

In June, we asked interns and recently licensed architects for stories about great internships and mentors. We received far too many stories to tell in one issue of *Direct Connection* and we hope to bring you more stories in future issues. If you have a great experience to share, please e-mail Olivia Marshall at omarshall@ncarb.org.

Taking Control of Your Internship



Luke Jarrett graduated from Clemson University in South Carolina with a Bachelor of Science in design from the College of Architecture in August 1999. After working for two years as an intern in Atlanta, he returned to school—this time Georgia Tech—where he received a Masters in Architecture in 2003. He worked as an intern at the Preston Partnership in Atlanta for a few months before he and his fiancé decided to relocate to Charleston, SC. A web search led him to the Byers Design Group and an interview with Sanford E. Byers, AIA, ASLA, in late summer 2003. Here are some of his tips on how to get the most out of your internship experience.

Determine what you want to get out of your internship.

I had a plan for my internship. I wanted to use it to learn to be an architect, but to also try to find where I belonged in the profession. I made a point of moving around as much as I could—without looking shifty—in order to experience many different facets of the profession before registration. I worked for a huge firm (185), a large firm (40), medium-sized firms (12-24), and a small firm (4). I worked on resorts, high-rise offices, shipping warehouses, shopping centers, hospitals, parks, restaurants, small retail stores, new residential, and renovation/addition residential. I worked on new construction and on historic structures. I did all of that in five years, and I saw a lot. I had a lot of bosses and managers, but I only had one that I would consider to be a true mentor, and that was Sandy Byers.

Discuss your IDP goals during the interview.

I liked Sandy immediately. We discussed licensure and I explained that I was interested in making a fast track through the remainder of my IDP. Sandy made it clear that I wouldn't have difficulty gathering up the hard-to-get training units. If I was willing to take on responsibility, he would work with me to ensure that I was able to get the experience I needed. This was a key factor in my decision to work at Byers Design.

The work I had been doing before was low-level "little-intern-in-a-big-firm" stuff . . . bathroom elevations, stair sections, finish schedules. With Sandy, I was able to grow as an architect. From the first day he made it clear to me that there would be no limitations on what I could do there.

Make a list of questions and find the right time to talk to your supervisor.

Sandy served as both my mentor and my supervisor. The only drawback I experienced was early on in the internship when I had not yet developed a sense of timing with respect to catching the principal at a good time to get answers to my questions. In the beginning, when I had a lot more questions than answers, I would make lists of questions and meet with him early in the morning or late in the evening to go through them. Sandy was always very good about checking with me to see if I had issues. He was also diligent about reviewing all work I produced at regular intervals before it went out and would offer suggestions and constructive criticism at that point.

Use your internship as an opportunity to learn about all aspects of the business.

In addition to the specifics of architecture, Sandy ran the firm in a transparent manner, with quarterly planning, marketing, and office management meetings with the entire firm. We would review the previous meetings and set goals for the next. He was always eager to

educate me with respect to the business side of the firm and helped me to understand the basics of marketing and project management from a profitability standpoint. I was invited to participate in a lot of aspects of the firm that were outside of architecture such as personnel—I was eventually charged with placing ads and interviewing prospective new interns—marketing and billing.

As I reached for more responsibility he was always there to extend it to me and then keep an eye on me to make sure that I didn't go too far. I had the feeling of always being in just a little over my head, not enough to cause panic, but enough to compel me to swim as hard as I could. There was never an issue of being pigeonholed into CAD or production. There was a good deal of that, but I also had the opportunity to do a lot of other types of work as well, like project management, presentations to local zoning and review boards, interaction with clients from project day one.

Learn from the firm's strengths.

There was also a lot of emphasis on community at the firm. As a small firm in a city renowned for its stringent design standards, we were used to interfacing with a wide range of entities through all phases of our projects, and Sandy always made a point of demonstrating that this was a positive aspect to Charleston architecture.

He helped me to understand that the organization of a project would result in its success. Elements that would be considered major impediments to design (Distribution Requirements Planning (DRP), restrictive zoning ordinances, and powerful historical, neighborhood, and social organizations, mandatory municipal proceedings, among others) could actually bring about a great project as long as they were treated as valued stakeholders and integrated into the design process in the earliest stages. He showed me how to diffuse sticky situations by communicating openly with our clients and the city. We always took pride in working above board, with nothing to hide.

