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Hoffmann Architects + Engineers awards first Diversity Advancement Scholarship to Shrestha

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Reeba Shrestha

New Haven CT Hoffmann Architects + Engineers has named the first recipient the Hoffmann Diversity Advancement Scholarship. Now in its inaugural year, the Hoffmann Scholarship was established in collaboration with the Connecticut Architecture Foundation (CAF) to support students from underrepresented racial or ethnic groups who are seeking degrees in architecture or engineering. Unique among CAF programs, the Hoffmann Scholarship offers not only tuition assistance, but also the opportunity for a paid internship at one of the firm's three offices.

The first recipient of the 2023 Hoffmann Diversity Advancement Scholarship winner is Reeya Shrestha, a second-year student pursuing a combined bachelor's and master's degree in architecture and design at Howard University. Shrestha was selected from the CAF's largest pool of applicants to date, a group characterized by outstanding academic achievement, perseverance in overcoming challenges, and drive to apply their education in design to achieving meaningful impact in their communities.

"As this is the first year of our scholarship program, we were amazed by the response," said Alison Hoffmann, chair of the Hoffmann Diversity and Inclusion Committee. "We received dozens of applications from incredibly talented students who are academically accomplished despite facing social and economic challenges to their continuing education. Our aim with the Hoffmann Scholarship is to support emerging professionals who excel in architecture and engineering but encounter barriers to success driven by decades of inequity and systemic racism."

Shrestha grew up in Kathmandu Valley, the historic capital of Nepal. As an adolescent, she witnessed the catastrophic earthquake of 2015, which claimed thousands of lives and lay waste to significant cultural landmarks. She volunteered on Nepal's Restoration Team and observed first-hand the social, political, and economic factors that impact historic restoration. "I want to study architecture because it is a powerful tool to sustain and promote cultures—which gives me a sense of identity and an irrefutable connection to my home," Shrestha said. "I aspire to become a licensed architect with a specialty in building restoration and rehabilitation to focus on historic preservation and conservation."

As an architecture and engineering firm focused on existing buildings, Hoffmann appreciated Shrestha's sensitivity to the complex factors impinging on a restoration project, particularly at a site of cultural or religious significance. The award jury was moved by her nuanced conception of exterior rehabilitation and inspired by her interest in applying building enclosure conservation to expand awareness of Nepali culture. An international first-generation college student, Shrestha aspires to bring her studies and experience back to her local community.

In addition to a \$2,500 tuition scholarship, Shrestha has been offered a paid internship with Hoffmann, which she plans to pursue in summer 2024. As an intern, she will have the opportunity to expand the work she began with the monuments and heritage sites of Kathmandu to Hoffmann's diverse project portfolio, which includes not only historic landmarks but also contemporary structures in the educational, government, healthcare, commercial, religious, and cultural sectors.

"The internship program is intended to provide a meaningful experience to professionals who are

completing their studies and beginning their careers. Hoffmann is a specialized practice, and we offer a unique perspective on the design and construction industry,” said Craig Hargrove, AIA, director of the firm’s New York office, where Hoffmann plans to host the internship. “By embracing this opportunity, we become a part of the centuries-old tradition of passing knowledge to the next generation of architects, engineers, and builders.”

The Hoffmann Diversity Advancement Scholarship is open to applicants who are students entering or enrolled full-time in an NAAB-accredited architecture program or ABET-accredited civil or structural engineering program, and residents / full-time college or university students located in southern New England (Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island) or the eastern Mid-Atlantic (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Washington DC, Virginia, Maryland), regions that form the core of Hoffmann’s practice. Eligible applicants represent a minority racial or ethnic group, as defined by the State of New York.

Applicants were solicited through a joint outreach effort with CAF to college and university architecture and engineering departments, campus affinity groups, social media, and professional organizations, such as the National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA). Applications were evaluated by the CAF Board and the Hoffmann Diversity and Inclusion Committee, a voluntary group of employees from varied locations, job positions, experience levels, backgrounds, identities, religious beliefs, and racial/ethnic heritage.

To fund the scholarship, Hoffmann Architects + Engineers contributed \$25,000 in the first year, and employees donated several thousand dollars more. CAF also collected contributions from individual donors.

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