

**Michelle Tapia**  
Assoc. AIA, AIAS, NOMA

**AIA Nevada Associate Award**

**2023**



## Hello! My Name is Michelle Tapia,

I am an alumnus of the University of Nevada Las Vegas where I graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Architecture in May of 2022. I am originally from the Central Valley of California and made Las Vegas my home in 2017 to attend university. I am currently a Project Designer at GRN Vision, where I focus on affordable and supportive housing projects utilizing pre-fabricated modular structures and trauma-informed design.

I first was introduced to the Las Vegas architecture community in the second half of my first year at the UNLV SOA, I had gone to an event at a local architecture firm hosted by the Committee on the Environment. They have given a presentation on the Living Building Challenge. This was the first time I ever interacted with AIA and local professionals. Since that moment, I began to be more involved in the community not only in the school with AIAS, but in AIA.

I went on to take the next step in AIAS and was appointed the Freedom by Design Director for AIAS at UNLV in 2019. During the height of the Pandemic in 2020, I ran and was elected AIAS UNLV Chapter President, doing my best to navigate our chapter and student engagement through remote learning. 2020 was also the first year I was appointed as a committee member for the Freedom by Design Advisory Committee for the AIAS National Organization. I would serve on this committee for 3 years, 2 of which as a general member and my final year as the chair of the national committee.

As my term as Chapter President came to an end, I moved to an advisory role in our Chapter as the Chapter's Past President. Helping to guide the next executive board and being a resource and mentor to new student leaders. At the time where I served as the chair of the Freedom by Design Advisory Committee, I also joined an initiative in AIAS called CAMP, this was a mentorship initiative where alumni members of AIAS were assigned to participating schools as mentors, providing advice and insight to AIAS Chapters all over the nation.

In 2021 I was asked by the AIA NV Fellow's committee chair if I would like to be the Secretary for the committee, I accepted and have been with the committee for almost 3 years. In the same year, I became an inaugural member of the AIA Las Vegas Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (J.E.D.I) Committee, we have since changed the committee's name and I am now a co-chair of the J.E.D.I & Education Outreach Committee. I am also an active member of the LV Women in Architecture Committee and the LV Placemaking Committee.

I have been grateful to be honored in many aspects of my involvement; I was the recipient of the AIAS National Freedom by Design Director Grassroots Attendance scholarship in 2019 and the recipient of the Jon Sparer, FAIA Leadership Scholarship in 2020. In 2022, I was the inaugural recipient of the AIA Las Vegas Women Building Nevada Symposium Rising Star Award.

Earlier this year I was the first member cover feature and interview with AIA Las Vegas' rebranded newsletter Blueprint. I have also had the opportunity to participate in two panels. I sat on a panel discussing Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in architecture from a student perspective in 2021 and a panel discussing Women in Architecture Academia. I was also asked to participate in a video with other professionals speaking about creating a more equitable and inclusive profession. Finally, I was asked this year among other emerging professionals and recent graduates to participate in a panel discussion about transitioning from architecture school to our respective firms.

## Personal Narrative

I am a firm believer that the actions of your past can influence how you see the world and your place in the future. Since I was young, I watched as my parents worked hard to give my sibling and I the same opportunities as other, more fortunate families. Our family lived paycheck to paycheck for our entire lives, but I was fortunate to have food on my plate, a roof over my head, clothes on my back and a family that loves and supports me unconditionally. My parents worked tirelessly, so that we never had to and I am incredibly fortunate I have never known what it was like to work in the fields picking, and had the opportunity to focus on my studies and extracurriculars. I learned from my parents the meaning of diligence and ambition, learning how to accept opportunities and to support others with ambition.

I learned from AIA the importance of mentorship and how my actions can encourage and impact others like myself. Being available for students and other emerging professionals is a crucial part in advancing the profession of architecture. Being involved with our local students and schools is how we create a connected community, and help influence the growth of our young leaders. Being vulnerable and open; answering hard questions and being transparent about the struggles of architecture help students be more prepared for the profession after graduation. Introducing students to our peers and other professionals help students develop their soft skills and build their network, encouraging students to be more involved.

