

Shanna Thunell
Walpole, MA

[MAID Suffolk University 2013](#)
IIDA Student Member

IIDA 2011 Student Mentoring Week

IIDA Foundation/Lloy Hack Memorial Essay Competition

My experience during the 2011 IIDA Student Mentoring Week was extremely inspirational. As a first year Interior Design Graduate Student at New England School of Art and Design - Suffolk University, I was able to shadow a local Architectural Sales Manager from Armstrong. My mentor set up four different site visits with her clients around the Boston area.

We first traveled to KlingStubbins in Cambridge Massachusetts. KlingStubbins is an internationally recognized design firm. They provide professional services in all major disciplines within the realms of architecture, engineering, interiors, planning and landscape architecture. I met with Robin Abraham, IIDA, LEED AP Interior Designer to discuss a current project the firm was working on. We discussed interior colors, finishes, branding and furniture. I also had the experience of figuring out a ceiling tile plan. I found this visit extremely helpful to work hands on and witness some of the everyday problem solving that occurs in an office setting.

Next we visited SMMA in Cambridge Massachusetts. Symmes Maini & McKee Associates is an integrated design firm offering architecture, engineering, planning, and interior design services to corporate, technology, and institutional clients. I met with some of the architects and sustainable design team at SMMA to discuss how they keep their projects LEED certified throughout the entire building process. Carolyn Highlands, AIA, LEED AP Architect showed me some of their current building projects including their recent acknowledgement for being one of the firms in Boston to design a Model School. The Massachusetts School building Authority created the The Model School

Program. “The Model School Program seeks to effectively adapt and re-use the design of successful, recently constructed elementary, middle and high schools. They are efficient in design and easy to maintain, incorporate sustainable design elements when possible and are flexible in educational programming spaces while encouraging community use.” We reviewed the floor plan of this building and discussed how this school can act as a template/plan for other schools located throughout Massachusetts – especially for those towns with little or no money for new construction. Carolyn and her team also highly recommended that I become LEED Green certified making myself more marketable to future employers upon graduation.

My favorite visit was to the Institute for Human Centered Design. IHCD is an international non-governmental educational organization committed to advancing the role of design in expanding opportunity and enhancing experience for people of all ages and abilities through excellence in design. IHCD’s work balances expertise in legally required accessibility with promotion of best practices in human-centered or universal design. Ruther Super, LEED AP, IHCD Studio, Architectural Designer showed me around their retail space, public library of resources and ADA accessible office. We reviewed a recent sustainable/ADA residential home built in the Berkshires. The family that sought out IHCD to build their home wanted a place that was sustainable and ADA friendly. This project was very intriguing especially since she shared all the new technologies that aid disabled people. Having a grandmother paralyzed from polio and a cousin with spinal bifida, I was able to quickly recognize the obstacles my family members face each day – where as other designers don’t always think of these challenges when designing new spaces. The Institute for Human Centered Design is a place I could see myself using my design skills to help people in need.

With an interest in event, retail and exhibit design, we visited Verner Johnson-museum architects and planners. They are the only architectural firm in the country specializing *exclusively* in the planning and design of museums. Louis Sirianni AIA LEED, President gave me a tour of his office and discussed a few of their projects that are know from around the world, including: The Museum of Science Boston, Museum of Fine Arts

Boston, Le Louvre in Paris France and Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC. He also shared information on their current museum development (Discovery Park America) in Union City , TN. We discussed the construction process, materials, timelines and the most important part of any development – being a part of the building process by constantly communicating with the developers and construction team to make sure your design is being implemented to the specifications provided. He shared that building these museums has been a very rewarding career.

I am extremely thankful that IIDA provides students like myself to participate in Student Mentoring Week. Being able to talk with other professional designers and architects helped me realize my career goals and the kind of company I would like to work for someday. Not only was it rewarding to visit different firms but also it was helpful to learn about my mentors' sales position. She opened my eyes up to knowing that there are endless possibilities for job opportunities within my major that I can pursue after graduation. I am very thankful for being able to get a feel for what a typical workday would be like for a designer. It was a wonderful educational experience and also an excellent way to start networking with other professional designers. I would recommend this event to any student and plan to attend again next year.