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Surviving internships takes planning— and mentors

Schemata Workshop, from left: Peggy Heim; Mike Delinger; Mike Mariano; Grace Kim

By James Murdock

Negotiating a fair salary and benefits is a thorny subject that many architecture interns would rather avoid—school leaves them largely unprepared for it, and woe is the person who seeks guidance from friends or coworkers. One young architect broached the compensation question on a Seattle-area listserv recently, says Grace Kim, AIA, and was admonished for straying too close to the “taboo” area of fees. What’s an intern to do?

Kim, who was the first recipient of the American Institute of Architects’ Emerging Professionals Mentor Award in 2004, says that compensation is among the top concerns she’s encountered during the 13 years that she’s been counseling architects. She’s dealt with it so many times that writing her book, *The Survival Guide to Architectural Internship and Career Development*, published this spring by John Wiley, flowed like a stream of consciousness, she says.

Tackling compensation, Kim advises interns to value themselves more highly: In some respects, recent graduates have an edge on established professionals. “They’re coming out of school knowing new technologies like Building Information Modeling,” she explains. “That’s a knowledge base that we would have to pay a lot of money to learn.”

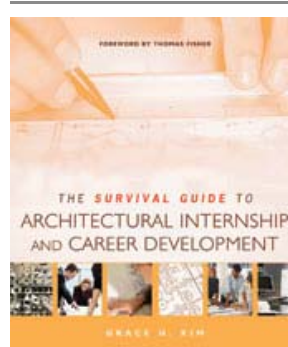
While Kim’s book is mainly aimed at students and first- or second-year interns, it contains something for every architect, including chapters on nontraditional career paths and how to start a practice. This is a topic that Kim knows well, since she wrote *The Survival Guide* while she and her husband, Mike Mariano, were founding their own Seattle-based firm, called Schemata Workshop.

For those who don’t have time to read the book, Kim’s vocational advice is twofold: Younger architects, in particular, should set career goals and revisit them regularly, and everyone should seek the counsel of multiple mentors.

The benefits of mentoring run both ways. “I get a lot back when I do it,” Kim explains. “Sometimes it’s just personal satisfaction, which is plenty, but other things also come of it, whether it’s job leads or meeting people I wouldn’t have normally met.”

Giving is something of a way of life for Kim and Mariano. Their practice participates in the “1% Solution,” a program that encourages architects to work pro bono for nonprofits and other needy community groups. And, in a case of practicing what they preach when it comes to designing pedestrian-friendly environments, the couple refuses to own a car—opting, instead, to share one through a system called Flexcar.

While the 37-year-old Kim has no regrets about her career, she admits, ironically, that she wishes she’d completed her Intern Development Program requirements faster. Her delay wasn’t a result of bad mentoring, Kim observes, but was due to her lack of a larger career plan: something she hopes that *The Survival Guide* will encourage young architects to take seriously.



Click here to read an excerpt from *The Survival Guide to Architectural Internship and Career Development*

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