



Emerging Leaders in Architecture University Task Force Report June 2024

Background

The Emerging Leaders in Architecture (ELA) Honors Academy was started in 2009 by AIA Virginia by a group of dedicated members to develop future leaders in architecture firms, in communities, and in the profession. The goal of the program is to accelerate the growth and maturity of 16 young architects and students each year through exposure and experience that will advance their careers and enhance their ability to serve society as leaders in their community.

Now in its 15th year, ELA is fully executed and managed by alumni of the program serving on an executive committee, steering committee, facilitators and mentors who are established leaders in the building, finance, non-profit, development, university, legal, consulting, and design professions and in the community at large develop and deliver the sessions, designed to provide participants with advanced knowledge and skills related to specific areas of leadership and practice.

The ELA University Task Force was formed in January 2024 for the purpose of evaluating the involvement of architecture students in the ELA program and making recommendations to the ELA leadership and the AIA Virginia Board of Directors by June 2024.

Task Force Members

1. Chris Warren, AIA (class of 2016) past chair, local steering committee chair
2. Mert Kansu, AIA (class of 2020)
3. Amber Hall, AIA (class of 2018)
4. Maggie Dunlap, Assoc. AIA (class of 2021) student participant from WAAC
5. Breanna LaTondre Helms, AIA (class of 2019) past chair, local steering committee chair
6. Brian Gore, Assoc. AIA, NOMA (Class of 2022)
7. Jacob Sherry, AIA (Class of 2020)
8. Cathy Guske (staff liaison)

Recommendation

This task force makes the following recommendations:

1. Continue to include students in the ELA class.
2. Reduce the number of students in the ELA class each year to 2 participants
3. Treat the student applications like the open applications to create competition for the student slots as opposed to only faculty nominations
4. Remove the NAAB-accredited requirement from the student application and accept applications from any students in an architecture program in Virginia

Motion

That the recommendations from the ELA University Task Force be approved.

Recommendations to ELA Executive Committee for implementation

1. Ask VANOMA if they would like to add/support a candidate (like our local nominations)
2. Indicate year of school on student application
3. A nomination taskforce be formed immediately to look at expanding promotions to schools and firms throughout the Commonwealth in the application process for the 2025 class. Breanna LaTondre Helms has offered to chair

Supplemental information

Key takeaways from research

1. **University faculty survey** (12 responses from 37 invites)
 - a. Financial assistance or transportation support is available from school for student participants in the ELA program.
 - b. Exceptions are made to the class schedule or attendance policy for ELA participants.
 - c. The ELA program is seen as valuable for students to build a network, engage in design sessions and seminars, develop collaboration and leadership skills, and address community-level challenges.
 - d. Student participation in the ELA program with other professionals is considered valuable.
 - e. Some students have provided feedback on the ELA curriculum or workload, mentioning enrichment but also challenges in terms of time commitment and impact on academic studies.
 - f. Some respondents have been involved in the ELA program as observers, nominators/selectors, or participants in final reviews.
 - g. ELA participation has an impact on student leadership or educational success at the university.
 - h. ELA participation contributes positively to future school alumni involvement.
2. **Past student participant survey** (11 responses from 25 invites)
 - a. The majority of respondents learned about ELA through their school faculty.
 - b. The majority of respondents were nominated for the program by their school faculty/dean.
 - c. The average rating for the likelihood of recommending ELA to colleagues or friends was 73 out of 100.
 - d. Recommendations for promoting the ELA program to students included marketing it as a way to teach/educate on business etiquettes and practices, staying in contact with student organizations, and showing detailed curriculum and relevance to students.
 - e. The most common expectations from the program were networking, exposure to the profession, and advancing knowledge of the practice.
 - f. The most impactful session/activity/event mentioned was a guest speaker who talked about the importance of architects in city leadership and inspired participants to become "citizen architects."
 - g. The most challenging parts of ELA mentioned were vague project requirements and difficulties in working together as a group due to geographical distance.
 - h. The most rewarding parts of ELA mentioned were the friendships and relationships developed with other young professionals and the connections made with fellow participants and guest speakers.
 - i. The accessibility of the program cost (tuition and travel) was rated an average of 65 out of 100.
 - j. The contribution of ELA to academic/professional careers was rated an average of 73 out of 100.

3. Discussions with student alumni

Phone calls were completed by the task force to 9 past student participants

- a. Both professional and student participants mentioned the value that students add to the class in terms of knowledge of current software and trends within an academic environment.
 - b. Most heard about the program through school faculty
 - c. Majority would recommend ELA program student participation
 - d. Promote earlier through AIAS/NOMAS & school architecture departments
 - e. Students had various expectations, including gaining leadership skills, networking opportunities, professional development, and smooth transition from school to practice.
 - f. The most common challenges mentioned were related to the project and managing the workload with a large group of participants. Other challenges included travel, staying organized, and balancing the program with other commitments like work or school.
 - g. Some participants mentioned the cost was not very accessible (if the school didn't cover the tuition or travel), while others felt it was fair or accessible.
 - h. The respondents generally found value in participating. (They also shared that it would have been better as a professional) The value as a grad student (esp. WAAC participants)
 - i. The majority of respondents expressed a preference for ELA to involve students within the program. Beneficial for students to have exposure to professionals and learn from their experiences.
 - j. A majority of student participants are still in Virginia and in the profession.
4. **Task force meeting conversations**
- a. There is definite positive in the student involvement contributing to future AIA involvement and a leadership "pipeline."
 - b. Student participation in ELA is valuable in fulfilling AIA Virginia's strategic goals to build university relationships & collaboration efforts
 - c. Removing the project requirement for students only was discussed but no consensus was reached on this item.
 - d. +/- of students in class (from the professional point of view)
 - i. + Their studio perspective
 - ii. - not pulling their weight on the project work
 - e. It does not matter if the student comes from a NAAB-accredited architecture program or not
 - f. There is an issue with student schedules aligning with the ELA schedule (in other words, graduations falling during May/June sessions, and students moving/taking jobs halfway through the program) - which could govern future conversations/evaluation of whether to limit participation to certain academic years (i.e. 4th years or 1st year grad students). Leniency on attendance will continue to be extended to the student participants.