I believe I have unconsciously become a familiar face and influence to many students, much to my surprise students have come up to me already knowing who I am, and asking questions about my experiences. I hope that we all have the goal to have interactions like these and to inspire the next generation through our leadership and service. These are the goals that I hope to achieve as I continue in my career.

## AIAS Leadership

My involvement and engagement in AIAS has helped put me in the same room as students from UNLV and other universities all over the world. Being in leadership positions, I have been able to guide students in their journeys through architecture school. At UNLV I was a leader in one of the hardest times in our chapter's history, where we had to navigate the world virtually and I was the captain. Through the efforts of myself and my team we were able to help build a solid foundation and knowledge of how to host successful hybrid and virtual events, while still providing value in these events, by creating avenues of communication between presenters and students, leveraging the nature of virtual events by inviting architects from across the United States to speak with UNLV Students.

One of my major goals in my involvement with AIAS was fostering the relationship we have built with AIA Las Vegas. Working together with AIA Las Vegas we have helped students attend more events and collaborated on student - professional events to give them the opportunity to network with local professionals.



Shoulder tapping students to attend these events have helped encourage them to get more involved in the professional chapter. I helped organize student volunteers, introduce students to our local professionals and advised the AIA LV chapter on the happenings of the UNLV School of Architecture.

I was able to be the representative for our architecture students and help provide student perspective to the chapter.

I have also been able to be a part of the AIAS Chapter Alumni Mentorship Program where I was paired up with 3 universities from all over the country. I had a chapter in the Northeast, Midwest and West that I met up with Monthly over the last year and a half. I was able to meet their leadership boards and answer any questions they had about the organization, profession, and transitions.

**Wednesday, July 15th**

**AIA Las Vegas July Virtual Membership Meeting**

**A Panel Discussion on  
"Equality, Diversity & Inclusion"**

**Time: Online Program Begins at 1:00 pm PST**  
Panel discussion of new views and actions on racial equality, diversity and inclusion.

**Our Panel For This Program Is**



**AIA Las Vegas**

# BLUEPRINT

JULY 2023

**FEATURING**  
**MICHELLE TAPIA**  
**ASSOC. AIA**

[AIALASVEGAS.ORG](http://AIALASVEGAS.ORG)

**3**

**MEMBER SPOTLIGHT**

## I AM AIA



MICHELLE TAPIA

I am a member of AIA because...

This is an organization that is a representation of our profession. AIA connects us to like minded individuals who share our same passions to help better the profession with a passion to create more equitable and just design, while supporting the next generations of aspiring architects/architecture students. I spent the majority of my time at UNLV as an advocate for students in the profession and academia through AIAS, holding positions both locally and nationally as UNLV Freedom by Design director, FBD National Advisory Committee chair, AIAS UNLV President and am a part of the AIA LV Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, AIA LV Women in Architecture committee, and the NV Fellows committee. I have been honored to speak on panels regarding justice, equity and diversity in academia, women in architecture academia, and transitioning from school to the profession at the women in architecture symposium in NV. I am currently working in the profession at GRN Vision, where we focus on sustainable building consulting, affordable housing and homeless housing. I am also exploring universities to study and obtain my Masters degree in Architecture, with the aspiration of becoming a licensed Architect. My vision is to create a career that will inspire minority girls, women and students to reach higher and further than you can think you can and to believe that you can achieve whatever you put your mind and effort to.

