International Students’ Perceptions of Mentorship throughout their Internship in the Built Environment

Ellyn A. Lester
Mariana Bianchin Pires

Stevens Institute of Technology

Pre-graduation Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is an important stepping stone for international students seeking future employment in the United States, as it provides direct, professional work experience within an American context. This can be helpful to students who are eager to establish themselves in the U.S. for post-graduation employment via Optional Practical Training (OPT), and may also be helpful to those interested in expanding their experiential knowledge prior to returning to their home countries.

In addition to providing work authorization to the student, CPT provides support by helping them understand supervisors’ expectations, job descriptions, and cultural norms in today’s Built Environment. It also provides an excellent opportunity for students to
learn from experienced professionals, often via mentorship, one of the most important relationships they will develop, and one that can directly affect their future careers.

Via surveys, solicited journaling and progress reports, the researchers gathered semi-structured, qualitative data to provide longitudinal insights into each student’s perceptions, experiences and emotions regarding his or her internship, while focusing on the role that mentorship plays in their experiences. This research provides new insights into how international students define mentorship, who their mentors are, what they believe their role is in mentor-mentee relationships, and how their mentorship experience may be different in the U.S. versus their home country. Operationalizing these insights, educators, students, and those in the profession who employ international interns can leverage these students’ perspectives to enhance experiential opportunities for international interns.

- Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

**Ellyn Lester** is an Associate Professor of Construction Management, Director of Built Environment Programs, and Associate Chair of Graduate Studies for the Civil, Environmental and Ocean Engineering Department at Stevens Institute of Technology. In addition to her teaching and administrative duties, Ellyn Lester serves as the point of contact for the program's outreach to the professional community. As such, she leads Construction Management Executive Roundtables, organizes professional and company seminars, and negotiates the program's professional and research relationships with industry. Before joining Stevens, Lester worked at the New School of Architecture and Design in San Diego, was Vice President of Architecture for MBA Management, and was Vice President of Membership Services at the Design-Build Institute of America. Lester has presented her research at numerous regional, national, and international academic and professional conferences, including CIB International Research, ICCF, ASEE, and Amps, as well as ECC International, CMAA National, and AIA National. Her notable awards include the 2018 Stevens’ Faculty Appreciation Award, 2012 AIA Associate of the Year, and SMPS National’s Striving for Excellence Grand Prize in 2001.

**Mariana B. Pires** is a Masters student in Construction Engineering and Management at Stevens Institute of Technology, where she is assisting Professor Ellyn Lester with research focused on the Internship Experiences of International Students in the Built Environment. She is also a Masters student in Civil Engineering at the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), Brazil, where she was awarded a scholarship to research critical infrastructure resilience and natural disasters. She earned a bachelor degree in Civil Engineering from UFRGS with a concentration in infrastructure, focused on transportation design and construction. She is a member of the Construction Management Association of America (CMAA), where she is completing her Construction Manager-in-Training (CMIT) certification. She is also a member of the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC). She serves as Secretary of the
Construction Management Student Organization (CMSO) at Stevens. She hopes to apply her internship experiences in heavy construction in the U.S. to a Ph.D. in the Built Environment beginning in 2020.