An Intro to Life Beyond School

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OK, so you're about to go to work for an architecture or construction related firm. What do you need to know?

Many graduates of architecture programs decide not to become licensed architects. And that's fine. But for those who do want to get licensed someday, they must fulfill the requirements imposed by the state (Maryland, Virginia, etc.), or protectorate or territory (District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, etc.) in which they wish to practice. Each one has its own Architectural Registration Board and its own different rules, and they change frequently. The varying rules can be grouped into three basic headings (the "Three E's"):

- **Get an Education**: That usually means a B. Arch., M. Arch., or D. Arch (a B. S. Arch. or B. A. Arch alone doesn't qualify) from a school accredited by the NAAB (National Architectural Accreditation Board). Some states allow architects without such degrees to become licensed but no current students are likely to qualify under those rules.

- **Get Experience**: That means a certain number of years working in the profession.

- **Pass an Exam**: That means the ARE (Architect Registration Exam) administered by NCARB (the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards). For more information, see [http://www.ncarb.org/are.aspx](http://www.ncarb.org/are.aspx).

The first one, **Education**, you're doing in your degree program. If you are working on a B.S.Arch, you will need to also complete an M.Arch at some point before qualifying for licensure.

The last one, **Exam**, you'll do **before, during, or after** you've completed your Experience, depending on the state. It's the same exam no matter where you want to be licensed, although some states have supplemental requirements. The national part of it, the part developed by NCARB, is done entirely on a computer, mixes multiple choice and graphic questions, is taken in multiple parts that take a total of about 38 hours, and is graded electronically. Parts can be taken at any time (after completing Experience, as just noted) at hundreds of testing centers in the US or abroad. If after five years, not all parts have been passed, the intern must retake all of the parts. If an individual part is failed, the intern must wait six months before re-taking it. The ARE has seven parts. There are free study guides for ARE 4.0 on the NCARB website. For more info, [click here](http://www.ncarb.org/are.aspx).

The middle one, **Experience**, needs further explanation, so here goes:
Yes, you're anxious to get a job working for an architect. You can count work experience at any time toward the internship required for architectural licensure.

Also, by federal law, interns must be paid, whether at architecture firms, construction firms, or any other kind of firm (except for congressional interns). Don't agree to be paid "under the table". That's just the boss' way of avoiding having to pay his portion of the taxes you'll owe.

All U.S. states, protectorates, and territories accept work experience that is gained through enrollment in the IDP program (Intern Development Program). To enroll, apply for an IDP file with NCARB. It is easiest if you do this as you start working rather than waiting until you have already worked for a while. If you want to get licensed in a state that doesn't require use of the IDP format, you can do so, but be warned: if you want to transfer your license later to another state that does require IDP, it will probably not be allowed.

IDP is actually a curriculum guided by a set of rules that were instituted to increase the chances that employers would give their interns some good, balanced experience. To complete IDP, you'll need to get a minimum of 5,600 hours in 17 different work categories including construction documents, firm management, consultant coordination, and others. NCARB tracks your progress using a form similar to a transcript. You file a report online two to three times each year informing them of the experience you've gained, signed by your employer.

When a company simply doesn't do all of the listed things for their clients (maybe they don't do their own cost estimating, for example), the intern may need to leave to work for a firm that does do those things. Once they complete IDP, the intern may or may not choose to return to the original employer. Generally, work done under the direct supervision of a licensed architect is acceptable in fulfillment of any category. In some settings, such as when working for a contractor, experience will be accepted for some categories only.

IDP also suggests (but does not require) that each intern to choose a mentor who does not work for the same company he or she does, someone to advise them when they have questions and to advocate on their behalf with their employer, should that be necessary. Interns may meet with their mentors a few times a year as they feel is helpful. Each intern must also identify a supervisor at the same firm to confirm the experiences claimed. The supervisor MUST be an architect, and must be licensed in the state in which the office is located.

Interns may start counting work experiences as soon as they graduate from high school, including the summer before they start college. Hours spent working on architectural projects in the employment of a licensed architect always counts toward IDP. But there are limits (about a year's worth) on the number of hours that can be counted in other efforts, including hours spent volunteering (working without pay) and on hours spent in construction-related areas but not supervised by a licensed architect. As of December 2013, there is no minimum limit to the number of hours that can be credited, so even if you work for an architect for just a few hours over winter break, you can still count it.
Certain kinds of supplemental activities can also receive IDP credit, such as time spent working on design competitions, time volunteering on professional committees (AIA, CSI, etc.) or social action efforts (Habitat for Humanity, etc.), time spent working as a research assistant, and time spent attending lectures for which professionals earn continuing education credits (such as our own CUA evening lecture series events). Credit is also given for those who pass the LEED exam or CSI credentialing programs (CDT, CCCS, etc.), and for obtaining post-professional architecture degrees (at CUA, that’s the Master of Architectural Studies degree).

Finally, don't delay in starting your IDP Council Record with NCARB. And submit documentation of your internship experiences frequently. No more than six months’ worth of experience can be allowed to be reported at once, and it must be submitted within two months of the end of that six month period. Any work experience not reported within eight months of being performed will not be counted toward your internship record. That's because it is much harder to remember what you did at your job last summer (or longer ago) than it will be to record your activities as you do them. Exceptions are allowed for childbirth and military service.

Also, if you file before you graduate, most of the fees are postponed until you get your license.

Much more information including application forms and free software that you can use to track your progress, is available at the NCARB website at http://www.ncarb.org. In particular, see http://www.ncarb.org/Getting-an-Initial-License/Registration-Board-Requirements/Initial-Registration-Requirements.aspx to determine the requirements in the particular state(s) where you intend to get licensed. There’s a lot of difference from one to another. The info posted to these websites is all up-to-date, and much more specific that what I have included here.

Good luck!