Please introduce yourself to the AIA community

I was born in the central valley of California, the agriculture center of the state and am a first generation college attendee and graduate, receiving my bachelors of science in Architecture in Spring of 2022. I am an emerging professional with a passion to create more equitable and just design, while supporting the next generations of aspiring architects/architecture students. I spent the majority of my time at UNLV as an advocate for students in the profession and academia through AIAS, holding positions both locally and nationally as UNLV Freedom by Design director, FBD National Advisory Committee chair, AIAS UNLV President and am a part of the AIA LV Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, AIA LV Women in Architecture committee, and the NV Fellows committee. I have been honored to speak on panels regarding justice, equity and diversity in academia, women in architecture academia, and transitioning from school to the profession at the women in architecture symposium in NV. I am currently working in the profession at GRN Vision, where we focus on sustainable building consulting, affordable housing and homeless housing. I am also exploring universities to study and obtain my Masters degree in Architecture, with the aspiration of becoming a licensed Architect. My vision is to create a career that will inspire minority girls, women and students to reach higher and further than you can think you can and to believe that you can achieve whatever you put your mind and effort to.

Describe a pivotal moment or influence that ignited your passion for architecture

A pivotal moment that ignited my passion for architecture was one of the first conferences I ever intended as a student. I attended AIA's grassroots in Washington D.C. where all the attendees were architecture students, prominent student leaders in their chapters and communities, and aspiring leaders like myself. There was so much discussion, inspiration and goals, I came back to Las Vegas buzzing with this new found knowledge and passion. I started to become more ambitious and curious about every facet of architecture and that moment and feeling became the driving force in my passion and career thus far.

Can you elaborate on your experience collaborating with other architects and industry professionals?

Collaborating with architects and industry professionals has been incredible since I have been involved in AIA. Professionals have always been happy to share their knowledge and experiences with me, and answer questions that I may have. I have also been able to help provide some student perspective to help answer any questions they may have, as well as help strengthen the bridge between the UNLV School of Architecture and the profession.

What advice would you offer to aspiring architect aiming to follow in your footsteps

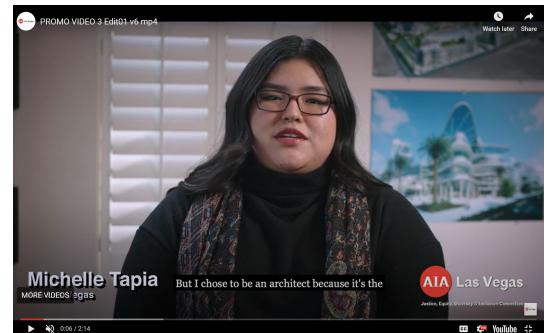
Get involved, get out of the studio and see the community you want to design for. Explore and be ambitious, take the time to have fun and explore new places and things, as aspiring architects it is important to take the opportunity to experience the many facets of inspiration and challenges the community around you can bring. It is easy for us to put our heads down and focus on studying and creating, but in order for us to design for change or to face challenges we first must experience who and what we want to design for. Don't be afraid to ask questions and take opportunities to help expand your knowledge and experiences.

Michelle Tapia, Assoc. AIA  
GRN Vision

## AIA LV Committees

Currently I am a member of the Women in Architecture Committee and am an inaugural member of AIA Las Vegas' J.E.D.I committee. As a Hispanic woman being present and recognized in a traditionally male dominated profession is so important. I remember as I started studying architecture I quickly realized that in our coursework and the profession around us, I didn't see many architects that looked like me. I think this is one of the key reasons why being apart of these committees is so important to me.

I aspire to be a role model for kids who want to be architects, engineers or be a part of a profession where you don't see many people like you. Participating in these committees make me feel like I am on the right track. Being able to share my experience, struggles and insecurities with other minorities and women help foster productive conversation and action for the betterment of the profession.



## The little things

I would have to say that my biggest achievement so far has been the little things. The times in between recognitions, panels, and events feel so much more important to me rather than any awards or honors. Being able to see the achievements of students or chapters that I have met and mentored are some of my proudest moments. I try to be there to celebrate the achievements of my peers, their recognitions, awards, elections and when they become part of something they believe strongly about. Being able to support others as they reach their aspirations and goals is truly special.

