

**Taylor Pinkney**  
**2021 Diversity Advancement Scholarship Recipient**  
**Application Essay**

Anxious, I walked into my first- grade class; it was the first place where I felt less than. I gazed around the vibrant room, and a sea of predominantly white students filled the room. They were all staring at me – the tall, lanky new girl. This marked the very beginning of what the next 11 years of my education would look like: insensitive remarks about my hair and complexion and stares from kids who weren't familiar with people who looked like me.

At a young age, I noticed the lack of diversity in my classroom, but I never could have imagined the lasting effect it would have on me. I eventually adjusted to my new reality, learned to dismiss and ignore my early experiences of prejudice, and succumbed to feeling silenced and insignificant. But why is this such a normal routine for many people of color? Experiences like this creep into many different settings, even the corporate world. Specifically, the architecture field has few minorities and therefore is missing out on the kinds of innovation and culture that comes from having diverse perspectives. However, I strongly believe that a more inclusive field will be transformative. A diverse set of cultures and viewpoints within the architecture profession will highlight new and unique perspectives, stimulate promotion, and strengthen businesses.

Imagine this: A room of 100 individuals who all think, act, and look similar. They all come from the same small town that raised them to be naive and blind to the harsh reality of the world. In this room, they are told to collaborate, to work together to solve one of America's biggest social issues: homelessness. While it is simple to think that a group this large is capable of coming up with a resolution to the issue, the problem lies in the lack of diversity within the room. It is very likely that the ultimate decision they all agree upon will be one- sided, simply because they were stripped of the opportunity to hear a set of opinions that lie on the other side of the fence.

When architectural firms design different buildings, the greatest final products derive not from the originality of a single person, but instead from a collection of different thoughts and suggestions. Having a diverse group of employees is crucial because it allows a set of unique perspectives and ideas to be heard throughout the staff. And by hearing various points of view, agreements and disagreements will influence the employees and allow them to consider new ideas they wouldn't have thought about before. Pat Wadors, LinkedIn's HR Chief, once said, "When we listen and celebrate what is both common and different, we become a wiser, more inclusive, and better organization." This quote hits the nail on the head; differing backgrounds of people in the workplace will produce a new level of acceptance within the architecture profession that does not overlook, but appreciates exceptional minds.

Oftentimes, when people ask me what I want to major in, I am usually nervous to tell them it's architecture, in fear that they will give the same discouraging response that most people do: "Oh ... good luck being a woman in that field." Or, they'll ramble on about how they know of someone who didn't survive the difficulty of architecture. In the past, comments like this caused my thoughts on the profession to waver; I wondered if it was even possible for me to thrive not only as a woman but also as a minority. However, I am a strong believer in the fact that one can reach true success by tuning out the discouragement of the world and instead focusing on receiving the resources one needs to flourish.

In my research, I've found a specific organization to be quite inspiring: The National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA). Their goal is to promote architects of color, and through their Pipeline Project, middle- and high school students can understand architecture/urban planning and how it connects to social injustice in neighborhoods of color. The students who work with NOMA are gaining a level of understanding that most

aspiring architects are not, and even at such a young age, they are gaining knowledge on topics that will later show up in their architecture careers. In addition to being surrounded by several cultures and viewpoints, they are also learning an advanced level of curriculum. NOMA is one of many organizations that focuses on the inclusion of minority groups within the architecture profession, but when young, ambitious architects see more cultural representation in the field, they become more encouraged to follow through with becoming architects. Instead of being blinded by the dispiriting comments, they can see that they are worthy enough to pursue – and ultimately acquire – such a job.

The representation of different viewpoints and cultures within the architecture profession, or any profession for that matter, also serves to enhance businesses. In Thomas Barta's article, "Is there a payoff from top-team diversity?" a study is conducted to take a closer look at the relationship between thriving companies, the diversity of their executive boards, their return on equity (ROE), and earnings before tax and interest (EBIT). Specific data was taken from France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States between 2008 and 2010. In the article, it concludes that "The findings were startlingly consistent: for companies ranking in the top quartile of executive-board diversity, ROEs were 53 percent higher, on average, than they were for those in the bottom quartile. At the same time, EBIT margins at the most diverse companies were 14 percent higher, on average, than those of the least diverse companies (exhibit)." (Barta et al.). The evidence is understandable because a business that lacks inclusion most likely only draws a certain group of people to their company, whereas a company rich in differing racial groups is likely to attract all types of people. Furthermore, the direct correlation between prospering companies and diversity within their business is something that will strengthen architecture firms and other jobs surrounding the profession.

Former President Jimmy Carter once said, "We have become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams." As a kid, I can remember going to Sunday school and the moment it was over, I was eager to go outside and look at the mosaics of Jesus on the wall.

I couldn't quite comprehend how a piece of art could hold so much depth because it wasn't just an ordinary piece of art, but it was a combination of multiple elements that each contributed to the beauty of the image as a whole. In the same way that the individually unique pieces of glass work together to construct a mosaic, a diverse community of people in the architecture field enhance the profession by placing a spotlight on unique ideas, encouraging promotion in the field, and complementing businesses. The most astonishing mosaics are made not from one shade of glass, but instead from an array of shades.