

Recently licensed professionals bring a unique and valuable perspective to the Architect Registration Examination (ARE) question-writing process.

## Young Professionals Add New Perspective to the ARE Subcommittee

In the vernacular of the Architect Registration Examination, a “recently licensed professional” (RLP) is an architect who has been practicing for five years or less. Since September 2004, the ARE Subcommittee, which develops exam content for the nine divisions of the ARE, has embraced the knowledge, wisdom, and perspectives of recently licensed professionals. Six RLPs currently serve as volunteer question writers—better known as item writers—for the ARE’s six multiple-choice divisions.

### ENGAGING YOUNGER ARCHITECTS

Starting in August 2001, NCARB has tapped younger architects who completed the computer-based ARE to pretest graphic vignettes. When gathering panelists for the 2004 Cut Score Study, NCARB staff included practitioners from all experience ranges, regions, specialties, genders, and ethnicities. Stephen Nutt, AIA, the Council’s director of professional development, explains, “You name the demographic and we tried to get it covered in order to increase the validity of the study.”

“In that varied group of 90-plus architects, we noticed an untapped resource of quality volunteers for the multiple-choice divisions that was simply too good to pass up. Our freshman class of ‘experimental lab rats’ transformed into what we now call ‘recently licensed professionals.’ As we approach our third year of committee appointments, I hope we can continue to recruit and persuade younger architects to participate in the ARE development process. It truly has been a success,” Nutt said.

Ronald B. Blich, FAIA, FACHA, the chair of the ARE Subcommittee, shares, “The recently licensed professionals ‘hit the ground running’ and became fully involved with their [divisions’] work. They have energized the more ‘seasoned’ members, and have raised the level of quality of [all] work.”

ARE Subcommittee Assistant Chair Dennis S. Ward, AIA, elaborated, “The young professionals have the ability to bring a ‘hands-on’ relevance to the item-writing process. . . . [They] tend to be more computer savvy and are more current with the concerns of the aver-

age candidate. They are more familiar with the tasks that candidates undertake within an office and are more current with ever-changing materials and construction methods.”

All six recently licensed professionals answered a series of questions relating to their experiences as exam candidates and as exam item writers. Their commitment to the ARE is evident throughout their comments, which are excerpted below.

### BUILDING DESIGN / MATERIALS & METHODS

In many ways, Scott Heywood, a 31-year-old senior associate at Detroit-based Albert Kahn Associates, Inc., already is a seasoned veteran when it comes to the ARE. He is a former graphic pretester and was a participant in the most recent ARE Cut Score Study, which ushered in the release of ARE Version 3.0 in spring 2004.

Since 2004, Heywood has served as an item writer for the ARE’s Building Design / Materials & Methods division. He agreed to join the subcommittee because “I believed in the contributions NCARB is making to the profession and wanted to be a part of it.”

Heywood views his role as providing perspective. “Because I am newly licensed, I think I bring a relevancy to the exam that might be hard to achieve for an architect who has been licensed for 20-plus years. I have a good understanding of what might be difficult or easy for a candidate, since I was in their shoes only a few short years ago.”

SCOTT HEYWOOD



TRICIA DICKSON



As an exam candidate, Heywood recalled, “In the past, I wondered why a history question would show up on a Mechanical & Electrical Systems exam. Now I realize that each [division] is broken down into content areas that would make that history question, for example, an appropriate item within the exam.”

He added, “I also never realized that pretest questions that don’t count toward your score are included in each test. I think NCARB has a great methodology for how the test is com-

ARE Cut Score Study. The 35-year-old architect currently works for a small firm in Portland, Oregon. She described her decision to serve on the ARE Subcommittee: “I feel this is a prestigious opportunity to participate in the exam process and am thrilled to have an opportunity to give back to my profession.”