Some of my favorite times have to be in the moments outside of formal gatherings. Where we are sitting and have conversations about leadership, architecture and the future. Moments of vulnerability that turn into meaningful discussion. From sitting in a hotel room with UNLV AIAS leaders brainstorming and calming anxieties of the upcoming school year to reviewing a student portfolio or resume as they are coming up on upper division deadlines or an exciting interview with their first firm. I want to help out in any way I can and give them what my mentors have given me.



This impact and influence does not have to start and end in architecture. It is my belief that in order for architects to design for their community, they have to know their community. I am not a native Nevadan, this community is something new to me. Everyday I am learning new things about the culture and needs within Las Vegas. I kept my eyes open for opportunities to volunteer with non-profits and provide a service that is not architecture but support. Being able to take a day off of work, or a take a day out of my weekend has impacted the way I think about architecture and has influenced the way I am involved in our community.



## Mentorship & Volunteering

Mentorship is an important goal that I have for myself. I have been fortunate to have incredible mentors myself and want to have the same effect on others as my mentors have had on me.

I began mentoring my peers when I was in my third year at UNLV by participating in our student mentorship program where upper division and graduate architecture students were paired with lower division students to be a resource for them as they go through their journey up until they apply for upper division. AIAS used this opportunity to help foster a studio culture of support and experience sharing.



I also was able provide the same support nationally through the mentorship program I mentioned previously. Providing my knowledge and experience of running our chapter, insight on Freedom By Design projects, and how we foster our relationship with our AIA component.

Being involved and volunteering is something I recommend to all the students and my peers. Volunteering has helped me grow my network and gain experiences and skills that I can share with others. I started volunteering when AIAS Freedom by Design had a project with Casa de Luz, where I helped build components of the teams design and helped build the end product. It was such an incredible experience and showed me the impact design can have on underserved communities. I have been volunteering with AIA since I started my architecture school journey. I have been able to help AIA with registration for many of their main events from the golf tournaments, awards gala and top golf tournaments. I have spent some time volunteering for the Nevada Partnership for homeless youth and career fairs to speak to middle and high schools students about my career in architecture.

I have also been able to informally mentor students as an emerging professional. This past year I have been able to help students prepare their upper division portfolios. I have also found myself in a few situations where students would know who I was and would want to sit and ask me questions about the profession, my career so far, and advice on getting through architecture school.



I was paired with 2 lower division students and was able to help give them advice on their studio projects, and was able to review their portfolios for the upper division application. I continued my mentoring the next year as the chapter president of AIAS and mentored students that were interested in becoming more involved in AIA, FBD, AIAS or interested in growing their leadership skills. When I became the Past President my role was to help mentor the incoming executive board, advising them on how to achieve their goals in their elected roles and provided feedback and support as they went through the school year.



## Leadership

AIAS was the gateway to where I am right now in my career. I became a member of AIAS early in my undergraduate studies. This was the catalyst of my involvement with both the student organization and AIA. I began as the Freedom by Design director in 2019-2020 where we had designed a reading loft for Gibson Elementary here in Las Vegas to encourage students to read. Unfortunately due to the COVID-19 Pandemic this project did not come to fruition, but this was the first step in my leadership with Freedom by Design.

After my term as FBD Director, I was the first Director to be elected UNLV AIAS Chapter President immediately following my directorship. I became President as we were in the middle of virtual learning. In order to keep engagement with architecture professionals and students, I headed a year long monthly discussion series, Off the Clock. This series featured architects from our region; Arizona, New Mexico, Reno, & Colorado. The topics of the series centered around architecture of place and how each of their respective firms define and create a sense of place in their work.

As we had successfully maneuvered through this difficult time, I now found myself on the other side. It was now my turn to help nurture and guide the leaders that came after me. I began taking a step back and helping stimulate the growth of these leaders, supporting them and providing resources to help them achieve the goals they had set for themselves.

