

The Intern Architect-Mentor Relationship

The relationship between an Intern Architect and his/her Mentor is a less structured one than that of Intern-Supervisor or Employer. The Intern Architect has the benefit of gaining insight into the profession of architecture and feedback on his/her own journey to becoming a licensed architect from a resource outside of the place of employment. The Mentor has the benefit of offering counsel and providing insights from his/her own experience to foster the next generation of architects; reminding the Mentor why he/she chose architecture and being able to keep abreast of the latest cultural and technological developments.

Historically, most architects were trained by Mentors, experienced practitioners who transferred their knowledge and skills to the apprentice or "Intern". Because of the ever increasing pressures of architectural practice this role has evolved to one of "employer and employee" or "employer and independent contractor".

The Intern Architect Program is designed to address this decline in the mentorship relationship. The intent of the relationship between Mentor and Intern Architect is for the Mentor to offer counsel that is removed from the employment situation, thereby providing an independent and objective overview of the Intern Architect's training and experience.

Committee of Canadian Architectural Councils' Guidelines for Mentors and Employers (2001)*

**Predecessor to Canadian Architectural Licensing Authorities*

This relationship of providing an independent and objective overview based on the individual experience of an Intern Architect is an integral component of a successful Internship.

Input from NSAA membership (NSAA Intern Architect Survey 2014) has indicated that Mentors and Intern Architects both feel they would benefit from more guidance than is currently included in the Internship in Architecture Program's handbook, so the NSAA's Intern Architect Committee was tasked with preparing these suggestions.

Intern Architect-Mentor Conversations: Where to Start

Starting a conversation can be difficult. In order to help make the most of this relationship, the NSAA's Intern Architect Committee has identified a range of potential conversation topics that can be used by Mentors and Intern Architects to help structure their regular meetings and mentoring sessions.

The potential conversation topics are grouped to roughly correspond to the stages of the internship process during which meetings might occur, but every situation is unique, so the topics are potential suggestions only. The Mentor and Intern Architect should develop an appropriate schedule and program to suit their situation and to make the relationship mutually beneficial and enjoyable.

Suggestions for First Meeting(s)

Mentor/Intern Architect Experience and Background

- How long has the Mentor been registered with the NSAA? Is/was the Mentor registered elsewhere?
- How many years did it take the Mentor to become registered?
- What strategies did the Mentor find useful in completing his/her internship?
- Who was the Mentor's Mentor? What did they learn from him/her?
- Did the Mentor write ExAC, ARE, or other exams? Did the Mentor write registration exams as soon as eligible?
- What kind of practice does the Intern Architect see him or herself in following registration? What are the kinds of practices that exist? Are there local examples?
- What is the reason the Intern Architect wishes to become registered? Why did the Mentor originally want to become registered? Did that change (if so, why)?
- What inspires you about architecture (for both Intern Architect and Mentor)? Are there books or other architects' work(s) that inspire you?

Internship Process

- Review the Internship in Architecture document – in particular, Nova Scotia-specific items in Appendix B
- What types of examinations does the Intern intend to write (ARE vs. ExAC)? Why? [*N.B. Many CALA jurisdictions will not be accepting ARE results after ARE 4.0 and Intern Architects will have to write the ExACs for their Canadian licensure.*](#)
- Why might an Intern Architect wait to write exams? Why might he/she choose to write as soon as possible?
- Review the CERB and discuss the categories. What kind of experience fits under these categories?
- How does the Intern Architect intend to keep track of his/her hours? What method of logging hours did the Mentor use?
- How long does the Intern Architect wish to spend pursuing registration? [*NB: refer to Appendix B of the IAP manual for the NSAA's requirements.*](#)

Practice

- Discuss the Intern Architect's employment situation in-depth. What kind of practice are they working in, what projects do they expect to work on, what responsibilities will the Intern have? Do any of these raise concerns for the Mentor in terms of which types of hours might be hard to get? How might these be addressed?
- Does the Mentor feel it is important to gain work experience in a variety of settings (i.e. different cities, small and large firms, design-focused firms, firms that focus on specialty building types)? Discuss, together, differences between working for one company for a long period of time and by experiencing many different firms. [*NB: Intern Architects should always discuss any decisions regarding changes in employment with his/her Mentor and the NSAA prior to making an employment change.*](#)

Suggestions for Subsequent Meetings

- Revisit discussions from the first meetings

Internship Process

- Review the list of topics for the pre-registration interview (provided by the NSAA).

Intern Architect Progress

- How often does the Intern speak with his/her Supervisor?
- Is the Intern Architect able to gain experience in the required areas? Are there any that are tricky? What advice does the Mentor have for gaining meaningful experience in these areas?
- Has the Intern Architect's progress been as expected since the last meeting/CERB submission? Does the Mentor have advice with respect to progress?
- Review, together, the NSAA Board of Registration comments on most recent CERB submission
- Review, together, the Intern Architect's range of project types, sizes and occupancies – are there any gaps? How might they be addressed? Can the Mentor provide any insight into their experiences with identified gaps?
- Are there any challenges the Intern Architect is facing where the Mentor can provide insight? Intern Architect and Mentor could develop a template to address specific challenges and review progress.
- Discuss, together, strategies for requesting new types of experience from Employers/Supervisors.
- What should an Intern do if assigned with a task in which he/she does not feel comfortable (lack of knowledge/experience, etc.)?

Practice

- What is a professional challenge that occurred in the past month or two? How is/was it being met? (this could be for both the Mentor and Intern Architect to describe)
- Are there any challenges the Intern Architect is facing where the Mentor can provide insight? Intern Architect and Mentor could develop a template to address specific challenges and review progress.
- How does the Mentor (or the Mentor's firm) pursue new work? What are important things to know about business development?
- Who does what job(s) in the Mentor's firm? How does a construction document set get produced? Who writes specifications? Who develops details?
 - Would the Mentor feel comfortable with taking the Intern Architect to his/her own firm to observe how certain projects are dealt with and to include their staff in that discussion?
- How should an architect deal with clients? What are different types of clients? Does the Mentor's firm focus on a particular type of client? Does the Intern Architect's firm focus on a particular type of client?
- How does the Mentor balance "design integrity" with a client's requirements? How is design integrity defined? How does the Mentor view the role of "design" in business? How is the role of "design" viewed in the Intern's firm?
- What is the difference between working harder and working smarter? How is this practiced in the Intern Architect's office? How is this practiced in the Mentor's office?

Practice in Nova Scotia

- Review, together, the Provincial Architects' Act. Discuss
- Review, together, the NSAA's Regulations. Discuss
- Review, together, the NSAA's Code of Ethics. Discuss. Has the Mentor experienced any situations that required careful consideration of professional conduct/ethics?
- Review, together, the Provincial Lien Legislation. Has the Intern Architect experienced its application?

End of compiled list

If you have any suggestions for this list, please contact the NSAA and direct your suggestions to the NSAA's Intern Architect Committee.