



Recognizing the importance of diversity in the design professions, ENV is working to bolster the diversity of its students.

Culture Shift

Bouza has found great success in a field that is not very diverse. The Los Angeles Business Journal named her the “2014 Executive of the Year – Women Making a Difference.” As a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), Bouza will be the AIA Los Angeles chapter 2019 president.

Of the estimated 125,000 licensed architects in the United States, around 18 percent are women. For African-American women, the number is much smaller at approximately 430 or 0.3 percent, she says.

Despite the lack of representation in the profession, Bouza says through the support of colleagues and mentors, she was able to make her dreams a reality.

“As an African-American woman architect, I could look at the statistics and be discouraged that the odds are stacked against me,” she says. “But the opportunities are there, and we need to do a better job of supporting each other.”

Bouza and Gensler continue to push for diversity in the profession. More than 50 percent of Gensler’s employees are women, including at the CEO level. Bouza has been working with other leaders at the firm to continue promoting Gensler’s Diversity Scholarship program, a university outreach effort designed to build a diverse pipeline of talent.

“The broad range of practice areas and markets we design for, such as workplace, education, retail, healthcare, sports, airports and media, provide amazing opportunities that require diverse leadership,” she says. “As a global firm, we are local first, and the cross synergy of different viewpoints has been key to our success. Diversity is a seat at the table; inclusion is having a voice.”

She also mentors young women through leadership programs such as Girls, Inc. and Dress for Success. Bouza is a longtime member of the National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA), which offers a summer camp for high school students interested in the field. She spoke at the national conference on “How Diversity Drives Business Innovation.”

Bouza is on the board of directors of Imagine LA, a non profit organization dedicated to stopping the cycle of family poverty and homelessness through an innovative mentorship program that provides parents and their children the tools to thrive.

Experience has taught her that a little extra guidance helps those new to the world of design and community of architects.

“It doesn’t matter your background,” she says. “It’s about opportunity.

The great thing about architecture is we have the ability to create a meaningful impact in people’s lives.”

At Cal Poly Pomona, the College of Environmental Design also is striving to bolster diversity. In the architecture program, there are about 120 new undergraduate students every fall but sometimes only one or two African-American students, says **Michael Woo**, dean of the College of Environmental Design.

The university is working with NOMA and school counselors to identify African-American students at high schools and community colleges who might have an aptitude and an interest in architecture or the college’s other disciplines. An open house and breakfast for high school and community college counselors is planned in the fall.

Diversity is very important for those seeking a career in the ENV disciplines, Woo says, adding that Cal Poly Pomona’s affordability and proximity to Los Angeles give students a great opportunity to focus their work on issues they care about.

“Design professionals have a big role in developing cities and urban environments, from immigrant communities to dealing with issues like homelessness,” he says. “If we don’t have enough ethnic minorities in the architecture and other design professions, then many urban communities will be shaped by designers and policymakers who don’t really understand the people who live in them.”

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A Turning Point

Cristian Martinez: ‘Project SUCCESS gave me a sense of belonging at Cal Poly Pomona’

The first email I received about the **Project SUCCESS** program went ignored.

It was the summer of 2016. I had just graduated from high school and wanted to enjoy my free time before I started college. So when Byron Howlett, the former interim associate vice president and dean of students, and Tim Alexander, the coordinator of the program, emailed me to see if I would be interested in joining Project SUCCESS that fall, thinking about academic support and mentoring was the last thing on my mind.

On my first day of school, I was nervous because I had never visited the campus and had no friends. I moved to Pomona from Carson, which is about an hour from campus. That quarter, I had classes from 8 until 11 a.m. every day. I thought this would be great for me. My classes would end early, and I would have the rest of the day to study and go out.

Acclimating to the quarter system was tough. I ended up just going to class, skating home to the off-campus room I rented and completing my assignments.

After a couple weeks, I realized I never went out. I had housemates who struggled with substance abuse, which forced me to stay in my room because that was the only place I felt safe. The stress affected my mental health, and I had no one to confide in or ask for help. I was lost and alone.

Toward the end of the quarter, I received another

email from Dr. Howlett notifying me that Project SUCCESS was accepting new applicants for the winter quarter. I had let this opportunity slip out of my hands before and didn’t want to repeat that, so I applied and was blessed to be accepted into the program.

This was the turning point in my college journey and life. Project SUCCESS gave me a sense of belonging at Cal Poly Pomona that I had never had before.

In my first year, I recall my first community gathering. I was super nervous because I had joined the program late and I didn’t know anyone. I was an introvert and when I got to the event, I just sat in the corner. Tim approached me and introduced himself; he told me how excited the program was to have me.

This moment changed my life. Never once was I ever told that someone was excited to have me, let alone a program. I immediately felt welcomed and gained a sense of brotherhood and family from that day forward.

In my second year as the Project SUCCESS co-intern, I worked closely with our lead intern, Francisco Martinez, assisting him with tasks such as conducting an inventory of supplies, printing out packets and planning seating for the Preview Day and the end-of-the-year banquet. As the school year wound down and Francisco prepared to graduate, I transitioned into the lead intern position.

I have been blessed and am grateful to continue working for this amazing program in a leadership role in 2018-19.

I am thankful for the program leaders and the whole organization for everything it has done for me. The program saw something in me that I never did. Project SUCCESS gave me a second opportunity that I will cherish forever. If it were not for Dr. Howlett and Tim Alexander recognizing a need on campus for men of color and allowing me to join, I probably wouldn’t be in the position I am in now. For that I am forever grateful and will continue being an advocate and mentor for men of color.

Cristian Martinez is a junior studying industrial engineering. He is the lead intern with Project SUCCESS.



About Project Success

Project SUCCESS is a mentoring program designed to improve the graduation rates of African-American, Latino and Native American male students. The program received \$100,000 from the California Community Foundation.