Leaving Space for Alternative Pathways

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PAPER

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Amidst attempts to increase diversity in architecture schools across the United States, there is a real need to evaluate recent methods of attracting and retaining underrepresented students. Pathway programs are intended to make an impact in introducing underrepresented students to the discipline and provide an on-ramp to the pursuit of architecture. This paper aims to provoke institutions to actively work to identify gaps in pathway systems that frequently lead to students leaving the discipline. Further, the paper considers these gaps as creative opportunities to work within pathway systems to establish new forms of collective institutionality, generate sustained systemic transformation, and foster students' career trajectories that may unpredictably yet productively meander.

PATHWAY PROGRAMS

Amongst our current time of significant political division concerning race and class, there remains a widespread effort to enhance diversity within architecture schools across the United States. As institutions actively engage in recruiting underrepresented students, it becomes crucial to assess the effectiveness of these methods in attracting and retaining students. One notable approach involves the implementation of architectural preparatory programs, also known as pathway programs, which play a vital role in introducing underrepresented students to the discipline of architecture and providing an on-ramp to pursue a career in the field. While these initiatives aim to increase diversity in higher education, there exists a pressing need for broader-scale networks that connect discrete programs, ensuring a sustained commitment to diversity and equity to create more equitable opportunities.

A nagging and critical question lingers when considering the evolution of pathway programs: *a pathway to what?* To question the legitimacy of a career pathway and its end goals may allow programs to focus on the nuances of pathways, including where they break down and where inventive strategies could emerge. Additionally, institutions might consider expanding the definition

of an architectural pathway and what constitutes its success. By loosening the framework of pathway programs that often are directed unsurprisingly at producing architects, educators can explore the value of architectural literacy for students who may pursue a broad range of career paths. Through this lens, architecture pathway programs can focus on one of the missed opportunities of their current efforts: their ability to excite a range of students that have varying interests. After all, it is not difficult to imagine exciting secondary students about the field of architecture: first forays into the studio environment are eye-opening (and fun!). Moreover, coupled with the thrill of designing for the first time, students are presented with the opportunity to learn expansively about architecture's importance in society: its latent promise to construct better worlds. The challenge, rather, is maintaining contact with students as they move through and beyond the pathway programs while concurrently providing more opportunities that reinforce their individual strengths and interests. Recognizing this need, pathway programs require robust institutional support to not only provide continuous assistance and guidance for the students who choose architecture as their chosen path but also to encourage students who see architecture as a gateway to other socially-minded professions. If institutions are not willing to provide that support, then they run the risk of perpetuating extractive measures that focus on quantifiable results and the pursuit of diversity for the sake of data. What might alternative and more open-ended initiatives look like? What would be the terms of their success? And how might these provide different tools for creating sustained change in the discipline?

This paper outlines a series of frameworks that serve as "infill mechanisms" that address the gaps that exist between programs along an architectural pathway. By classifying the ways that these programs support students on their journey, institutions can more clearly see their role in identifying and filling gaps in pathway systems.

PATHWAY CRITIQUES

Among the persisting challenges of pathway programs lies their inability to bring about lasting change. In the now seminal book "When Ivory Towers Were Black: A Story about Race in America's Cities and Universities" Dr. Sharon Sutton shares in depth

Figure 1. "Painting Public Surfaces." An internship program for local Ithaca high school students through Cornell University's Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP) in collaboration with the Department of Architecture.

