



ACE MENTOR PROGRAM
ARCHITECTURE • CONSTRUCTION • ENGINEERING

ACE Mentor Program - Advancing the Future Workforce by Katie Chevalier, AIA, AIA Westchester Hudson Valley

Don't miss Katie and ACE representatives at the QUAD Conference Tradeshow at booth number 70 on November 10th!

About: The ACE Mentor Program of America, Inc. (ACE) helps mentor high school students and inspires them to pursue careers in design and construction. The mission is to engage, excite and enlighten high school students to pursue careers in architecture, engineering, and construction through mentoring and to support their continued advancement in the industry.

It's no secret that the design and construction industry has taken off, and we all know that finding qualified candidates to help fill our offices can be challenging at best. Have you ever stopped to think about the next generation of designers, and where they are right now in life? In order to help ensure the future success of our industry workforce, we need to focus on today's youth. That is the mission of the ACE Mentor Program of America, to engage, excite and enlighten high school students to pursue careers in architecture, engineering, and construction through mentoring and to support their continued advancement in the industry.

The ACE Mentor Program was founded 23 years ago by Charles Thornton in New York City. Mr. Thornton recognized the need to provide high school students interested in our industry with real world experience and mentorship to keep them engaged, excited, and educated. Today, the program has grown to over 70 affiliates throughout the country, serving over 9,000 high school students each year who are considering entering the fields of design, engineering, construction, and the trades. The ACE Mentor Program of America is a national, non-profit organization that supports local affiliates around the country. ACE is the construction industry's fastest growing high school mentor program in the nation. ACE also financially supports students furthering their education through scholarships and grants, and has provided over \$16 million in scholarships since the program's inception.

Hudson Valley NY Affiliate

Prior to 2016, the state of New York was served by 3 affiliates in New York City, Albany, and Rochester. Last year, I was privileged to join forces with a local contractor to bring ACE to the Hudson Valley. Thanks to our ACE Regional Director, I was introduced to Erik Collier of Collier Construction, who had heard about ACE and was also interested in making this opportunity available to high school students in the Hudson Valley.

Erik and I worked diligently with the support of many local organizations, and established ACE Mentor Program of Hudson Valley NY in June 2016. This would not have been possible without the generous support and financial contributions from companies throughout the Hudson Valley that understood the importance of our mission. We completed our first year of ACE in the Hudson Valley with great success. Over 3 teams, we had 52 high school students and 20 mentors that met every other week from September through May.



Each team worked with industry professionals serving as mentors to develop real-world, local community design projects, meeting every other week for a total of 15 sessions throughout the school year.

While ACE strives to support all students, there is an emphasis on increasing diversity in the industry by supporting those who are traditionally underrepresented in the fields of design and construction. We are proud that in our first year, the Hudson Valley affiliate served a student population of 25% female students and 35% minority students.

Benefits of ACE

One of the greatest rewards that I see from the program is that the relationships formed in ACE do not end upon high school graduation. As an ACE student, I was able to maintain contact with my mentors throughout college and as I entered the profession of architecture. In fact, I was fortunate enough to land a summer internship during college and my first job out of college through my relationship with my ACE mentors, many of which still remain professional mentors for me to this day!

Not only does ACE provide students with networking opportunities, it also benefits the companies involved with mentoring by giving them the chance to develop relationships with ACE students. When it comes time for those students to start looking for a job, they will already have connections with those same companies through their experience with ACE, giving the companies involved with ACE a leg up against their competitors who may also be looking to hire qualified young professionals. ACE students



earn real world experience before entering college, making them valuable candidates for employment in the industry.

Leaders in the industry should also recognize the many benefits of encouraging and supporting staff to volunteer their time as an ACE mentor. In addition to the value that mentors provide to their students, the mentors themselves receive many benefits. Mentoring is an inherent networking opportunity with local professionals throughout the industry, providing connections with potential clients, consultants, new employees, and interns. Mentoring also provides

excellent leadership training and the opportunity to refine public speaking and presentation skills, those of which are critical skills for success in this industry.

Get Involved

One of the biggest misconceptions about ACE is the time required to participate and support the program. While we are always looking for full-time mentors who can attend most sessions throughout the duration of the school year, there are many other ways to get involved with ACE and give back to your local community.



One option is to donate your time for one or two sessions as a guest presenter. ACE students benefit in hearing from a range of professionals in various stages of their careers industry-wide. There are many different players in the design and construction process and we encourage everyone to get involved with ACE in order to create a well-rounded educational experience for the students, even if your time is limited and you can only commit to one session.

Another opportunity is to provide support in the form of sponsorship. ACE is a comprehensive mentor program offered at no cost to students, and there are many expenses that each affiliate has to cover in order to make the program successful. Even if you are not directly involved in the industry, making a monetary contribution to your local affiliate is a meaningful way to pay it forward in your community. ACE Hudson Valley is currently accepting company-sponsored student scholarships as well.

During the first year of our affiliate, over 70% of our local students expressed an interest in pursuing a career in architecture. There is no one better to inspire a new generation to start careers in our industry than the professionals currently shaping it. If you are interested in getting involved as a mentor, sponsor, board member, or just want to share ideas for the program, please see below for my contact information.

No matter your professional role, there is a way for you to get involved and make a difference for the next generation of design and construction industry leaders while helping to ensure the workforce of tomorrow!



Katie Chevalier, AIA is the Vice Chairman of the ACE Mentor Program of Hudson Valley NY. Most recently, Ms. Chevalier has been appointed to serve at the Director of Regional Programs (Northeast/Mid-Atlantic) for the ACE Mentor Program of America. Contact Katie at kchevalier@acementor.org to learn more and get involved.

Written by Katie Chevalier, AIA, with contributions by Erik Collier, Katelyn Amaral, and Daniel Eastman.

[For the complete article, please click here.](#)