



4

MENTORING
PROGRAMME
GUIDANCE
CASE STUDIES



Personal stories to help you on your journey

RIBA 
Architecture.com

At Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) we recognise the important role mentorship plays in the professional development of our staff. Amid the rapid transformations occurring within the architectural profession, young architects are more essential than ever, fostering the vitality and renewal of the firm. SOM's future success demands that we maintain our commitment to the next generation of architects, providing a rewarding work environment that encourages their professional growth and development.

We believe that individuals who have been guided towards achieving their full potential by an influential and supportive mentor perform better than their equally talented peers. Not only are mentors providing guidance on job tasks and communication skills, but they are also providing a deep understanding of the firm's guiding principles.

SOM introduced a Mentoring Programme designed to complement the broad range of activities professionals undertake in the course of their work. Whether they are involved in the design, project management or construction of an SOM project, completing a professional qualification or undertaking continuing professional development, the mentorship programme is designed to increase awareness and provide support and encouragement to mentees.

Our mentors are often a diverse group of registered senior professionals

with substantial experience and diverse points of view inherent in our multidisciplinary practice. They do not replace supervisors, studio heads or tutors in any way; rather they complement them by providing overall guidance and direction throughout a young professional's career.

Our Mentoring Programme includes formal and informal activities, developed to encourage professional development at all experience and education levels. The goal is to establish a network of support for each individual. Internal mentorship programs include events, lunches and one to one meetings. SOM focuses on providing mentorship to architecture students by offering shadowing programmes, work experience programmes and office tours.

The feedback from participants indicates that both mentors and mentees appreciate the opportunity to meet an array of staff and to





promote professional and personal relationships within the office and gain an understanding of the many responsibilities in a large firm.

Mentors and mentees benefit from discussing their professional experiences in the field, establishing a better understanding of roles, expectations and goals; and from witnessing the mechanics and intricacies of how our business is carried out. They also often form a stronger professional support network, which helps fostering more confident young professionals.

Over the years, it has been a great experience to see mentees and

mentors form long-lasting professional relationships, and develop as individuals and as professionals. We find sustained relationships that are still important to each party, even when the previously less experienced staff have grown into current leaders. Whilst the benefits and rewards of a mentorship programme may not be immediately apparent or easily quantifiable, we are proud of the long term engagement by some of our most senior professionals in the mentorship programme, and the invaluable contribution they have made towards the programme's success both as mentors and mentees.

During my career as an architect, I have benefited from mentoring initiatives both as mentor and mentee.

When I joined SOM many years ago as a recent graduate, I was aware that this could be a great career opportunity. Early on in this journey – and with the knowledge that success in any industry often comes from first understanding the service and system, then improving upon it – I joined the mentoring programme as a mentee.

My mentors were instrumental in my learning more about the business, projects and the industry. The mentoring initiative gave me the opportunity to informally address my questions, increase my knowledge about our practice, learn from the experiences of others and improve my skills as an architect. I have observed first-hand the positive impact of mentoring, and as a result have also taken an active role as a mentor in several initiatives.

Even though the benefits of mentorship programmes are often not immediately apparent, over the years I have personally observed the benefits of mentoring initiatives. One can best comprehend the full impact that these initiatives have on individuals by carefully assessing the

long-term progress of both mentors and mentees. I have witnessed that, in the long-term, most individuals who participated in mentorship activities built a stronger support network, formed a more thorough understanding of the firm's services and industry best practices, developed as individuals and often became leaders in their respective fields. These individuals often developed a stronger sense of belonging, within the organisation and the field. They were provided with a better understanding of common goals and individual expectations.

Over the years, I had the opportunity to build long-lasting professional dialogues both with my mentors and mentees. It has been an invaluable experience to see talented mentees develop as confident, successful professionals and to see mentors develop as stronger multifaceted leaders who ultimately, by their contribution to mentorship, are committing to the continuation of the practice and the development of the field of architecture.