the essential needs to impactfully recruit and foster thriving environments for students. In it, Sutton shares the history of Columbia's "experiment" to actively recruit ethnic-minority students in response to the civil rights protests and campus rebellions of the late 1960s, which, in Sutton's words, "made the recruits the stars of the school."[1] In doing so, the interests of the recruited students were centered; an ingredient that proved to be incredibly significant to the long-term success of the cohort at Columbia. The ultimate demise of the experiment, importantly, resulted not from the failure of students' efforts but rather from disinvestment and a reduction in recruitment efforts that would have sustained the admission of minority students. Here lies the issue—with the end of Columbia's recruitment initiative came the end of a diverse student body in the architecture school. This speaks to Sutton's concern with solely data-based recruitment strategies aimed at increasing the Black and Brown student "pipeline" into universities; it perpetuates the same systems (that have not created enduring change) rather than transforming the systems themselves. Instead, current systemic institutional mechanisms (i.e., brief investments in minority recruitment) serve as temporary fixes aimed at producing immediate results that, when ceased, can not persist. In place of a pipeline, Sutton suggests an "educational ladder," which includes continuous tracking and support for Black and Brown students, institutional focus on attrition, and a student-focused education that reflects their lived experience; all of which emphasize sustained commitments to minority students and diversifying the field without relying on recruitment and admissions as the sole mechanisms for creating diversity. With this in mind, there are potent lessons to learn from Sutton's dissertation and first book, "Learning Through the Built Environment," which reframes the focus from *pathways to architectural programs* to *pathways to new ways of learning and seeing.*[2] Through architecture, students and teachers can learn about space, collaboration, dismantling hierarchies, policy, activism, etc., as a means toward social justice.

PATHWAY FRAMEWORKS

Over the past ten years, several Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) have initiated early-learning programs for underrepresented students[3] that introduce architecture as a career pathway before the college application process ensues.[4] From 2016-2018 the author was a Michigan-Mellon Fellow in Egalitarianism and the Metropolis at the University of Michigan, a multi-faceted fellowship that included full-time teaching of a Detroit-based pre-college architecture program (ArcPrep), a design and research project, and administrative responsibilities. The position served as exposure to the detrimental effects of status quo recruitment strategies and the roadblocks that students face outside of the classroom environment that impacts continuity beyond the completion of an early-learning program. The experiences in Detroit affirmed that along with inventive pedagogical strategies, more attention and creative thought might be given to tasks that are typically deemed to be non-design-related or administrative and, moreover, that these seemingly mundane institutional tasks and frameworks have profound effects on pedagogical approaches and the affirmation of the interests and life experiences of students who comprise pathway programs. Recruitment, post-evaluation, and large-scale mentorship are as important as course content in providing students with an egalitarian, human-centered education.

An expansive look at the trajectory of a student who moves through the architectural pathway reveals both the gaps along the way between significant milestones while identifying how supplemental programs can stitch the pathway together. It is helpful to use the diagram offered by Illinois Chapter of the National Organization of Minority Architects that illustrates a student's educational trajectory as a base (Figure 2). The typical trajectory of a student and the introduction of a career pathway includes middle school, early high school, high school, college,
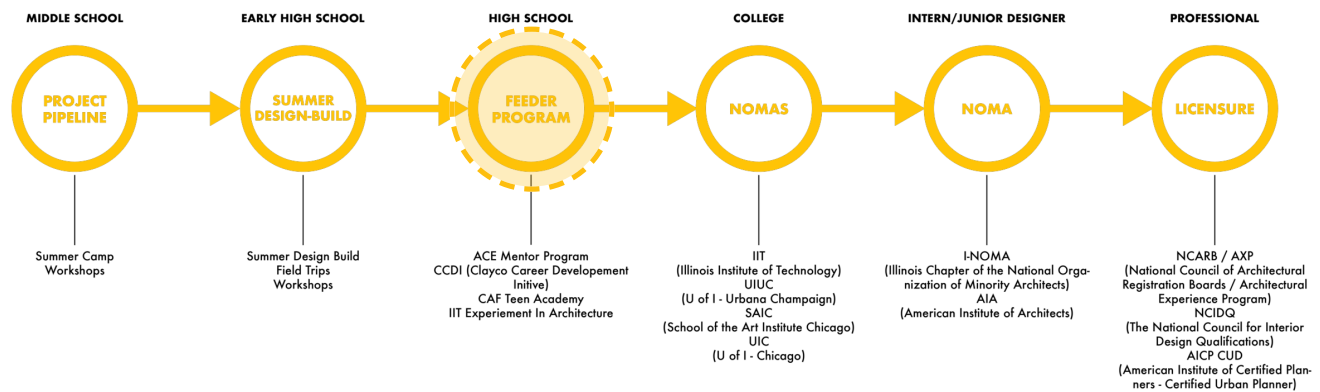
Figure 2. "Project Pipeline - i-Noma." The Illinois Chapter of the National Organization of Minority Architects.

