UofM Added as Member of Architects Foundation’s Design and Health Research Consortium

December 9, 2015 - The Architects Foundation, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA) have added the University of Memphis School of Public Health and five other schools of architecture and public health as members of the AIA Design & Health Research Consortium. The consortium helps translate research on design’s influence on public health into architectural practice for the public, policymakers, and design and public health professionals.

“The School of Public Health is pleased to partner with the Departments of Architecture, City & Regional Planning, Engineering, Criminology and Criminal Justice, as well as community partners such as the Shelby County Health Department, Office of Sustainability and Livable Memphis,” said Dr. Marian Levy, SPH associate professor and dean of students. “By participating in the prestigious AIA Design & Health Research Consortium, we can increase the connection between design of the built environment and public health in order to create healthier communities.”

Over a three-year period, the Architects Foundation, the AIA and its partners will provide institutional support and capacity building for the new consortium members, promote collaboration through local and national partnerships and enable knowledge sharing through conference calls and face-to-face events. Whenever appropriate, the AIA and its partners will promote the activities of the consortium with potential funders.

In addition to the UofM, consortium member teams are Morgan State University, the
School of Architecture at the University of Minnesota, the School of Architecture at the University of Virginia, the University of Washington Department of Architecture, and the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts/Architecture at the University of Washington in St. Louis.

Memphis and its Delta region, with some of the highest rates of poverty in the nation, leads the country in many public health challenges, such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension and other chronic diseases. Yet walking safely is a challenge that restricts many individuals from enjoying their neighborhood and gaining access to goods and services by foot. Memphis has one of the highest pedestrian fatality rates in the country. The school’s Memphis Walks initiative focuses on improving quality of life through improved walkability, promoting physical activity, improved air quality and social cohesion through walking. Its goals are to document the importance of walkability to public health and well-being and to make the case for why walking more should be a priority in urban neighborhoods.

The AIA has organized its design and health initiative around six evidence-based approaches that architects can influence through design practices and policies at the building and urban scale. These six approaches — environmental quality, natural systems, physical activity, safety, sensory environments and social connectedness — recognize that the physical environment creates health opportunities and facilitates positive health behaviors.

Read more about the six approaches to achieving health through built environment design and policy at http://www.aia.org/aiaucmp/groups/aia/documents/pdf/aiab104538.pdf.

###