Dickson’s work has not gone unnoticed. Jeffrey Kreps, AIA, the coordinator for the Mechanical & Electrical Systems division, explained, “Tricia most definitely fulfills the

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 —Tricia Dickson

pleted and improved upon, and I never would have understood how fair the test is if I hadn’t become an exam item writer myself.”

In addition to learning how the ARE is developed, Heywood also has learned something about his fellow item writers: “The people who write exam questions are just ordinary people like me who are practicing architects in the field! The mysterious nature of exam writers was dispelled when I met the others and began to learn how items are created and discussed openly. . . . The people are extremely friendly and humble; ego never gets in the way of creating the best possible exam.”

**MECHANICAL & ELECTRICAL SYSTEMS**

Tricia Dickson is another young practitioner well-versed in the ARE. Like Heywood, Dickson also volunteered her time as a graphic pretester and took part in the 2004

intended role of adding a strong voice in support of molding the ARE to better fit what today’s interns need to know at this level of development.”

Kreps also noted, “Her most notable contribution in the item-writing process is her ability to objectively judge which items are truly relevant and have the proper level of difficulty for an intern. She also is very knowledgeable [about] environmental and green building issues along with many of the current resources needed to support items involving these topics.”

In the give-and-take system that characterizes item writing, Dickson also has learned a great deal about the ARE. She said, “I have come to better appreciate the complexity and many hours required to prepare each question for inclusion in the ARE and the precision

of the specific content matter. There is nothing arbitrary about the entire process.”

**PRE-DESIGN**

Ask S. Scott Martin why he volunteers as an ARE Subcommittee item writer, and one will discover pure enthusiasm. Martin explains, “I had such a great time working on the Graphic Pretest Subcommittee that when they asked me to come back and try something new, I jumped at the chance.”

Martin “saw it as a unique opportunity to provide fresh insight from the vantage point of someone recently registered in hopes of improving the exam’s effectiveness.” Martin also said, “It appealed to me as a once-in-a-lifetime chance to learn from senior architects from all over North America.”

Martin, a 40-year-old practitioner with GBD Architects, Inc., in Portland, Oregon, described his learning process about item writing and the ARE: “I always wondered who wrote the questions and how the minimum standards were established. Working on the subcommittee has helped to personalize the exam for me. . . . It’s amazing how many thousands of hours go into each exam and how many times the questions are vetted prior to being presented to candidates.”

For Pre-Design coordinator Randall L. Romanin, OAA, FRAIC, Martin clearly is an integral part of the item-writing team. Romanin shared, “Scott has been able to focus his item writing on items that would be better understood by a recent graduate. In reviewing items in the test pool, he is an excellent source of which topics are dated or

S. SCOTT MARTIN



MARCENE KINNEY



JEFFEREY P. HUNT



WILLIAM ECHTERLING



## The Value of New Perspectives: Working with Recently Licensed Professionals

by Jerome Allen Ritter, AIA

As division coordinator of the Mechanical & Electrical Systems division last year and of the Construction Documents & Services division this year, I have had the opportunity to work with two recently licensed professionals—Tricia Dickson and Marcene Kinney.

Tricia and Marcene have contributed their talent, knowledge, and commitment to the development of the examination. It is enlightening to witness such exceptional skills and dedication among this new generation of architects. As a testament to this commitment: Tricia gave birth to her son less than a week before our last meeting—and still completed all of her assignments!

simply out of step with what is currently being taught in universities.”

As an item writer, Martin has been most surprised by the challenges associated with developing wrong answers (“distractors”) for multiple-choice questions. He explained, “It is [difficult] to come up with plausible distractors. We’re trained since preschool to select the ‘correct response’; thinking of incorrect responses isn’t very natural.”

### CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS & SERVICES

Two distinct though connected reasons led 32-year-old Marcene Kinney, an associate at Cincinnati-based GBBN Architects, to serve on the ARE Subcommittee. She explained, “[T]aking the ARE was a milestone in my career. When I was given the chance to volunteer to help develop a milestone I had been working toward for 10 years (including school), there was no looking back.”