internship, and ultimately practice. NOMA has its own examples of architectural preparatory programs under each educational milestone that introduce underrepresented students to the discipline and provide an on-ramp to the pursuit of architecture. What is helpful about this diagram is that it expands beyond the typical notion of singular "feeder" programs which occur in high school to programs that exist either pre or post-high school and thus broadens the range of experiences and potentially offers productively redundant opportunities to interface with the discipline.[5]

In order to think more holistically about the architectural pathway, the following examples of pathway frameworks reveal support in the gaps or transitions between major milestones. They could be classified as different types of infill mechanisms including: vertical networks that connect early education and academia with the profession, horizontal networks that are cross-institutional initiatives between differently-tiered academies, and open-ended support systems linking youth with external institutions and community organizations. Such open-ended support systems offer strategies that might propel a broader cultural transformation in the discipline; linking early architectural literacy and design thinking to a host of different professions with societal ambitions..

STACKED MENTORSHIP PROGRAM[6]

The Equity in Architectural Education Consortium (EAEC)'s "Stacked Mentorship Program" introduces a model that links multiple collegiate institutions together in support of the ArcPrep early-learning program in Detroit. The stack model creates vertical support that follows a student's trajectory (high school, college, graduate, doctoral, through early and advanced professional practice) and provides horizontal support across a variety of institutions. It is described as a "meta-mentorship community supporting students of color and other

underrepresented minorities in architecture." The five stacks are titled, Stack 01: Detroit Public Schools (DPS) and Consortium Mentors, Stack 02: Prototyping and Fabrication, Stack 03: Doctoral and M.Arch Mentoring, Stack 04: Faculty and Junior Faculty Development and Exchange, Stack 05: In the Profession and Practice. The primary focus thus far has been mentorship and hosting activities both vertically and horizontally. The framework is seen as something that can be applied to and amplify other efforts; for example, in recruitment and the formation of scholarships as well as to collectively enhance the resources at individual institutions.[7]

- Institutions: Architecture schools, departments, and programs at: Florida International University (FIU), Hampton University, Howard University, University of Michigan, Morgan State University (MSU), Tuskegee University, University of Michigan (UM), University of Oklahoma (OU), and Florida A&M University (FAMU).

- Constituents: Stack 1, Detroit ArcPrep students and participating academic institutions (above).

- Location: Virtual

- Duration: Introduced during the semester and potentially long-term into upper "stacks."

- Founded: 2018 by EAEC in support of ArcPrep (founded 2015)

