

N C A R B



THE REGULATION
OF ARCHITECTURE
IN THE
UNITED STATES

The Regulation Of Architecture In The United States
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INTRODUCTION

By describing the responsibilities of the five principal organizations dealing with the practice of architecture in the United States, we hope to dispel confusion in the minds of architects from abroad dealing with organizations that facilitate the practice of architecture in this country. In the United States, the right to practice architecture and the right to use the title “architect” are granted by state registration boards and no one else. The National Council of Architectural Registration Boards is the national agency representing those state boards and works with its member boards to establish registration or licensing policies.

With respect to the registration process, each of the five organizations plays an important supporting role. The American Institute of Architects, for example, fosters among its member firms necessary support for structured intern training. The Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture represents the institutions that educate future architects, and the National Architectural Accrediting Board accredits those institutions (most state boards require a degree in architecture from an accredited program as a precondition to registration). The American Institute of Architecture Students represents future architects across the nation and, in that capacity, critically observes and assesses the registration process.

National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB)

NCARB is the federation of the state registration boards of the United States. Its only members are those boards. Each state and territory in the United States has a governmental authority that registers and regulates architects. Typically, the authority is vested in a State Board of Architecture comprised of architects and lay persons appointed to the board by the governor of the state. Without registration issued by the state board, no one may engage in the practice of architecture nor use the title “architect” within that state. In addition to issuing registration to persons the state board considers qualified to practice architecture, the state boards watch over the practice of architecture within their state boundaries and discipline architects whose practice does not meet minimum standards of professional conduct established by the board. Note that in the United States the state laws governing the practice of architecture are

both “title” and “practice” statutes. With only minor exceptions, no one may engage in acts that constitute architectural practice without first being registered. (The statutes typically define the activities that constitute architectural practice.) In addition, no one may use the title “architect” or advertise his or her services as an architect or otherwise represent himself or herself to be an architect without first being registered. The states and territories (and not the federal government) control these matters. The federal government in Washington has very little influence on the laws governing architectural practice.

When, in 1920, it became evident to the state boards that many architects conducted their practice in several states and, therefore, needed to obtain registration from several state boards, the state boards decided to create a national system for identifying qualified architects. Once identified and certified as qualified, those architects would be readily granted a registration in any United States jurisdiction. This scheme, conceived by the state boards working together, gave rise to the organization of the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB).

NCARB is not a governmental agency, but it is a federation of all the state boards that register and govern the practice of architecture. The state boards formulate the rules and policies of NCARB and elect NCARB’s officers and directors. Working with the state boards, NCARB establishes national standards for certifying qualified architects. Those standards have been recognized by every state board as adequately rigorous to allow the state board to register the NCARB Certificate holder generally without further examination or other demonstration of his qualifications.

This national certification system has worked because the standards applied by NCARB are largely the same standards applied by each state board in judging an applicant for registration. Every state board uses the NCARB Architect Registration Examination (ARE) as its written examination to test the skills, knowledge, and abilities of applicants for registration. NCARB, of course, similarly requires its candidates for certification to have passed the ARE. NCARB requires candidates for certification to have completed an internship (the Intern Development Program or “IDP”), which includes specific accomplishments. Most state boards similarly require IDP. NCARB requires a degree accred-

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ited by the National Architectural Accreditation Board in the study of architecture; most state boards exact the same requirement.

Because this national certification system has worked so well for so many years, American architects seek work in many states other than their base state and are able to obtain registration in other states with ease. The success of the system requires the close cooperation of the state boards and NCARB. Over the years, state boards have been willing to bring their requirements for registration in line with NCARB's certification standards. NCARB, for its part, modifies its standards in response to pressure from its state boards. As an example, until the late 1970s very few states required an accredited degree. Then a number of states decided that the public would be better served if a degree requirement were enacted. Effective 1984, NCARB, in turn, required an accredited degree for certification. Thereafter, many of the remaining states enacted a degree requirement. While architecture is regulated on a state-by-state basis, there is a healthy appreciation for uniform standards among the states.

In addition to setting the standards for national certification, NCARB recommends to the state boards rules of conduct that a majority of the state boards have adopted as their own rules and which serve as a basis for disciplining architects. Several state boards have made continuing professional development a requirement for registration renewal. NCARB produces educational monographs to enhance a practicing architect's lifetime learning process and enable registrants to meet their state board requirements. NCARB publishes from time to time legislative guidelines which advise state legislatures on how a state board may best operate and publishes white papers dealing with important regulatory issues affecting the practice of architecture.

NCARB serves as the United States "spokesperson" when representatives from other nations seek bilateral accords or inter-recognition agreements to facilitate architectural practice between nations. When the standards of another nation are comparable in all respects to those required by NCARB for certification, NCARB has been willing to explore with that other nation the establishment of an inter-recognition agreement whereby architects from the other nation may become NCARB Certificate holders and existing NCARB Certificate holders may, in return, practice in the other

nation. Such an agreement exists with Canada.

When the requirements of another nation have some similar and some dissimilar aspects, NCARB has been willing to explore bilateral accords with the other nation where architects from the other nation are granted the opportunity to practice in the United States by affiliating with a U.S. architect.

