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The Value of AIA

A'17. An enlightening opportunity comprised of leadership, networking, education, experience, and most of all value. This years national conference changed my perspective of our industry from individuals who design the built environment to a collective of inspirational minds striving to better our values, communities, cities, and world.

As a graduate student in the College of Architecture and Environmental Design at Kent State University, I currently serve as the AIAS Kent State Chapter President for 2016-17. Through a gracious travel scholarship appointed by AIA Cleveland I was able to attend this years AIA National Conference 2017 in Orlando, Florida. This was my first National Conference and my first major exposure to the AIA minus local collaboration. Eager, and aspiring to learn I traveled to Orlando this May for a five day experience of a lifetime with limited knowledge and understanding of the AIA on a National and Local level. This letter serves as a recap of my experience and as a narrative outlining the value that I see in the AIA.

Wednesday, May 26th I traveled to the Cleveland Airport to meet AIA Cleveland Chapter President Adam Yaracs and AIA Akron Chapter President Eric Pros to travel down to Orlando. Upon landing in Orlando the three of us and another colleague traveled to the Ohio Valley Region Lunch to begin our conference. At the time I was still unsure of what to expect from the conference and the events that I was planning on attending, however this regional lunch set the tone for the rest of my time in Orlando. Tim Hawk, Ohio Valley Region Director began with introductions, highlighted our regions FAIA recipients, and then got down to business with specific important resolutions soon to be voted on at the National Business Meeting. Sitting at a table of presidents, president elects, and various board members I felt a sudden sense of inspiration and understanding come over me as I decided I would take notes on what Tim was talking about. I was vastly confused by the discussion but knew that I wanted to understand it. This is where I first began to understand the value of AIA as Tim discussed the resolutions outlining an approach for the AIA to seek a solution for our nation's homeless epidemic. Before this statement I never considered that the AIA could potentially make such an impact, I was intrigued.

Following the lunch we attended the candidates questions session where I got a first hand look at what the members in my region thought was important via their questions, as well as the vision that future leaders of the AIA had for the institute. My aspirations to learn and become more engaged continued as I [the only student in the room] decided to ask a question of the AIA National President Elect candidate, William J Bates [AIA Pittsburgh Chapter President]. Well received by the moderator, the candidate, and the room I felt this sense of acceptance and belonging by professionals and future peers. I may have been attending as a student, but I belonged there just as much as anyone else. Following the questions of the candidates, we convened to a vast auditorium, where I continued to sit among my region and was able to witness the AIA National Business Meeting. It may sound obscure, but I felt as though I was on the edge of my seat for the entirety of the meeting. Each report, resolution debate, and vote was more exciting than the next. For an individual that has spent most of his life in the North East region of the United states it was enticing to hear members of various chapters across the nation raise their own perspectives and concerns towards national issues. This meeting left me with the realization that the AIA was much more than I thought it was, it not only functioned on a national level, but also had the ability to impact local communities and individuals. As this meeting came to a close I already felt that this conference was worth my time, and that I could see the value of the AIA emerging in front of me.

The rest of my conference experience was jam packed with evening socials filled with networking, good times, and new connections, inspiring key notes from figures such as Elizabeth Diller, Michael Ford, and Michelle Obama, award ceremonies featuring inspirational projects big and small, classes to suite the interests of anyone seeking continuing education, and a massive exhibition floor that one could spend a whole day exploring. The programing, events, environment, and overall experience were invaluable for

someone in my position as I am beginning to understand the transition from student to professional.

Throughout the conference I was introduced to new ideas, people, agendas, and protocols all redefining the profession that I have spent the last five years trying to understand through the classroom. This experience was inspiring and shed light on the future that is in store for me upon graduation. A profession that I feel I will have a voice in, the ability to make a difference, and the correct tools to change the world. It is an understatement for me to stress that attending the AIA National Conference as a student is an opportunity to change ones life. The information, and knowledge that I gained from the speakers and networking will continue to shape and inspire me as I begin my professional career, and the new connections I have within and outside of our local AIA chapters will continue to foster my growth long after the conference ended. I must again thank AIA Cleveland for funding this unforgeable opportunity and hope that future students will follow in my footsteps by attending the conference. I must also thank the AIA Cleveland and AIA Akron board members that mentored me throughout the conference. Having the opportunity to make those personal connections in Orlando was amazing, and I now look forward to running into familiar faces and new faces as I begin attending local AIA events in our area.

Lastly I would like to end my letter with my own perspective of what the value of AIA is to me. I believe that the value of the AIA is simply people. Whether those people are local AIA mentors guiding an overwhelmed AIAS student through their first conference, a new professional contact you met at a social, a renowned speaker instilling inspiration and design, or a rep on the exhibition floor passionately informing upon their product. Education, knowledge, movements, all derive from the collaboration and inspiration of people. As architects and aspiring architects we may design the built environment, but we design it for people, and the AIA fosters an atmosphere for those people to come together. So I encourage you to get more involved, find your value of the AIA, become enlightened, design, learn, and most importantly inspire together.

Respectfully,



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