CARNEGIE MELLON UDREAM[8]
Udream is a program that not only focuses on diversity and equity at the academic level of the institution—but also beyond—that searches for ways to attract more diverse designers to the city of Pittsburgh. Following a competitive application process intended for recent graduates of architecture and urban design programs, accepted students participate in a six-week academic program, followed by a 14-week placed internship. "UDreamers" take architectural and urban design courses, as well as participate in one week of "youth give-back" and one week of community
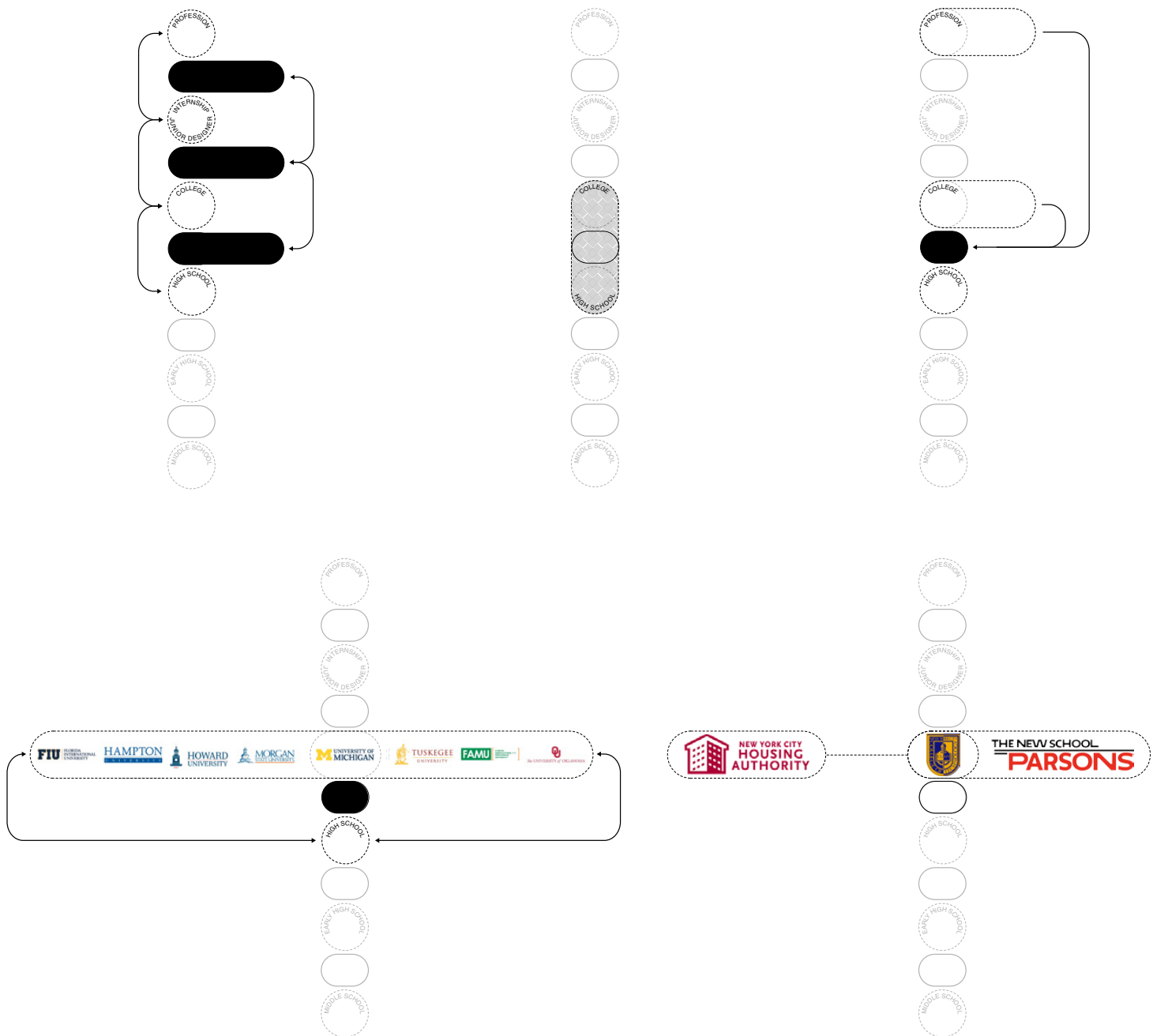
Figure 3. Vertical and horizontal frameworks that infill gaps in the "pathway." Left to right, top to bottom: Stacked Mentorship Program (vertical), Baltimore Design School (vertical), UDream (vertical), Stacked Mentorship Program (horizontal), ArcScholars (vertical/horizontal).

engagement throughout the city. Courses differ from the typical pedagogical exercises of the school year, focusing more on ideas of "race and place" within the urban environment, using real site conditions and real partners for studio briefs, and rethinking ways in which Real Estate can be used to invest and revitalize existing conditions in the city. "Youth give-back" is a dedicated week in which U-Dreamers work with students from Project Pipeline, Assemble, or the Legacy Arts Project in a design-related camp environment, prompting similar questions about the built environment that link to the pedagogical founding of UDream's

coursework. Through this component, "UDreamers" are also instrumental in the local growth of the K-12 educational pathway in the Pittsburgh region.[9]