This is the time where I began to be more involved nationally as a member of the Freedom by Design Advisory Committee. I was in charge of collecting FBD project updates, distributing resources to chapters and creating programming that would help train FBD directors through their service project. These projects focus on addressing barriers in their communities with design, whether that be design engagement, service or design-build. I helped navigate chapters in finding design and construction mentors, fundraising, design development, AXP hour information and was involved in panels at both major conferences hosted by the AIAS to answer questions, share advice, and facilitate collaboration to get chapters the resources they need to succeed. After my time as a member of this committee I went on to be appointed the chair of the committee this previous year. I had accumulated years of knowledge of Freedom by Design both before and after the pandemic and began passing this knowledge on to the new members of the committee, AIAS National Board of Directors and NCARB. Doing many of the same things I did as a member, I also began to have meetings discussing the partnership of AIAS freedom by Design with NCARB giving my insight on how the program is working, the feedback we receive from students and the overall process of partnering and being awarded grants for FBD projects.

As I was gaining momentum in my leadership positions I was approached by the Chair of the AIA NV Fellows Committee asking if I would be interested in becoming their secretary. I graciously accepted and have been with the committee for almost 3 years, I focus on taking minutes, collaborating with the chair to send out updates, agendas, event planning, and keeping the committee organized.

**OFF  
THE  
CLOCK**  
SPONSORED THROUGH THE  
JULI ARTIST IN RESIDENCY PROGRAM

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2021  
@ 4:00 PM VIA ZOOM  
REGISTER TODAY AT  
[HTTPS://AIAS-UNLV.SQUARE.SITE/](https://aias-unlv.square.site/)

JOSHUA  
VERMILLION

JOSEPH VERNON

JOSHUA VERMILLION IS A TENURED ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR IN THE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AT UNLV, FORGING A MULTI-YEAR CAREER IN THE EXPLORATION, DEVELOPMENT AND EXECUTION OF "DIGITAL CRAFT." HIS EFFORTS IN RESEARCH, PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICE BELONG TO THREE PRIMARY CATEGORIES: DIGITAL INFORMATION AS MEDIUM (COMPUTATIONAL, PARAMETRIC AND ALGORITHMIC DESIGN); DIGITAL INFORMATION AS MATERIAL (DIGITAL FABRICATION TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES); AND DIGITAL INFORMATION AS METHOD (SITUATED TECHNOLOGIES, RESPONSIVE SYSTEMS, AND ROBOTICS).

JOSHUA HAS SPOKEN WORLDWIDE AND HAS PUBLISHED AND PRESENTED PEEER-REVIEWED RESEARCH AT ACADEIA, SIGRAD, ECAADE, ACSA, NCARB, AND ARCC CONFERENCES, AS WELL AS THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ARCHITECTURE COMPUTING. HE HAS CO-EDITED TWO BOOKS—"DIGITAL DESIGN EXERCISES FOR ARCHITECTURE STUDENTS" (ROUTLEDGE, 2016) AND "BOTTOM-UP SOCIAL CHANGE SYMPOSIUM PROCEEDINGS" (ACSA PRESS, 2020). JOSHUA HAS SERVED AS GRADUATE COORDINATOR AND ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR THE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND IN 2017 RECEIVED THE FELDEN MEDAL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS OF EXCELLENCE TO ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION.

PRIOR TO HIS APPOINTMENT AT UNLV, JOSHUA TAUGHT DESIGN STUDIOS, SEMINARS AND LECTURE COURSES AT STATE UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENTS OF ARCHITECTURE, WHILE THERE—THROUGH A GRANT FROM THE FELDEN FUND (HE CO-FOUNDED)—MADE AN APPROPRIATE DESIGN + LEARNING INSTITUTE FOCUSED ON BRIDGING ARCHITECTURE FACULTY AND DESIGN PROFESSIONALS WITH REGIONAL INDUSTRY PARTNERS TO WORK ON MUTUALLY-BENEFICIAL PROJECTS UTILIZING DESIGN, COMPUTATION AND FABRICATION. DURING THE SPRING OF 2014, JOSHUA WAS THE INVITED TAYLOR SEMINAR LECTURER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY'S FACULTY OF ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN. PRIOR TO JOINING ACADEME FULL TIME, JOSHUA WORKED PROFESSIONALLY AT SEVERAL ARCHITECTURE FIRMS INCLUDING NBBJ'S COLUMBUS OFFICE.

