

Architectural Record

Atlanta Mentorship Program Encourages Diverse Students to Pursue Architecture



ACCI's 2019 Summer Academy at Kennesaw State Academy
Photo courtesy ACCI

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Kara MAVROS

According to the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards' [NCARB by the Numbers 2020 report](#), fewer than one in five new architects in 2019 identified as a racial or ethnic minority. To help improve those numbers, mentorship programs across the country are taking steps to broaden and diversify the pipeline of youth interested in architecture. One such initiative is the nonprofit [Atlanta Center for Creative Inquiry](#) (ACCI).

Founded in 2004 by architect Oscar Harris, ACCI offers low-cost, week-long "Summer Academy" sessions that introduce high schoolers of color to architecture, engineering, and construction. Hosted on the campuses of Georgia Tech and Kennesaw State University, groups of 15 to 20 young people work with two professors and two college student mentors on projects like transforming a garden into a community training center, or designing sustainable, "off-the-grid" container buildings for a town in Haiti. Participants also visit firms' offices and construction sites and hear from diverse local architects who come in to share their thoughts on the profession and their experience in it.

The organization also has partnerships with out-of-state architecture schools, including the Harvard University Graduate School of Design and Auburn University's College of Architecture, Design and Construction, and has provided financial assistance to ACCI students to attend those institutions' summer programs.



ACCI's 2019 Summer Academy at Kennesaw State Academy, Photo courtesy ACCI Architect Garfield Peart, a founding member and previous ACCI chair, says programs like these are especially important in helping high-schoolers understand that a profession in architecture, engineering, or construction is attainable. "It's more about your creative ability and big ideas than your grasp of structural engineering or geometry," he explains—at least at first—and that initial spark is what ACCI aims to ignite. Over the last 15 years, Peart estimates that the organization has worked with more than 500 high school students, successfully encouraging ACCI graduates to pursue degrees at architecture and engineering schools including Howard University, Savannah College of Art and Design, Clemson University, and Georgia Tech. One alum of the program has even earned his Ph.D. in engineering from Vanderbilt University.

Today, he says, the group's focus on promoting diversity in the profession is more vital than ever. "We must reaffirm the commitment to our mission as we take a stand for inclusion, peaceful reform, and social justice under the banner of the Black Lives Matter movement, fighting the inequalities that still exist in our communities of color."

A week-long virtual version of the program is launching this fall, with the hope of on-campus classes resuming in 2021.