- Primary Institution: Carnegie Mellon University

- Location: Pittsburgh

- Duration: 22-week post-graduate experience; including a six-week academic intensive module, two 1-week community engagement modules, and 14-week paid internship .
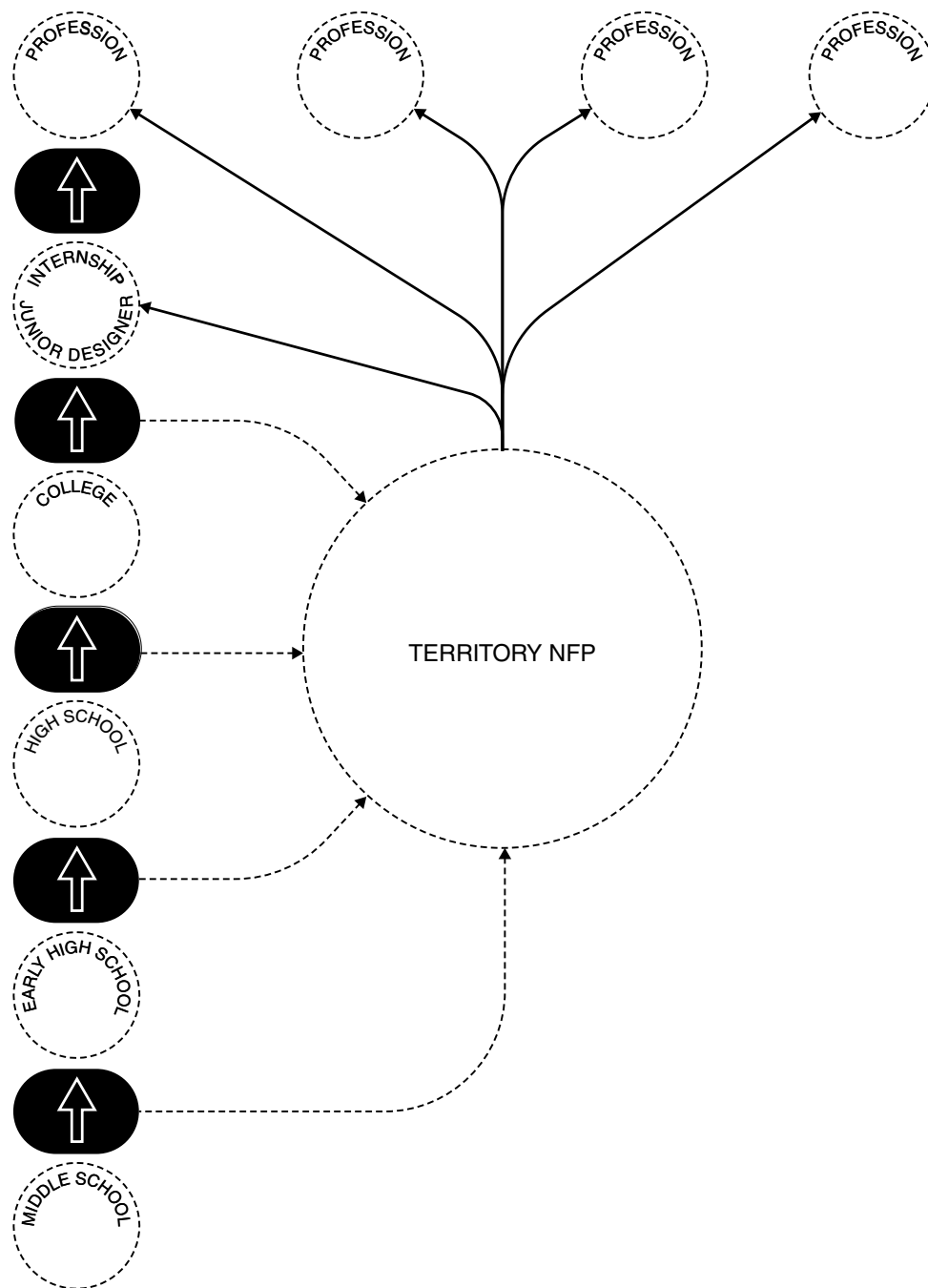
Figure 4. An open-ended framework that also provides programming at multiple stages of the youth participant's life. Territory NFP.

- Constituents: Graduates of architecture, urban design, and urban planning programs. Instruction and mentorship by CMU faculty and design professionals.

