International Students’ Internship Experience: An Exploration of Expectations and Outcomes

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The Built Environment is complex and constantly in flux across all its domains. Therefore, to excel as a professional both theoretical knowledge and practical experience are required to navigate all the disparate processes used on different projects, markets, and geographical regions. Studying abroad in built environment-related fields allows international students to augment their knowledge, skills, and experience by learning how things are done in other countries. In the U.S., international students from all over the world have accepted this challenge. Being an international student in Built Environment disciplines in the U.S. is not an easy task. This paper analyses the opportunities and challenges faced by international students as they take part in Built Environment internships. Thirty-five international graduate students enrolled in Curricular Practical Training (CPT) while simultaneously working in degree-related internships completed a semi-qualitative survey, which was analysed to inform the design of a second survey that was given to additional CPT students enrolled during the following semester. Analysis of
survey responses is presented. Curricular and experiential learning outcomes revealed in this study are used to guide recommendations for improvement to international students’ experiences as they pursue Built Environment studies in the New York area. Although the complexity of the subject makes any improvements to the international student experience difficult, this study offers preliminary recommendations as well as a path forward to improved outcomes for those studying in the U.S. as they begin their professional careers.

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

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.

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.