

ACSA Candidate for At-Large Director (3-year term)

Dahlia Nduom, Howard University

Candidate Statement

The ACSA and its work, which focuses on equity, social justice, and climate action in architectural education, is essential in today's fraught world. My experiences as an architect and educator align with ACSA values and strategic plan priorities, specifically, those focusing on equitable learning culture, environmental and social justice, and the role of the built environment in mitigating climate change.



My research, teaching, and service focuses on housing, design, and equity through an intersectional lens, probing the geographic, social, cultural, political, economic, and ecological issues informing architecture and perception of place. My work explores housing as a human right that has historically not been developed equitably and investigates evidence-based design solutions across cultural contexts. My work prioritizes architectural locales at the margins of architecture academia, bringing these histories and critical investigations to the forefront. As ACSA prioritizes promoting and disseminating scholarship on climate action, I intend to bring my experiences to help shape ACSA's role in promoting community-engaged design, which is not exploitative of those communities most vulnerable to climate change.

My approach to architectural education is to empower students to be disruptors to drive change in the built environment. My pedagogical approaches have promoted design activism as students understand the impacts of issues beyond disciplinary boundaries on the built environment. As ACSA focuses on equity, social justice, and climate action in architectural education, I believe there is a role for ACSA to help member schools navigate balancing NAAB accreditation requirements with interdisciplinary opportunities, allowing students to understand the implications of public health, economics, social, political and ethical issues confronting the built environment. This theme was raised at the most recent Administrator's Conference, "Expanding our Impact." As At-Large Director, I hope to contribute to shaping how member schools can reach beyond our disciplinary boundaries, something we must confront as we mitigate and adapt to climate change.

As a former ACSA Faculty Councilor and participant in numerous ACSA workshops and conferences, I have seen the benefit of the organization in shaping and supporting design education that is diverse, equitable and prepares future architects with the skills to confront the myriad social, economic, and environmental issues confronting society today. When I transitioned to full-time academia on a probationary tenure-track appointment, I experienced a steep learning curve juggling teaching, research, and service expectations. ACSA workshops, white papers, and conferences played a pivotal role in guiding me through this transition. For example, the 2018 ACSA New Faculty Workshop and Defining Your Research Workshop were pivotal sessions for framing my research agenda and confronting the expectations of tenure-track faculty. I have since volunteered as a reviewer for the 2020 AIA/ACSA Intersections Research Conference. Through this board position, I intend to use these experiences to help shape programs and workshops that help faculty and staff navigate architecture academia to meet diversity goals. Within ACSA's equitable learning culture agenda, I believe there is also a role for the organization to empower member schools to create an equitable teaching culture for faculty, to retain diverse talent who are innovating within the discipline. I intend to contribute my experiences to this conversation.

ACSA's focus on equitable learning culture also aligns with my work advocating for design activism, equitable learning environments, empowering students' agency, and mental health in design education as a form of activism. Through my teaching, I have aimed to foster safe spaces for students to explore their authentic selves and bring their lived experiences and diverse backgrounds to their work. My work focusing on pedagogical approaches through a justice lens has been published and presented widely.

I bring this focus on justice and equity to my current board and advisory positions. I am a member of the Board of Directors of the Neighborhood Design Center (NDC), a community design center in Maryland. On the Board of the NDC, I serve on the Image and Promotion committee, where I work with board members and staff to disseminate the vital work of the NDC. I am also a member of the DC Housing Authority Technical Advisory Committee for the project *Family Friendly Affordable Housing Design Guidelines* and a member of the advisory board for the *DC Black Women's Suffrage Movement* project, a collaboration between Dr. Synatra Smith, Dr. Portia Hopkins, and the DC Preservation League. As a member of the advisory board, I will review deliverables and provide recommendations related to the research, focusing on the nuances and sites of the Black women's suffrage movement in Washington, DC. These service positions have armed me with experience translating my design skills, research, and pedagogical interests into actionable strategies. My work on various committees at Howard University, an HBCU, has also equipped me with perspectives that I hope to bring to the Board as the ACSA aims to strengthen pathways to architecture for students of color and equity in architecture academia.

Dahlia Nduom, AIA, NOMA

Biography

As an Antiguan Assistant Professor in the Department of Architecture at Howard University, I bring diverse experiences and knowledge as an architect and educator to the ACSA Board of Directors. I received a BA in Architecture and Visual Studies from the University of Pennsylvania and a Master of Architecture degree from Columbia University. I am a licensed architect in the District of Columbia who has practiced in the US and Ghana. I also have extensive teaching experience as a faculty at Columbia University in NYC and Ashesi University in Ghana before joining Howard University.

My research, teaching, and service concern environmental and social justice issues. This is seen in my work, which investigates dwelling spaces of the African Diaspora through an intersectional lens, probing the geographic, social, cultural, political, economic, and ecological issues informing the architecture and perception of place. Through intersectional investigations of what it means to dwell in the Caribbean, Ghana, and predominantly African-American communities within the US, I challenge Eurocentric architectural histories and pedagogies.

This research has been nationally and internationally recognized. The Graham Foundation recognized the importance of this work for a grant focused on the legacy of tourism and colonial consumption in Jamaica (Tourism, Tropicalization, and the Architectural Image). The results from this work will be exhibited at the Octagon Museum in Washington, DC, in Fall 2024. My work has also been exhibited internationally at the ArchiAfrika pavilion in the European Cultural Center's Time Space Existence exhibition alongside the 17th International Architecture Exhibition, Venice Biennale, and the African Futures Institute Pinpoint Archive which recognizes "100 of the most innovative and provocative African and African Diaspora practitioners whose engages with the twin issues of decarbonization and decolonization." My work has also been recognized as the recipient of the 2022 AIA DC Architect Educator of the Year Award.

The current climate change and affordable housing crisis have been at the forefront of my work. My focus on housing, climate, and social and environmental justice has been published and presented in numerous forums. Most recently, I was a panelist in the session Housing and Environmental Justice at the Housing Justice Futures: Philadelphia Forum on Design, Race and Climate Change, hosted by the University of Pennsylvania, Weitzman School of Design. I also presented at the Domestic Land Policy and Practice session at the first US Conference on Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) in Crisis Contexts, which was co-organized and hosted by Howard University's Department of Architecture and numerous international stakeholders.

This work has led to the development of the Community Design and Development Center (For Housing in Crisis Contexts). As coordinator of the center, I will expand the work on climate change-related displacement and community-engaged design already occurring at Howard University. This work aligns with ACSA's commitment to addressing racial and environmental equity issues in architecture academia and its centering of research and scholarship focused on climate change.

ACSA's focus on equitable learning culture also aligns with my work advocating for design activism, equitable learning environments, empowering students' agency, and mental health in design education as a form of activism. My scholarship has also centered on equity in architectural academia with articles such as Field Notes on Design Activism and Challenges and Opportunities in Teaching Architecture Design Studio during the COVID-19 Era: An HBCU Perspective.

Finally, this focus on equity and justice in the built environment has informed my service work, which includes being a member of the Board of Directors of the Neighborhood Design Center (NDC), several advisory board positions, and service at the university, college, and department levels at Howard University. These board positions and committees have equipped me with experiences I will bring to the ACSA Board of Directors. For example, my work on the Image and Promotions Committee (NDC) and the Ad-Hoc Bylaws Committee of the College of Engineering and Architecture have equipped me with skills and experiences beyond those honed throughout my architectural education and career.