- Founded: 2009 (with break from 2018-2022)

HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF DESIGN BLACK IN DESIGN MENTORSHIP PROGRAM[10]

Black in Design Mentorship introduces Boston Public School students, sophomore to senior, to education in design, even though they might not pursue a career in architecture or design. The intention is to promote greater representation of Black talent in the design fields by linking high school participants with current GSD graduate students who provide academic instruction and Perkins & Will designers, who offer professional mentorship to both, forming a circle of exchange between the three constituents. The mentorship trios are intended to create a support system that extends past the 10-week program.[11]

- Primary Institution: Harvard GSD

- Location: Boston

- Duration: 10 week program, alternating between virtual learning sessions and in-person events.

- Constituents: For Black sophomore to senior Boston area high school students. Instruction

- and mentorship by Harvard GSD students, alumni, and Perkins&Will design professionals.

- Founded: 2021

BALTIMORE DESIGN SCHOOL[12] **+ MORGAN STATE (HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY)**

Baltimore Design School (BDS) is a Baltimore City public transformation school and college preparatory program for students between the 6th and 12th grades that focuses on careers in design fields and provides Career and Technology Education (CTE) pathways. The first year of the high school level serves as a general design foundation year that supports entry into specialized areas of focus including architecture, graphic design, and fashion design. Following the foundation year of study, students select a chosen pathway for the remainder of their high school studies. The new curriculum is heavily influenced by the Morgan State Beginning Design Curriculum as an intentional way to potentially sponsor a more formal partnership with Morgan State in the future. Currently, Morgan State students volunteer to provide mentorship to the high school students within the architecture pathway.[13]

- Primary Institution: Baltimore Design School

- Location: Baltimore (embedded in HS)

- Duration: 3-year program.

- Constituents: BDS students who choose an architecture pathway. Morgan State students provide mentorship.

- Founded: Current curriculum since 2019

ARCSCHOLARS [14]

ARCscholars is a semester-long program that partners with a specific NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA) neighborhood development each semester to pair City Tech architecture students with NYCHA residents ages 16-24. The combined cohort of about 15 students per semester is challenged to take an interdisciplinary approach to questions, conversations, and design processes that intersect the fields of architecture, urban planning, and public art, while remaining focused on placemaking in NYCHA communities. In this program, City Tech architecture students work with residents from NYCHA. Some resident participants are high school students; however, the program is open to all residents interested in focusing on healthy and durable housing for low income individuals and families in New York. City Tech is working to develop partnerships with other New York-based academic institutions that will further the diversity of students, skills, and interests, further expanding possibilities for all constituents of the program to learn from one another. [15]

- Primary Institution: City Tech

- Location: New York City

- Duration: Semester (2.5 months on weekends, 3 hrs each weekend)

- Constituents: NYCHA residents (ages 16-24) with City Tech Architecture students. NYCHA community board, NYC architects (6 different firms)

- Founded: 2021

TERRITORY NFP [16]

Territory is a design and place-based youth organization, focused on regenerating public spaces within the Austin neighborhood of Chicago through small site interventions. Territory NFP situates itself outside of the academic trajectory. It employs teens interested in doing out-of-school time design projects and offers programming prior to, during, and after high school. The participants in the program, range from 14 to 21 years of age, and work within groups to investigate, design, and eventually build physical structures that promote place-making and reclamation of existing underutilized public spaces and foster community growth and transformation. Territory delves beyond typical pathway models to introduce a framework for technical and professional skill-building and long-term employment opportunities for participants. [17]

- Primary Institution: Territory NFP (founded by three architects, with focus on public art, community planning)

- Location: Austin neighborhood on the west side of Chicago.

- Duration: Fall/Spring/Summer session; Intro studio = 70 hours, Advanced Design Studio = 120 hours, Fall and Spring = 40 hours Working towards establishing 5 day/week program.

- Constituents: Intro and advanced programs for young people ages 14-21, and supports youth-led advocacy

projects. Elected officials, Chamber of Commerce, local neighborhood groups (partnership-based process); Afterschool Matters (recruit through this network), One Summer Chicago, partnerships with high schools on bus routes local to Territory.