In any case, neither citizenship nor residency is required in order to obtain the NCARB Certificate. A non-U.S. person who meets NCARB's standards may obtain the Certificate. In many cases, education and training outside the United States are fully credited by NCARB. To practice in the U.S., an architect must be registered, and only a state board has that authority. The holder of an NCARB Certificate will ordinarily find it a simple matter to obtain registration in most states.

The American Institute of Architects (AIA)

In the United States, the AIA is the principal professional organization. Membership is open to all registered architects on a voluntary basis and to other interested citizens. Nearly one-half of the registered architects in the United States are members of AIA.

Founded in 1857, AIA exists, according to its by-laws, "to organize and unite the profession in fellowship; to promote the profession of architecture including its aesthetic, scientific, and practical efficiency; to advance the science and art of planning and building; to coordinate the building industry; and to make the profession of ever-increasing service to society."

Acting collectively through the AIA, architects can affect public and private decisions about the built environment in the United States. AIA is the most powerful voice speaking on behalf of architects in legislative halls at the state and national levels. AIA also works closely with the Executive Branch of the federal government on matters relating to architecture. By publishing the standard contract forms used by owners, contractors, and architects, AIA shapes the principal relationships in the construction industry in America.

AIA encourages research about architecture and watches closely the academies teaching architecture to the young. AIA acts as one of the three organizations (with NCARB and ACSA) funding and supporting the academic accreditation process. From time to time, as with AIA's *Handbook of Professional Practice*, AIA pays

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for the development of course material that schools of architecture use in their curriculum. AIA has established a national system for advising and mentoring interns who are being trained in architectural firms across the nation.

AIA is the official voice of American architects in the deliberations of the Union Internationale des Architectes and the Pan-American Federation of Architects' Associations. It has played a significant role in advising its sister organization, NCARB, in the development of agreements leading to the free flow of architectural services across national boundaries.

AIA is a voluntary organization in the service of its members. Throughout its history, AIA has recognized that the best interests of its membership lie in advancing the public good. Thus, while a private non-governmental organization, AIA is dedicated to achieving broad social goals.

Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA)

Founded in 1912, the ACSA's purpose is to advance the quality of architectural education. It has 200 member schools, including all of the accredited degree programs in the United States and Canada and many schools without accredited programs.

ACSA holds a series of meetings every year to provide an opportunity for architecture faculty members to present papers on architectural theory, research, and teaching. In addition, ACSA sponsors continuing education programs to assist faculty members to stay abreast of changes in architectural practice and teaching techniques.

ACSA helps to fund NAAB and participates on the accreditation visiting teams. ACSA sponsors awards to distinguished teachers in schools of architecture and sponsors design competitions for students in those schools. Since 1947, ACSA has published the *Journal of Architectural Education*, the only juried journal in North America dedicated to architectural education. Working with the AIA, ACSA fosters research in the field of architecture. That research benefits both the architectural curriculum and the profession of architecture.

National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB)

Most state registration boards require an accredited degree in architecture before registering an applicant. Rather than each state board deciding which programs satisfy that requirement, the boards rely on NAAB's accreditation process. Many state statutes and the regulations of all state boards explicitly refer to "a degree program accredited by NAAB."

Note that the institution is not accredited; rather, it is the program of study leading to a degree which is accredited. Many institutions with accredited degree programs also offer degrees in architectural studies which are not accredited. If one's objective is to qualify for registration, it is important to ascertain that the program of study you intend to pursue is accredited.

NAAB establishes general criteria by which programs are evaluated. Currently, it publishes 37 areas of knowledge or ability that it expects a satisfactory program to include. The curriculum of a satisfactory program must include both general studies and professional studies that together compose a liberal education in architecture.

The accrediting process requires that the institution engage in a self-assessment. NAAB then reviews and evaluates the self-assessment and sends a team to the institution's campus to do an on-site examination of its program, faculty, and student body. The visitation team typically comprises persons recommended by AIA, AIAS, NCARB, and ACSA, as well as an NAAB representative. The team makes its recommendation to the NAAB Board of Directors, which has the final decision as to whether or not to accredit the program.

NAAB was founded in 1940 by AIA and NCARB. Currently, its members are the AIA, NCARB, ACSA, and AIAS. AIA, NCARB, and ACSA each nominates three directors to NAAB's Board; AIAS nominates two directors. In addition, the board has two members chosen from the public. NAAB's funding is shared equally by AIA, NCARB, and ACSA. In recent years, NCARB has asked NAAB to examine non-U.S. programs in order to give NCARB a basis for deciding if the architectural education in another country is comparable to our own. Ascertaining that another country's architectural education is at least as rigorous as those programs accredited in the United States furnishes a basis for exploring an arrangement with the other country for reciprocal registration.

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The American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS)

As the largest American organization for students of architecture, AIAS represents over 5,000 students. AIAS' mission statement includes organizing architecture students to combine their efforts to advance the art and science of architecture and promote excellence in architectural education, training, and practice.

AIAS deals with issues respecting the education, training, and examination of future architects. For example, AIAS has been in the forefront of an effort to ensure that interns training to be architects are adequately compensated and that the conditions of their employment conform to the requirements of law. It works with AIA and NCARB to improve the mentoring of future architects.

AIAS has been assigned a seat on the NAAB Board of Directors, giving students a voice in the accreditation process. A representative of AIAS participates on every NAAB team visiting an institution for accreditation. AIAS also has a representative on the ACSA Board of Directors and on the AIA Board of Directors.

Provided below is contact information for each of the five organizations.

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