

Aaron Ruffin

Aaron Ruffin graduated with the Bachelor of Landscape Architecture in 2005. He continued on at MSU earning a Master of Public Policy and Administration in 2007. Ruffin works as a network real estate manager for Mobilitie, a telecommunications infrastructure company. He is a member of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) Diversity Summit, which brings a dozen landscape architects from around the U.S. together to discuss ways the ASLA can expand the profession as more ethnically and culturally diverse.

DESCRIBE AN MSU MEMORY. In the fall of 2003, the landscape architecture department college chapter of ASLA designed a floating landscape for the MSU homecoming parade. A local nursery donated all of the plants and the float turned out well. We had a great time putting it together and participating in the parade.

WHAT LED YOU TO PURSUE THIS PARTICULAR DEGREE AT MISSISSIPPI STATE? I began in the architecture department but discovered it wasn't a fit. I thought about transferring to another institution. My best friend told me about the landscape architecture program one day in the cafeteria. I met with Cameron Man, the department chair at the time. He completely sold me on the program, which I began the following fall.

DESCRIBE YOUR CAREER JOURNEY. Since graduating, I haven't worked directly in a landscape architecture firm. I have worked for municipalities in urban planning/development as well as private firms where I worked as a consultant to municipalities. Just recently, I've made somewhat of a shift into telecommunication infrastructure but still work within the same realm. I manage a team of eleven. We provide

the infrastructure for cell phone carriers to offer optimal service. We strategize the placement of small cell facilities and work with local jurisdictions to navigate the permitting process. The geographical areas I serve include New Jersey; Long Island, New York; and the Philadelphia metro area.

HOW DID YOUR DEGREE PREPARE YOU?

The degree laid the foundation to help me excel in this career. I never thought I would be exposed to the opportunities that I have been able to capitalize on. The further I go in my career, the more opportunity I see. Landscape architecture has prepared me with a working vocabulary and the hard skills to understand plans, construction documents, and ordinances. The first thing I do when I read an ordinance is visualize how it looks in 3-D to better understand it. My design background puts me in a natural position to lead because it gives me access to the big picture others don't necessarily have the background to see.

HOW HAS THE INDUSTRY SHIFTED? One thing I didn't realize when I was in school is just how versatile the degree allows you to be. I feel like I can dabble in several different things because it is so broad in terms of what we learned in school.

WHAT EXCITES YOU MOST ABOUT THE INDUSTRY CURRENTLY?

Although I moved away from landscape architecture from the design point, I am still a member of the American Society of Landscape Architects. I am a participant in the ASLA Diversity Summit, which seeks to find ways to recruit minority students into the profession at the national level. The program is in its fifth year. I was in the third class they invited to Washington, D.C. and am serving in my third year.

Some of the summit action items we've formulated include the development of scholarships for minorities, educational outreach for elementary schools, and the development of a mentorship program. This year, they will bring all of the classes together to discuss how the profession is evolving, what role minorities currently play in it, and the progress we have made since the summit's inception.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST FOCUSED ON IN YOUR CAREER RIGHT NOW?

I am focused on understanding just how technology is impacting the profession. I hope my current position is a catalyst that gets me in the mindset of being able to identify technological trends that will cross various sectors and influence site development as a whole.

WHAT DO YOU SEE FOR STUDENTS ENTERING THE WORKFORCE?

Landscape architecture offers the opportunity to blaze your own path.