- Founded: 2011

VERTICAL, HORIZONTAL, AND OPEN FRAMEWORKS

In addition to the vertical mentorship opportunities, the Stacked Mentorship Model exemplifies how a broad-scaled horizontal cross-institutional network model might exist between academies (and possibly between disciplines or departments). To think between would accommodate the range of capabilities of students that participate in preparatory programs and enable a rethinking of the goals of early-learning programs. To work between institutions would be to offer outlets and pathways that extend beyond the "host" preparatory program (often a top tier, elite school) and link up with other academies at a range of tier levels.

Perhaps most transformative as a model to academia and the profession is exhibited in Territory NFP, which embraces a common ethos of architecture preparatory programs in that they are a gateway to a multitude of related professions. These programs measure success not by admittance into elite architecture schools but instead aim to expose students to thinking critically about the built-environment with the anticipation that doing so can open up interests (which is different from "job training") in a host of related fields (such as construction, design, engineering, law, or public policy).

While all of the programs are admirable and do a great amount of good, one way in which Dr. Sharon Sutton pushes all involved in the making and sustaining of these initiatives is to evaluate the methods based on their potential to be transformative and disrupt current systems.[18] Apparent and shared across the example programs is the ambition to continue support beyond the singular program experience. Where most programs agree they would like to improve is through persistent endeavors to support and track students following their experiences in pathway programs. Sustained efforts to support and track students following prep courses could assist in placing them in schools existing at a variety of tier-levels and facilitate connections with other disciplines. The ethos of working together across institutions for the common good is in the spirit of the preparatory programs' aims and helps to evaluate whether architecture is the right fit for a given student. Simply put, if institutions that host preparatory programs would provide pathways to other institutions, or job pathways, even those with whom they are in competition or at different tier levels, a number of bridging opportunities could arise.

Despite the success of preparatory programs in introducing students to the world of architecture, the number of Black Americans in the profession has seen little change. It is evident that these programs, without accompanying structural changes within our institutions, can only achieve limited impact. To foster substantial transformation, additional support through mentorship and cross-institutional networks is essential. Large-scale change will require the accumulation of numerous smaller initiatives that provide continuity and extended support beyond the scope of a single introductory course. To increase diversity effectively, universities must expand their efforts beyond current investments in recruitment and develop more comprehensive and expansive support networks. By emphasizing continuity through pathways, a new model of collective stewardship might emerge, leveraging the capacity of institutions to instill an ethos that nurtures support at all scales.

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Figure 5. "Foregrounding Background: Perceptions, Identities, Space." A cross-instituional collaboration between University of Michigan ArcPrep students and Cornell University architecture students.

ENDNOTES

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2. Sutton, Sharon E. Learning through the Built Environment: An Ecological Approach to Child Development. Irvington Pub, 1985..

3. This data was derived from a combination of researching all accredited school's departmental websites, and performing internet searches containing the keywords "underrepresented," "high school students," "architecture prep," "architecture development program," and "architecture program" and found that 13 of 53 PWI's have initiated early-learning programs directed toward underrepresented students.

4. Early-learning programs take different shapes and vary from intense, semester-long design studios (these include University of Michigan: ArcPrep, Princeton University: ArcPrep, University of Southern California: A-Lab) to short-term programs that span several days up to a week (Rice University: Summer Immersion Program, Virginia Tech: Explore VT), workshops (SCI-ARC: Pop-Arc), mini-courses (University of Buffalo: Architecture + Education),) after-school classes (Pratt Institute: DICE), and programs that roll out over several years (Pratt Institute: Pratt Young Scholars). These initiatives are unique in that they offer free design experiences yet remain tethered to a university. While the degree of intensity varies depending on time and resources, the programs share a similar ambition and focus on exposure, support, and empowerment.

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16. "Territory NFP – Chicago Teenagers Designing, Planning, and Building Better Futures for Everyone," Accessed July 15, 2023 https://www. territorychicago.org/.

17. Helen Slade (Territory NFP, Co-Founder), in discussion with Suzanne Lettieri, virtual, Spring 2023.

18. Dr. Sharon Sutton, in discussion with Suzanne Lettieri, virtual, July 2023.