



Key Points:

- If the design profession is going to reach its full potential and its aspirations as a truly diverse profession, it needs more proactive and coordinated programs for public and minority awareness.
- There is a need to invest in mentorship programs and funding for minorities through scholarships and financial aid.



NOMA (National Organization of Minority Architects) Detroit is a professional architectural organization designed to be a conduit of knowledge and experience to the youth and our community.

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AIA Michigan
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Project Pipeline: *An Architectural Summer Camp for Minority High School Students*; Created by NOMA

“Start by doing what’s necessary, then do what’s possible and suddenly you are doing the impossible.” Saint Francis of Assisi

The AIA’s 2015 Diversity in the Profession of Architecture Study showed there to be significant progress made for women in the architecture profession, as nearly 33% more women have entered the profession since 2004. However, the number of men of color who are registered architects has only increased from 1.5% to 1.8%, and the number of women of color has only improved from .3% to .5%. The study identified that the leading explanations of why people of color are not well represented in architecture include: minority students are generally unaware of architecture as a potential career choice; minority students have a lack of role models in the field; and those with limited resources may not be able to afford a degree in architecture, or may be encouraged by peers and family to pursue more lucrative careers.

The study also identified some effective ways of attracting and retaining people of color in the field, including:

1. Increase industry outreach to K-12 students through school curricula, extracurricular clubs and activities, and weekend summer programs.
2. Expand industry support for the National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA).
3. Attract more professors of color to teach in accredited architecture programs.
4. Increase community outreach into middle schools and high schools by university architectural programs.
5. Offer industry-funded college scholarships for people of color interested in studying architecture.

If the design profession is going to reach its full potential and its aspirations as a truly diverse profession, it needs more proactive and coordinated programs for public and minority awareness. There is a need to invest in mentorship programs and funding for minorities through scholarships and financial aid. These costs have the potential to be offset by a more diverse talent pool. NOMA, in an effort to engage youth of color into the profession of architecture, created a mentoring program called Project Pipeline. Three of the underlining goals of this initiative are building general awareness about architecture, increasing representation, and creating a series of events that reinforce and continue to grow interest.





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“Architecture doesn’t come up that often as a career choice,” said Bryan Cook of NOMA Detroit, who began the Project Pipeline camps in Grand Rapids in 2012 when he lived there, “There are so many times that if a child had known about architecture earlier, they would have been working towards that goal.”

This year, Cook helped lead camps in Detroit and Kalamazoo. Many mentors shared their experience about not knowing any architects growing up. Several architects at the camp shared how they had not stepped foot inside an architect’s office even after attending architecture school.

“It makes a difference to have volunteers that are diverse,” said Jenny Wang, Associate AIA, of Diekema Hamann.

“Having mentors that the students can relate to enables them to envision themselves in professional roles and stay more actively engaged.”



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The primary focus for the two-day summer camp is to provide high school students with a fun and engaging introduction to what architecture is and to the various things that architects do. The NOMA Detroit Chapter helped organize the first-time event in Kalamazoo as well as running its own event in Detroit. AIA Michigan, the Michigan Architectural Foundation, and the AIA local Chapter AIA SWMichigan provided sponsorship support as well as many architectural mentors for the two-day event in Kalamazoo.

A particularly successful aspect of the NOMA camp is prescriptive training—well thought out exercises that teach students some fundamental skills in measuring, drawing and developing concepts. Other skills include basic model building and collaborating with team members. Research on out of school programs like Project Pipeline, suggests its positive impact on student success in the classroom as well as its potential to develop students’ career aspirations beyond typical career days or presentations. When students choose to participate in extra-curricular activities, they build what educators refer to as “grit” or “rigor,” instilling determination and passion to pursue something long-term. Because of the project-based nature of many out-of-school time activities, students also develop proficiencies in problem-solving, decision-making, teamwork, and fine motor skills—all of which will help them excel at architecture, should they choose to pursue it down the road.

Day one of the camp includes a site visit to an architecture firm, as well as the project site. The host site for the Kalamazoo camp was Diekema Hamann, a local architecture and engineering firm. The students also visited Tower



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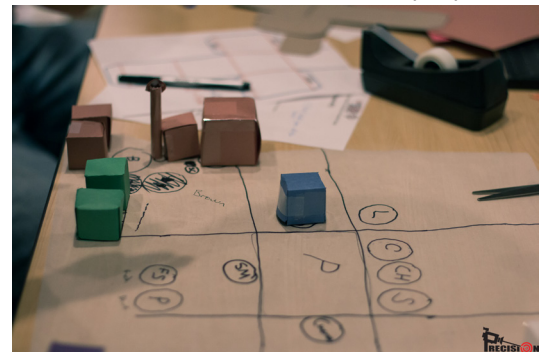
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Pinkster, which allowed them to experience a second firm. “We like to do the field trips as part of the camp, so they get a sense of what it’s like to actually study architecture or work in an architect’s office,” says Hayward Babineaux, Associate AIA of Byce Associates and one of the program leaders. “It gets them enthused about the ideas of the profession, so that when we transition into skill awareness activities they have more reasons for why they should learn a particular skill.” Day Two of the Project Pipeline focuses on group projects. A model of the proposed site and surrounding structures was prebuilt, so students could visualize how their solutions can fit. The groups start by brainstorming ideas, then collaborate on choosing the best options and finally select a project they all support. They spend five hours drawing plans, and constructing a scale model that would fit in the site model.

For the final event of the camp, students within each group are given the opportunity to present their own perspective of the project to their family and friends. This year, there were over 40 people in attendance at the Kalamazoo camp, including a jury consisting of two representatives from the city and a local architect. The Mayor of Kalamazoo, Bobby Hopewell, shared the history of the site chosen for the project and the opportunities he sees going forward for the site.

The presentations were well received, and the camp made a favorable impression on the students and their families. Several students, who were already planning on visits to architecture schools, said the camp fueled their desire to visit the programs. Continuity and connectivity are the next priorities of the camp and a planned pizza party for the camp participants is anticipated for September. The hope is that the mentors and the camp will continue to be a resource for those who attended and their families.

Project Pipeline is well structured and does have admission requirements. Although tuition is free there is an application process which requires the students to write short essays responses to several questions. Prior to the camp, students are given reading materials designed to familiarize them with architectural terms, definitions, and nomenclature. The intention is to prepare the students, so they arrive at the camp far more engaged. The reading materials also include the background and parameters for the Day Two group project. The camp ideally facilitates 10-25 students with 8-12 architectural mentors supporting and facilitating different sessions. Kalamazoo had 12





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students participate in its first camp. The Detroit camp has had as many as 25 participants.

If the design profession wants to benefit from and achieve diversity over aspiring to it, resources need to be allocated to achieving this goal. The NOMA Project Pipeline is just one piece of the strategy. Coordination with university programs such as the University of Michigan's ArcPrep as well as camps at the University of Detroit and Lawrence Technical University, can build on NOMA's efforts. AIA Michigan and the Michigan Architectural Foundation recognize the importance of public awareness and that it includes improved minority awareness of architecture and the profession of architecture. Both organizations have recently committed their financial support to bring more Project Pipeline Camps statewide. However, the greatest need is the support given by mentors—individuals who give their time at such events, and make themselves available to young people.

Authored by Norman Hamann, AIA; Diekema Hamann Architecture

