



ULI/REAP Virtual Academy returns with Spring program

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New York, NY The ULI/REAP Virtual Academy in commercial real estate (CRE), a landmark partnership in diversity & inclusion launched in the fall of 2020, is returning in the spring of 2021 following a highly successful debut that broke records on several fronts.

Last December, Project REAP (Real Estate Associate Program) and ULI (Urban Land Institute) celebrated the graduation of 190 fellows of the inaugural ULI/REAP Virtual Academy. The graduates comprised not only the largest single cohort in REAP's 22-year history, but also the program's first virtual class and, because the online program expanded geographic access, the first class to include international participation.

REAP chief program officer Osayamen Asemota-Bartholomew said, "Every crisis brings an opportunity. The challenges of going online due to the pandemic also presented benefits. Being virtual allowed REAP to open up the academy to roughly six times the usual number of participants."

When Asemota-Bartholomew saw that COVID-19 would require REAP to pivot from its traditional methodologies, she reached out to longtime REAP supporter ULI, an executive diamond sponsor. Gwyneth Jones Coté, ULI president–Americas as well as a member of REAP's board of directors, welcomed the idea of partnering with REAP with enthusiasm and was immediately eager to team up with REAP to help create the innovative program.

"ULI, the preeminent real estate organization, is committed to leading the industry in welcoming diverse professionals into all sectors of commercial real estate," Coté said. She commended REAP for "educating and connecting talented individuals from diverse backgrounds since 1998."

REAP academies have provided in-depth instruction in CRE through 10-week biannual semesters held in such leading cities as LA, Dallas, Chicago, Atlanta, Washington, DC, and New York City.

The newly configured virtual, live and on-demand classes drew representation from 22 U.S. states, Canada, India, and Japan. Participants came from a variety of backgrounds ranging from construction management to community development to finance.

The virtual format allowed for weekly lectures and social events that featured a broad range of speakers many of whom were REAP alumni and successful BIPOC professionals who served as role models and sometimes as mentors. Graduate Ayize "Glenn" Gray said, "The weekly ULI/REAP-hosted virtual happy hours and breakout sessions were educational and informative while

providing unparalleled opportunities to network and establish meaningful business relationships with peers.”

In his remarks to the graduating class, REAP chair Lamont Blackstone heralded the possibility of a more robust network born of the virtual format. “You will be at the vanguard of a nation and industry facing this new challenge,” he said. “Relationship capital is the foundation of the real estate industry and real estate careers. If we reach beyond the silos of REAP class years and geographies, REAP alumni will have a powerful tool to connect with each other.”

REAP’s alumni directory helps graduates maintain and foster relationship capital. Alumni are given a complimentary one-year ULI membership, giving them access to the Institute’s educational resources, events, and professional networks.

Students shared post-graduation plans in online breakout sessions following the graduation ceremony. Maria Smith Dautruche, a vice president at the New York City–based nonprofit National Urban League currently transitioning into a senior advising role to the organization, hopes to work on CRE deals to create philanthropic community investments and community partnerships. The Academy helped give her the confidence to make the leap into a new career.

“Fellow cohort members sharing their stories, offering advice, providing insights and encouragement were integral parts of my ability to complete this program,” said Smith Dautruche.

REAP is accepting applications to the ULI/REAP Spring 2021 Academy. Check www.projectreap.org for details.

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