

AFRICAN AMERICANS, ESPECIALLY WOMEN, BUILD UP THEIR NUMBERS IN ARCHITECTURE

Mary Reilly, University of Cincinnati

The informal sorority of black, female architects may be the nation's smallest profession. But hope is building. In about the last 10 years, African American women have more than tripled their numbers as licensed architects. The percentage of African American men becoming licensed architects has seen slower – but steady – growth.

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As best as can be tallied, there were 44 African American women licensed as architects in the United States in 1991. That was out of about 90,000 licensed architects in the nation, all told.

Now, a little more than 10 years later, in 2004, African American women have more than tripled their numbers as licensed professional architects – to 145, out of about 120,000 licensed architects in the United States.

Even though these findings from the University of Cincinnati seem to highlight the loneliness of the black, female architect, the women that these numbers represent are history makers in that many are the first African American women licensed in their respective states. For instance, as recently as 1994, Patricia Harris became the first African American woman licensed to practice in North Carolina.

And though their numbers seem (and are) small, they are indeed part of the increasing vanguard of diversity in the architecture profession, according to Dennis Mann,

professor of architecture in UC's College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning. Mann, and former UC professor Bradford Grant, now at Hampton University, have tracked the demographics of African Americans in architecture since 1991 when they released the first-ever "Directory of African American Architects." Working through the Center for the Study of Practice at UC, they produced an updated directory in 1996 and now maintain an online listing of African American licensed architects at <http://blackarch.uc.edu>

African American men licensed as U.S. architects now stand at 1,263. Added to the number of women licensed as architects, the total number of African American licensed architects now stands at 1,408. That's up from five years ago when the number stood at 1,238 and up from about ten years ago, in the fall of 1994, when the number stood at 1,011.

"Overall, maybe 40 African Americans become licensed in any given year. The numbers of African American women are bound to continue the most dramatic growth, because women now represent half of the

student body in architecture schools. That's quite different from 25 years ago when women, perhaps, represented five students in a class of 80. Now, they number 40 in a class of 80. Here at UC, the architecture class (UC's undergraduate programs in architecture and interior design were recently selected as the best in the nation) is evenly divided between males and females," explained Mann, who added that, nationally, women represent about 11 percent of all licensed architects.

In researching the numbers of African Americans licensed as architects, Mann has also found anecdotal information that points to increasing numbers of Asians and Hispanics becoming licensed architects. "Architects are licensed by the states, and as I review the state listings for newly licensed architects, I'm seeing more and more Asian names all the time. I'm also seeing more Hispanic names. Less than one percent of licensed architects are African Americans. Just three percent are Asian-American, and two percent are Latino," Mann said. He stated that the largest concentrations of African American licensed architects were to be found in New York City, Washington,

D.C., Atlanta and Los Angeles. A number of states have no resident African American architects: Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Montana, New Hampshire and South Dakota.

By the numbers:

Numbers of African American women licensed as architects

- 44 in 1991
- 98 in 1998
- 145 in 2004

Numbers of African Americans (men and women) licensed as architects

- 880 in 1991
- 1,011 in 1994
- 1,233 in 1998
- 1,408 in 2004

Mann's figures reflect the number of licensed architects, which does not include all working architects-in-training. To be licensed, a would-be architect must serve a three-year internship after graduation before passing a comprehensive licensing exam.