Why and how did you become an architect?
My primary motivation for pursuing architecture began at a very young age with a desire to understand how everything worked. I took things apart and sometimes got them back together. At the time, I did not know of another profession that would give me a global sense of how things worked and allow me to document discoveries I made through drawings. I had naïve but romantic notions of what architects did. These notions were the vehicle that propelled me into going to school to learn about architecture.
Why and how did you choose which school to attend for your architecture degree? What degree(s) do you possess?

I possess a B.Arch. from New York Institute of Technology at Old Westbury and an M.Arch. from Cornell University. I chose my undergraduate institution based on what I could afford to pay, the location, and admission. I selected the graduate program because it offered an opportunity to work as an administrator and do graduate work at the same time. I pursued graduate work to learn additional design theory and to explore the possibilities of teaching.

What is the greatest challenge facing the future of the profession?

The greatest challenge is the lack of accessible and visible role models in the profession and in the academic environment for aspiring ethnic minority and women students. I was fortunate to have a cousin practicing architecture in New York City who allowed me to work in his office from high school on through my undergraduate studies. This was the component of my education that actually kept me in school, as I was challenged to see the relevance of my schooling to the practice of architecture. For all students, a link to a role model is always helpful when things get tough to sort out.

From my undergraduate years and beyond, I have always been fortunate to find role models to keep me on track and to expose me to opportunities I would not have known about otherwise. I think it is important to have a strong sense of your destination but also to be flexible about the path to this goal. Ultimately, you should stay agile in your ability to modify your goals with respect to experiences acquired on your path of learning.

How does your work as a faculty member inform your architectural practice, and vice versa?

Being constantly surrounded by bright minds — always a diverse range of individuals able to collectively generate a range of ways of seeing a problem — is a valuable learning experience for the teacher. Teachers learn at an accelerated rate from their students. Students always challenge the conventions of how things go to together.

I am an academic whose practice of architecture is embedded in working with students in the design and construction of building mockups and prototypical structures. This form of practice has helped me acquire small-scale examples of the inti-
mate process of design and construction. The academic involved in practice always has a voice in the back of his or her mind asking the question, “How can I capture this process and explain it to students so they can learn from it?”

What are your primary responsibilities and duties as an architect and as a faculty member?
I think some practitioners want to see faculty as practicing architects first and as academicians second, as this seems a logical way to ensure that students will learn the skills they need to become architects. From my experience, being a practitioner first does not ensure this; success depends more on teaching strategies that provide students with the tools for understanding these connections.

Practitioners must understand that they play an important role in the education of architects too. Some feel students need to deal with more complex design issues in school, but I think issues must be simplified so students can develop ideas beyond the planning stages of a project into constructible architectural vocabularies. Acceptable levels of design development are lacking in many studios, as students spend too much time thinking about complexities.

How does teaching architecture differ from practicing it?
What a teacher does is a mystery to those who do not teach. I think universities must work to decode what academics do. I often hear that the role of an architecture professor is to teach students the skills to build buildings, but I think the role of an architecture professor is far greater. Teaching is a modeling of future citizens who will make great contributions to society as upstanding citizens in addition to having the knowledge needed to create architecture. Good teaching is where both the student and teacher learn from the interaction. This is why people are attracted to teaching—because it provides a continuous learning mechanism.

You have been a member of more than one of the national boards of the collateral organizations. What has that involvement meant for your career?
People often think that individuals who volunteer with associations have limited interest in the broader issues that affect the profession—that is, design. I have the opposite view: Active involvement with the collaterals gives a broader view and appreciation for the profession. Navigating association work is the ultimate design problem for consensus, as you must move through a bureaucracy. I served as national president of the AIAS in 1984–1985 and as secretary for the ACSA in 2004–2006. Association work allows you to establish a macro view of the profession through networks that, over time, disperse and expand.