**SmithGroup Creates Partnerships with Three HBCUs**

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April 22, 2021 – SmithGroup, one of the nation’s leading integrated design firms, has initiated partnerships with architecture programs at three historically Black universities – Florida A&M University (Tallahassee, Fl.), Hampton University (Hampton, Va.) and Howard University (Washington, D.C.). SmithGroup has formed a five-year partnership with each of the participating institutions which includes financial support to each school for programming needs, an internship program and academic mentorship.

The intent of the partnership program is to increase the number of architecture degrees awarded to Black students, thereby contributing to the development of a more diverse design talent pipeline. SmithGroup’s promise to Design a Better Future includes a commitment to creating a more diverse profession, through supporting underrepresented populations in the design industry.

Black architects are historically underrepresented in the architecture profession. In 2019, the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) reported that only 4% of the degrees awarded that year were to African American students.

“We formulated the HBCU partnership program with three goals in mind: to address equity through sponsorships, diversity through internships, and inclusion through academic mentorship,” says Taft Cleveland, an architectural designer at the Chicago office of SmithGroup. Cleveland, an alumnus of Florida A&M University School of Architecture and Engineering Technology, initiated the partnership program and is overseeing its growth.

The seven HBCUs offering NAAB accredited architecture programs award 32% of the architecture degrees earned by Black architecture students in the United States, according to the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture. Through targeted partnership with architecture programs at HBCUs, SmithGroup hopes to address some of the inequities facing Black architecture students today, increasing the number of graduates.

SmithGroup worked directly with architecture faculty at each university to craft meaningful engagement in the coursework of each institution. SmithGroup employees are participating in bi-weekly virtual desk crits providing real-time feedback and mentorship as students advance through their coursework. Staff will also serve as jurors for the program’s midterm and/or final projects.

SmithGroup is also selecting students from each of the three universities for paid summer internships with the firm’s Chicago, Detroit or Washington, D.C. offices to provide practical learning opportunities in a real-world setting.

Select architectural and engineering staff are lecturing at each university, teaching students a well-rounded understanding of how architects collaborate with other design disciplines, how successful businesses operate, tools used in delivering design work today, and leadership and collaboration skills needed to be successful in the field today.

“The SmithGroup partnership is supporting our third-year studios, which are focusing on housing. The firm’s staff, some of whom graduated from Howard, are complementing our studio instructors, and are bringing expertise specific to the studio project. It has been a great experience for our students, and we look forward to continuing the partnership,” says Dr. Hazel Edwards, Professor and Chair in the Department of Architecture in the College of Engineering and Architecture at Howard University.

In addition to the intensive academic mentorship of this partnership program, SmithGroup’s annual [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion scholarship program](https://www.smithgroup.com/smithgroup-equity-diversity-and-inclusion-scholarship-program) has provided students from historically underrepresented demographics in architecture, interior design, planning, landscape architecture or engineering programs financial support and internship experiences since its inception in 2018.

SmithGroup also fundraised to provide students in [Howard University’s Department of Architecture program with personal laptops to aid in their studies](https://www.smithgroup.com/news/2021/smithgroup-supports-howard-university-architecture-students-with-laptop-donation), alleviating one hardship many students in the program faced when COVID-19 closed their campus.

*Read more about SmithGroup’s commitment to* [*Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion*](https://www.smithgroup.com/equity-diversity-and-inclusion) *and our statement on* [*Racial Injustice and Action*](https://www.smithgroup.com/racial-injustice-and-action)*.*

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