AIAS  
UNIVERSITY OF  
NEVADA LAS VEGAS

## Leadership

As I continue my journey, I am currently an active member of the AIA Las Vegas Women in Architecture Committee, The AIA Las Vegas Placemaking Committee and I currently the new Co-chair for the AIA Las Vegas J.E.D.I and Education Outreach Committee, where I attend career fairs, workshops and we are developing a coursework that is accessible for all ages to learn about architecture in a fun way while being exposed to actual programs and concepts we use in the profession.

I have also been involved in advocacy in architecture locally here in Las Vegas, where I was invited, along with two other emerging professionals to present a statement to the Nevada legislature in support of fundamentally changing the initial diploma Nevada high school students are enrolled in. We advocated for students to be already enrolled in a college and career ready diploma track.



## Speaking Opportunities

Being involved in so many aspects of architecture as a student and emerging professional, I have some incredible opportunities to speak alongside influential architects and represent the larger population of architecture student and young professionals, both locally and on a national scale.

The first panel I was asked to sit on was the AIA Las Vegas Equity, Diversity and Inclusion panel in 2020. I was asked to speak about this topic from the perspective of a minority student currently in architecture school. I was such a surreal moment for me given my background. We spoke about the benefits of diversity in education, architecture and the world overall. How these ideas can influence how we design our spaces and the impact those spaces have on our communities. We spoke about the shortcomings of some aspects of architecture in this realm and how we can remedy those shortcomings as well as the need to have a more equitable, diverse and inclusive profession and next generation. This discussion led to the creation of the AIA Las Vegas J.E.D.I committee and also led to the creation of a promotional video, where I was asked to share my journey to choosing architecture. The video was aimed to appeal to young school kids and showcased architects, professionals and students from all backgrounds. Truly a pleasure and an honor to be showcased.

After this panel I was asked by the AIA Las Vegas Women in Architecture Committee to be a part of a panel discussing women in architecture education, again from a perspective of student leader. We spoke about the role of women education, the rarity of women role models and the struggles of finding women mentors in school. We also spoke about the lack of women representation in academic classes discussing architecture. We also talked about influential women architects that inspire us and how they are paving the way for women architects to come after them.



Being involved in Freedom by Design gave me the opportunity after these panels to participate in national panels and workshops speaking about the importance of service through design. Talking about ways advocacy and support can take many different shapes and how architecture students, alumni, and professionals can leverage our knowledge and skills to support and uplift underserved populations in our communities. Most recently I was able to lead this discussion and introduce design service to interested members at AIAS' Grassroots Conference this past summer in Washington D.C.

## Speaking Opportunities

Finally, After being award the inaugural AIA Las Vegas Women Building Nevada Symposium last fall, I was invited along with two other recent graduates and emerging professionals to host a breakout panel discussion titled '*Transitioning from School to an Architect's Firm thru the Eyes of Emerging Professionals*'. Where we discussed the anxieties and struggles of transition to the profession after architecture school.

Being vulnerable about our own insecurities and anxieties in front of my own peers was a struggle, especially when there is a possibility one day I could be working for someone in that room with us. We were able to lift each other up and be confident in our panel, helping to shed some light on the realities of this transition. We share stories and our inputs on situations these young professionals may face. We shared some of the hardest lessons we learned in the beginning and our growth since we started. We mainly wanted to help ease the tensions and anxieties of the participants as they navigated their next steps.



I would like to say a huge thank you for your consideration of my applications for the AIA Nevada Associate Award and I hope you find myself a worthy candidate for your consideration.