Know your weaknesses, and find ways to improve those skills.

Sandy is a natural coordinator. He has a great skill for finding common ground when there are parties in opposition. He would use this skill to bring together the project team, to work with the client and to move projects in difficult or highly regulated areas of town. He would always listen very carefully to stakeholder needs and then give them serious consideration before acting in any manner. Even if he ended up acting against someone's opinion, it was always clear that he had thought about that action and also its likely impact. In many cases that skill helped make parties who were initially at odds with each other develop at least cordial relations, and in most

cases we were able to find a solution that at least gave something to everyone.

This skill is not one that comes naturally to me, so in contentious situations I always look to the experience that he gave me. As I move further into architecture I believe that being able to bring divergent groups together is one of the greatest skills that an architect can possess. Design is subjective in many ways, especially in a very historic city. Trends come and go. However, an architect who listens to all stakeholders, who acts only after careful deliberation, and who places a premium on communication and open dialogue will always be an asset to their community.

Make your strengths known to the firm.

Sandy treated my ideas with interest and respect. He made a point of finding what I considered to be highlights in my previous experience and education and always made an effort to use those skills to the benefit of the firm. I felt that I was really contributing to the firm.

Meet with your mentor and supervisor on a regular basis.

Each quarter, I would meet with Sandy—usually during staff meetings—to go over where I was in the IDP. At that time, I'd let him know the areas in which I was hoping to gain more experience. I found that the community service areas were the most challenging to gather,

Luke Jarrett completed his IDP in the fall of 2004. He received his license to practice architecture in South Carolina in the spring of 2007, and is currently pursuing NCARB certification. Last year Luke joined Liollo Architecture in Charleston, where his work includes master planning, new construction, and renovation design of residential, commercial, and health care projects. He has most recently been involved in the design of upgrades to several service areas at the VA Medical Center – Charleston, renovations to Larimer Child Care Center, and master-planning and schematic design for Martin Luther Evangelical Lutheran Church. Luke is also working with the Town of Ravenel on the exterior restoration and interior preservation of a circa 1931 Train Depot.

Move around as much as you can so that you can see as much of the profession as an intern as you possibly can. Ask a lot of questions . . . as an intern you have a free pass to learn. Use it!

since they didn't fall in naturally with the flow of an architectural office and they usually took place on weekends or after hours. I made a target of what I needed and made Sandy aware of what I was after and we worked to maximize all opportunities that would fit the bill.

I was with Byers Design Group for 2.5 years, and in two of them I had managed to overfill all of the learning units for IDP, without really having to try very hard. I never had to pressure him to gain access to the units that were traditionally difficult to obtain. I was on the job site; I was preparing design competition submissions and meeting with the local business journal. I attended community functions as a representative of the firm.

To get the most out of your internship you need to take control of it.

Look for the position that will give you the chance to reach for the difficult areas. No firm will do this for you, but there are a lot of them who will make it very difficult to do for yourself. Everywhere I have ever worked there are interns who will always be interns, who wait for someone to move them into licensure. This won't ever happen. You have to make it a priority for yourself. You have to understand the rules and the requirements and put them

at the forefront of your mind and you have to go out and get them.

Also, never work as an intern in a strictly salaried position. Always ask in your interview about being compensated for your overtime work. Any employer who is unwilling or uncomfortable discussing this is probably planning to put you into the salt mines just as soon as you are reliant on them for your living expenses.

Move around as much as you can so that you can see as much of the profession as an intern as you possibly can. Ask a lot of questions. Never act like you know something that you don't, ask someone who does or find it on your own. As an intern you have a free pass to learn. Use it!

Oh, finally, travel. Travel as much as you can.

Pass your knowledge on to someone else.

After a year with Byers Design Group, Sandy added additional staff and I was charged with directing the efforts of our most junior intern. I would schedule his workload, and review his timesheets and work before passing them along to Sandy with comments. I enjoyed that a great deal. I'm still very close with that junior intern even though we have both since moved on to other employment. DC



Luke Jarrett's experience shows that to get the most from your internship, it's important to find the right internship and a good supervisor and mentor. He found the right combination at Byers Design Group in Charleston, SC. Founded in 1999, the group combines architecture, landscape architecture and land planning in order to offer comprehensive design services to residential and commercial entities throughout South Carolina. Founder Sanford E. "Sandy" Byers, AIA, ASLA, is a licensed architect and landscape architect, and has mentored more than 10 architects and landscape architects on a formal and informal basis. This is his perspective on being a mentor.



