition of the *IDP Guidelines* into her course—literally speaking. Students are given an assignment to include the *Guidelines* in the design process. (How many copies will fit into a particular unit that students must design?) This hands-on approach encourages them to familiarize themselves with the *Guidelines*, both as resource and material.

The IDP training areas are next addressed through a series of lectures given by local practitioners. Each focuses on a specific training area and provides an in-depth look at the practical applications of the related knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Last but not least, Callahan incorporates the lowly bulletin board in her efforts to introduce internship and mentoring. She noted that bulletin boards often are visible in places where students gather. Why not use them to their fullest extent? To that end, Callahan makes certain that several bulletin boards sport the latest information about IDP, including several pages from the *IDP Guidelines*.

A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO MENTORING

Taking its inspiration from the *Emerging Professional's Companion*, academic and administrative staff at the Boston-based Wentworth Institute of Technology have organized a Collaborative Mentoring Committee that supports third- and fourth-year architecture students. Much of the credit for this re-envisioned approach to mentoring, internship, and professional development

can be traced to Charles J. Cimino, AIA, an associate professor and IDP educator coordinator at the Institute, and a conference presenter.

Professor Cimino described several facets of Wentworth's collaborative approach to mentoring. Comprising four members, the Collaborative Mentoring Committee works toward introducing upper-level students to a studio sequence that focuses on the fundamentals of internship, co-operative employment, and personal presentation skills.

To that end, the individuals serving on the committee have specific responsibilities that support committee goals.

- Cimino helps students enroll in the Intern Development Program, a mandatory step within the studio sequence. He also works with the Boston Society of Architects' Mentoring Committee.
- Career Planning Advisor Rachel Levine helps students perfect their resumes, coordinates and conducts mock interviews, and maintains a database of firms that hire Wentworth students both on temporary and permanent bases.
- Assistant Professor Lora Kim offers working sessions on resume and portfolio design; Kim's valuable feedback helps students present themselves and their work effectively.
- Karen Boss, director of student leadership programs, introduces the benefits of personal time-management skills during the studio's first semester. She also offers a workshop on personal habits and time management for all architecture students participating in a cooperative work semester.

Among the benefits of this multi-departmental approach to mentoring, Wentworth is enjoying a new-found collaborative spirit among its divisions. Likewise, the committee has made certain that all related workshops and events can be funded under existing budgets.

Perhaps the most telling sign of success is one basic statistic: Student participation in the studio is nearly 100 percent. **DC**