Thank you,

Michell Tapia, Assoc. AIA, AIAS, NOMA

# Vivian Arredond-Rendon, AIAS

2023-2024 | UNLV AIAS President



**AIAS**  
UNIVERSITY OF  
NEVADA LAS VEGAS

09 NOV 2023

RE AIA Nevada AxNV DSA Associate Award Letter of Recommendation  
for **Michelle Tapia**, Associate AIA, AIAS, NOMA, GGEP

AxNV DSA Selection Committee

I am writing this letter in support of Michelle Tapia's nomination for the 2023 AIA Nevada Associate Award. Throughout my time at UNLV and my involvement with AIAS, Michelle has demonstrated great character by setting an exemplary path for aspiring student leaders, and by continuing her involvement as a mentor beyond her time as a student.

I remember my first involvement with AIAS being with UNLV's FBD chapter. During this time, Michelle was no longer the FBD director, instead she was navigating the AIAS UNLV chapter through COVID while simultaneously providing guidance to our FBD team. Throughout this alienating time, Michelle and her team were able to put together a lecture series and a peer mentorship program, where Michelle herself was one of the mentors. Seeing someone so dedicated to their fellow students, inspired me to continue my path in AIAS. I have now served as Treasurer and currently serve as president of the AIAS UNLV Chapter, and although she graduated before I started my time on the board, she has had a continued impact on the chapter and myself as a leader. I attended my first Grassroots Conference this summer where I saw Michelle, still eager to attend. She gave both me and our chapter past president very insightful information and advice about the organization and her experience after graduation. As a result of this conversation, I started the conference with newfound confidence and enthusiasm, leading me to be a part of the JEDI Committee this school year. Additionally, Michelle's continued involvement in AIA Las Vegas has helped me navigate my way through the professional facet of leadership. I have seen her serve on various discussion panels, advancing the voice and agency of young women in the field. Although I could continue writing about her and list her involvement, accomplishments and awards, it is the small moments, such as the conversations in our Grassroots hotel this summer, or the friendly face at AIA LV events that always checks on how I'm doing, that define Michelle's dedication to AIAS, her community and the profession of architecture.

It is my firm belief that part of the continued success of the AIAS UNLV Chapter has to do with Michelle selflessly providing her knowledge and support not only to her immediate successor Tristan Osorio, but also my predecessor Ivan Gonzalez and currently, myself, past the time the organization 'required' her to do so. Michelle is not bound to her duties by any by-laws or obligations, she takes it upon herself to get involved with and support past, current and future student leaders. For these reasons, I believe she is more than deserving of the AxNV DSA -Associate Award.

Sincerely,

Vivian Arredondo Rendon, AIAS  
*UNLV Chapter President 2023-2024*

**Rick Van Diepen**, AIA, NCARB, LEED AP BD+C  
 Managing Principal | GRN Vision



*Fostering Sustainable Communities*

[www.GRNVision.com](http://www.GRNVision.com)

**AIA Honor Awards Selection Committee**

**C/O Carlos D. Fernandez**

Executive Director | AIA Nevada & AIA Las Vegas

The American Institute of Architects

Sent Via Email: [CFernandez@AIANevada.org](mailto:CFernandez@AIANevada.org)

Re: Letter of Support for Michelle Tapa, Associate AIA

Dear AIA Selection Committee,

I am writing to convey my full support for Michelle Tapa in recognition of her significant contribution to the Las Vegas community and to furthering the mission of AIA Las Vegas. Michelle has been a great example of service as an Associate AIA member.

I have had the honor of mentoring Michelle in her role as a designer and intern project manager at GRN Vision, a public-interest design and sustainability firm; since receiving her architecture degree from UNLV in 2022. It has been remarkable to witness how much she has learned and contributed after such a short internship period; particularly considering that this was her first job with an architecture firm. Michelle is equally passionate and inquisitive about her chosen field and she is clearly on a fast track to becoming a successful architect and community leader.