LUKE JARRETT AND SANDY BYERS ENJOY LUNCH AT 11 CENTER STREET, A GOURMET GROCERY AND TAPAS RESTAURANT IN FOLLY BEACH, SC, WHICH WAS DESIGNED BY BYERS DESIGN GROUP.

A Mentor's Perspective

Mentoring enhances the quality of the work produced by employees.

I first became a mentor in an effort to improve the design profession and help intern architects under my employment to develop as architects while fulfilling their IDP requirements. I continue to be a mentor because I really enjoy watching and helping young people grow in their endeavors.

Mentoring is a very rewarding experience because I'm able to place interns in situations and watch as they grow in various ways. The area in which you might expect the individual to expand is not always the one that reveals itself. That is the reason that I try to expose interns to as many diverse situations as possible. The only time I don't enjoy mentoring is when an intern doesn't have a passion for his or her profession, and doesn't take full advantage of the opportunities afforded them.

It's a privilege to serve as a mentor.

When someone asks me to be their mentor, I am honored that they trust that I will present them the proper opportunities to adequately fulfill the requirements and truly give the individual the experience and background to make them a successful architect. While most interns that I mentor are hired to fulfill a certain position with the firm, it is especially flattering to have an intern from outside of my employment ask me to mentor them due to the fact that they have sought me out for a particular reason. It is my mission to show all interns the good as well as the more realistic aspects of running a firm to prepare them for the "big picture" and business side of running an office.

Build trust and instill confidence by teaching interns to become problem solvers.

I always try to teach interns to be creative thinkers not only in design but in creative problem solving and resourcefulness—to use the cliché, "to think outside of the proverbial box." There are infinite solutions to every problem.

In addition, I make an effort to listen, make interns know that their opinions and ideas are important. I let interns be involved in all aspects of the project, from design through production and in the field. Interns have opportunities to make decisions and test their own judgment. This process helps the individual make the transition from the university environment to the professional studio of the "real world." This type of approach to the process is so important in building personal trust and confidence.

Meet with the intern on a regular basis.

At the onset with an intern, I let them know that it is their ultimate responsibility to make the program be what they need it to be for them. I let them take the lead in letting me know when they need to meet. Usually it is once every 3 to 4 months. Interns update their form, submit it to me for review and then we meet to discuss and develop a strategy for proceeding to the next period. I feel that the planning, recording, and reporting process should be the intern's responsibility. Not that I don't want to take the responsibility, but I feel that responsibility and organization are a large part of the learning process set forth by the program.

Be upfront about expectations.

My role as a mentor is to initially evaluate the intern and together through discussion, have a clear understanding of his or her status in the IDP process and what the expectations should be from both parties. After the evaluation is done, I consciously try to place the indi-

vidual in environments that can help them gain the hours of experience to work toward fulfillment of the program.

I also make myself available to my interns at all times possible for questions or special learning requests they may have. We are a small firm and I think this is an advantage due to the fact that the intern is more involved with all the facets of running an office. My philosophy is to allow the intern to see the inner-workings of the firm, express their particular interests and have open discussions about ways to grow in the business and the profession.

Help interns fulfill training areas that may be difficult to obtain.

It has been my experience that most interns have difficulty having the exposure to fulfill their hours in Code Research and Construction Administration. It is a situation where they don't have the knowledge to take on the responsibility, but also need to gain the experience to be able to do it at some point in time.

I make a conscious effort to have the intern accompany me or another project manager to project sites so that they can see how we perform on site and what is expected of the architect in the construction administration phase. As far as the code research, I place the intern under the supervision of a more experienced individual as they work through the programming and code research for a project.

Be passionate about your work.

My best advice to interns is to take the IDP process seriously and don't hesitate to ask questions at all times. Your mentor is there to help you learn. Communication is paramount so that your mentor can help you in all aspects of fulfilling your program. Above all, remember that it is the intern's responsibility to take full advantage of every experience and opportunity. Show a PASSION for what you're doing and the rest will follow. **DC**