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“In some ways, I feel that the low prestige of the intern out of school did a number on my lasting sense of self-worth. I watched all my fellow university graduates become ‘engineers’, consultants, and ‘project managers’, while I remained an ‘intern’ for five years.”

“The deeper you get into life, the harder it is to take the exam. A friend of mine finished the whole exam in five months, and I said I was going to do the same thing. But I have a child, and finding that much time to study on my own after work was just impossible.”

“I think that architecture firms were more supportive of the time and other needs when 10 or 15 interns were taking the exam all together. Now it’s one here, one there, and it’s like the firm is doing you a favor.”

“Are we really surprised that career and licensing ambitions are continually postponed while interns struggle to satisfy their employers?”

Licensure and Time

Casius Pealer

In the 1990s, the time it took for a professional degree graduate to complete licensure requirements more than doubled.

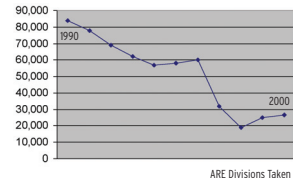
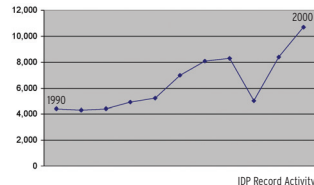
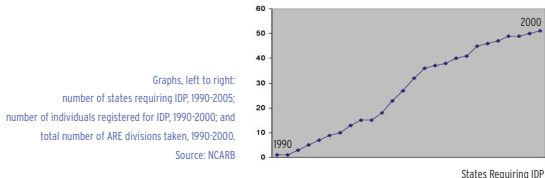
On June 20, 1996, the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB) administered the last paper-and-pencil version of the Architect Registration Examination (ARE). Thus ended a mentally and physically grueling three-day rite of passage for U.S. architects that officially began in 1962, but had its origins in the nineteenth-century charrettes of the Ecole des Beaux Arts. What followed that last exam changed the licensure process to this day in multiple and unexpected ways.

That same year, another event occurred that marked a significant change in the licensure process: completion of NCARB’s Intern Development Program (IDP) became required for an NCARB Certificate, which facilitates interstate reciprocity and national architectural practice. Although IDP is required by individual state boards rather than by national mandate, states increasingly adopted this requirement throughout the 1990s in accordance with NCARB’s Model Law. At the start of the decade, just fifteen states had made IDP mandatory for initial licensure; by the end of the decade, forty-four states and the District of Columbia required IDP. NCARB’s change in 1996 marks the date when IDP could first be called a truly profession-wide program.

The Intern Development Program

IDP was initially developed in the late 1970s as a voluntary system for interns to document their breadth of professional experience in training areas that NCARB felt were important for architectural practice. In 1978, Mississippi became the first state to make this voluntary program mandatory, with the intent of ensuring a structured transition between education and practice. Yet IDP never was (and still is not) a structured internship program.

Selected remarks from interns discussing the effect of the computerized ARE with the author at AIA Houston on February 27, 2003, the sixth anniversary of the new ARE. Published in *ArchVoices* on February 28, 2003, and available in the archive at www.archvoices.org.



A 1999 study of the impact of IDP, funded by NCARB, recommended that the profession return IDP to a voluntary program rather than a mandatory requirement, as there were no significant differences between the experiences of interns who participated in the program and those who did not. The results of this study were published in a 2003 issue of the *Journal of Architectural Education* in an article titled, “A Sociological Analysis of the Intern Development Program,” by Dr. Beth Quinn. Dr. Quinn’s article highlighted the problem that “IDP simply assumes the goodwill of the employer, regulating only the intern, who is arguably the weaker party in the [employment] relationship.”

Because IDP placed additional requirements on interns to get specific work experiences that they were mostly powerless to ensure, the time it took for interns to obtain these experiences and document the process was often extended from the three years that was the norm before. Although many graduates in the 1990s took longer to complete this new internship program, few leaders in the profession were aware of the extent of the impact this new program was having on the licensing process.

Architect Registration Examination

Meanwhile, although IDP had slowly but steadily gained momentum, the switch to the computerized ARE was a sudden shock. One initial shock was the dramatic increase in cost of the computerized ARE. NCARB’s need to develop sophisticated testing software for the graphics portions of the exam made the tests extraordinarily expensive when compared to

the paper and pencil version, as well as when compared to other professions. A 2001 comparison of the costs of professional licensing conducted by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants revealed that the \$981 fee for the ARE was higher than that for all professional exams other than medicine (\$1,300), more than double accounting (\$458) and law (\$429), and more than six times engineering (\$150).

This increase in price even surprised many state licensing boards and initially led the legislature in Texas to refuse to allow the ARE to be administered. At the 1998 AIA Convention, the AIA membership passed a formal resolution encouraging NCARB to find ways to reduce or mitigate the price of the new exams.