At GRN Vision, Michelle is a talented designer with a level of understanding and thirst for knowledge that belies her young age. Michelle contributes to every project we work on and manages several of our residential group home projects nearly autonomously, which is extremely rare for a recent graduate. She has also had a strong influence on our firm and our overall approach to community-based design, leading our master planning and design projects that include homeless navigation centers, and affordable and transitional housing multifamily housing. Michelle is a very quick study and has already become one of our in-house experts on trauma-informed design, code research and project entitlements.

Michelle is not only a leader at our firm, she is also a proven leader in the profession of architecture. She has served in leadership and mentoring roles with AIAS while she was student and subsequently as an advisor to the current AIAS officers and volunteers at the AIAS chapter at UNLV as well as to other university chapters. Michelle has been a very active and reliable volunteer for Freedom By Design and has served on several AIA committees including JEDI, Fellows, Women in Architecture, and COTE- Placemaking. Michelle has also shown her leadership and public speaking skills as a panelist/ speaker at numerous AIA events, and she is equally happy being one of the behind the scenes hero volunteers that make so many of our events successful.

I can unequivocally say that Michelle is one of the most intelligent and talented aspiring architects that I have ever come across and clearly has a bright future ahead of her as a model, 'citizen architect.' More than anything, Michelle is kind and generous and for those reasons alone, she is highly deserving of any award or recognition she receives.

Very Sincerely,

Rick Van Diepen, AIA, NCARB, LEED AP BD+C  
 Managing Principal

# Monica Gresser, AIA, NCARB, LEED AP

Principal Architect | Brazen Architecture



07 NOV 2023

RE AIA Nevada AxNV DSA Associate Award Letter of Recommendation  
for **Michelle Tapia**, Associate AIA, AIAS, NOMA, GGEP

AxNV DSA Selection Committee

It is with immense joy that I recommend Michelle Tapia for the 2023 AIA Nevada's Associate Award for her dedication to, and efforts towards, improving and progressing the Profession and the American Institute of Architects.

Michelle was the first UNLV AIAS President I recall meeting. She was honest and engaging, and she seemed more determined to connect the students with working Architects. Post-university, she continues to work with students, encouraging them to participate in Chapter activities.

I met Michelle again with student volunteers working on a beautification project in a low-income neighborhood. Getting 15 students to do anything outside of school is difficult. Under her leadership, they organized, filed for a grant, purchased materials, and upgraded the front yard at the Casa de Luz building in Las Vegas' Naked City.

Michelle currently serves the Las Vegas Chapter as the Fellows Committee Secretary and is involved in the Women in Architecture and the Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion committees. She continues to show her amazing ability to organize, be diplomatic, and move the ball forward.

In September 2022, the AIA Las Vegas Women in Architecture committee awarded Michelle Tapia with the Committee's RISING STAR AWARD. The nominee for this award must be a woman who is growing her leadership qualities through various professional roles and activities. The Committee was unanimous in selecting Michelle as the RISING STAR recipient.

Along with two other Emerging Professionals, Michelle was part of a 2023 AIA Las Vegas Women in Architecture committee panel discussion, titled: *Transitioning from School to an Architect's Firm thru the Eyes of Emerging Professionals*. It was risky to be vulnerable with other, more experienced professionals who could become her future employer. By discussing her new-profession anxieties and methods to cope with them, other young professionals learned that they were not alone in their anxiety as they gain footing in the profession. I am incredibly proud of her for being strong and sharing her story with the committee.

Michelle Tapia is an Emerging Professional who shows compassion in her approach to leadership, supported by an organizational strength. She is a tremendous asset to the Las Vegas architectural community.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Monica".

Monica M Gresser NCARB AIA LEED AP

Principal Architect

**brazen**architecture

AIA Nevada 2020 Citizen Architect Award Recipient

Chair | Las Vegas Chapter Women in Architecture Committee

Co-Chair | Las Vegas Chapter Affordable Housing Committee

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