More importantly, however, the technology used to administer the new ARE was optimized for individual test-takers, rather than a group delivery method. It simply did not make sense to fill a convention hall with computers for three or four days once a year, and so NCARB turned to a single private testing company to administer the ARE year-round at sites across the country. This setting made it logical to split what was once one exam—the ARE—into nine separate exams that could be taken individually over time. This fragmenting of the ARE radically changed how candidates (and the firms that employ them) viewed the profession’s licensing process.

The accessibility and flexibility of the new computerized ARE was in many ways an important improvement for interns. But the obvious benefits came at the non-obvious cost of making the exam a highly individualized experience rather than a collective rite of pas-

sage. An architect who graduated in the 1990s was far more likely to celebrate licensure as an individual rather than a shared achievement. Additionally, that celebration was almost certainly triggered by a letter stating that the individual passed the Mechanical & Electrical Systems division, for example. For architects who graduated in the 1990s, licensure was most often achieved not with a bang, but a whimper.

Time to complete

Together, in the mid-1990s, the internship process and the examination process were restructured in ways that artificially extended the time it took most graduates to achieve licensure. Although there were no statistics at the time, IDP is widely understood now to take an average of five years to complete. This meant that by the time they were eligible to start taking the ARE, many interns were further along in their professional careers with substantial work responsibilities, and more interns had significant community and family responsibilities. Interns had to balance these expanded responsibilities to others with their own need to study for and take each one of the nine exams required by the ARE. Perhaps as a result, interns also took longer to complete the ARE than had previously been expected. In 2005, the most recent survey of recently licensed architects on this topic indicated an average of 1.9 years to complete the ARE.

Overall, regulatory changes to the licensing process during the 1990s turned a mostly three-year licensing process into a seven-year process on average. Yet, because the profession had no public data showing the numbers of interns completing IDP or the numbers of

interns completing licensure, most architects were unaware of the demographic changes. Where individual interns expressed frustration with encountering an entirely different system than had been described to them in school and by mentors in practice, they were mostly seen as being lazy and not wanting to take responsibility for their own professional development.

The Point

The point of this article is not that the licensing requirements should not have changed during the 1990s. Clearly a paper-and-pencil examination would be an anachronism today, and IDP was intended to respond to genuine concerns about the efficacy of a generic three-year apprenticeship. Instead, the point is that both the internship and the examination process changed significantly during the 1990s, and that the impact of those changes was not anticipated by architecture graduates during that time, or by the profession as a whole.

As the AIAS National Vice President in 1996-1997, I was in a unique position to talk with leaders of the profession during many of these changes and to read all the reports and surveys that were done to support the changes and measure their impact. Mostly, I was shocked at how little information the profession compiled on students and interns, and consequently at how ill-informed many discussions and policy decisions were. The fact that there remains only one study done on the actual benefits of IDP during the program’s three-year history, and that the study recommended eliminating the program as a requirement, is evidence that the architecture profession has yet to take research or “knowledge

creation” seriously.

It is possible, however, that the same decisions would have been made even if all the relevant data had been available at the time. This is certainly what happened when the California Architects’ Board adopted IDP as a mandatory requirement, despite being provided with evidence that the program had no demonstrable impact on the internship experience, and without identifying any evidence showing otherwise. (Although, by the time the CAB made this decision, IDP had already become a profession-wide program, and the facts of national reciprocity were perhaps more important than the facts of IDP itself.)

Statistics

In 2003, the AIA and *ArchVoices* produced the first Internship and Career Survey—what was at the time the most comprehensive survey of architecture graduates ever compiled. In 2005, NCARB joined in, and that same survey was repeated with a broader reach and consequently higher quality data. These two surveys quantified for the first time the overall impact of IDP and the ARE on the licensure process. These surveys were motivated by the lack of meaningful, public data on internship that could be used to guide public policy decisions about licensure requirements.

In 2005, these surveys served to transform an ongoing national debate about whether to allow architecture graduates to begin to take the ARE while in the midst of IDP. Because the ARE was no longer a single exam, it could be completed concurrently with IDP, shortening the overall licensing process without eliminating any substantive requirements. A

small number of states, like California, already allowed this structure, and a number of profession-wide task forces had recommended the change, but there was no clear national direction. The 2005 Internship and Career Survey informed the debate and significantly helped state licensing boards to vote two years later to allow the ARE to be taken concurrently with IDP nationally.

The AIA again circulated a version of this survey late in 2007, and presumably a final report of the results will be available later in 2008. Hopefully, this biennial survey will continue to be used to inform policy decisions about licensure and internship. In addition, the AIA has initiated other significant data collection efforts aimed at diversity in the profession (2003) and licensure rates (2004). NCARB itself has started compiling data on national licensure rates and, just a year ago, released ARE passing rates by school for the first time. Other initiatives continue to expand our knowledge about professional preparation and training, such as the *Design Intelligence* annual rankings of schools and the Inside-Arch.org website, which allows architecture firm employees to comment on the work environment at specific firms.

These advancements could be said in large part to be products of the dramatic changes that occurred in the profession in the 1990s. In any case, when we review the changes to the profession in the first decade of the twenty-first century, we will have a lot more information to dissect and debate. ■