Kinney thoughtfully added, “I truly believe in practicing architecture as a profession—not merely providing a service. At its very core architecture is about progress not stagnation.

A standardized national benchmark that continually upholds the minimum standards we expect from our professionals is fundamental to progressing the value of being an architect. Being an NCARB committee member is allowing me personally to work toward this goal.”

As she has gained more experience as an item writer, Kinney has reached some deliberate conclusions: “It has occurred to me more as a writer for the exam that examination is only one part of the transition to becoming a licensed professional—there is also education and experience. I realize more profoundly that if a person is learning from the exam, that person’s ability to safely practice architecture independently is in question.”

Kinney realizes that she provides a “true perspective from the trenches of practicing as a young professional.” She said, “I understand firsthand how a young professional may or may not see necessary connections between the complex requirements to produce architecture outside of designing and creating construction documents.”

She also noted, “I’m probably most surprised by my being more demanding than some of the seasoned NCARB veterans about what candidates should know. I guess the candidates are lucky in this regard!”

### LATERAL FORCES

Jefferey P. Hunt followed a now familiar pathway—graphic pretesting and the ARE Cut Score Study—to the ARE Subcommittee. The 32-year-old Hunt, affiliated with Craig Architects, Inc., in Grand Rapids, Michigan, humorously said, “It took me 14 months to complete all nine divisions [of the ARE]. I passed all exams on my first try. It was the most stressful 14 months of my life (minus thesis). The worst part was not knowing how the heck ‘They’ came up with the exam questions—and why! Now I know.”

Recalling his days as a candidate, Hunts readily admitted, “It is very frustrating to not know anything about the creation of an exam that determines your career. I now know the many layers of review and quality testing that each question goes through before it reaches the candidates. I’ve done a complete 180.”

## The Stupendous Six

**Scott Heywood, AIA**, is a graduate of the University of Michigan where he earned master’s degrees in architecture and in engineering with a focus on construction management. A registered architect in the state of Michigan, Heywood is a senior associate at Albert Kahn Associates, Inc., in Grand Rapids; he specializes in architectural design/health care design.

**Tricia Dickson, AIA**, is an associate in a four-person firm based in Portland, Oregon. She earned her B.Arch from Washington State University and now specializes in government, parks and recreation, religious, educational, and residential projects. Dickson has been registered for five years.

**S. Scott Martin, AIA**, holds master’s degrees in architecture and landscape architecture from the University of Colorado at Denver. Martin currently oversees project management for GBD Architects, Inc., a “single office firm striving to be at the forefront of green architecture.” The Portland, Oregon-based firm specializes in mixed-used development, high- and low-rise condominium towers, retail architecture, small sporting arenas, hospital design, interior design, and stage theaters. Martin has been a registered architect since July 2000.

These individuals bring a unique perspective to the examination process, which is the knowledge base of entry-level candidates.

Their recent education and completion of the Intern Development Program have contributed additional insights. Each has great communication skills, a willingness to help others learn through their knowledge, and a remarkably broad understanding of the profession. They have worked and debated collegially with all

subcommittee members and have become integral parts of their teams.

Started as an experiment, the naming of recently licensed architects to the ARE Subcommittee has been a tremendous success by providing the subcommittee with perspective, inspiration, and a more current connection to the candidate population.

Like his fellow recently licensed professionals, Hunt believes that he provides a relevant and necessary perspective. He explained, “Everybody who sits on my [division] has been registered for a very long time. None of them sat for the exam in its current format. I have not only taken the computer-based exams, but I’ve been a pretester. I bring that experience to the item-writing process.”

Hunt looks forward to continuing his tenure as an ARE item writer. He noted, “I think it’s important that people who care about the candidates, the profession, and the integrity of the exam volunteer to do what they can to help.”

### GENERAL STRUCTURES

Houston-based William Echterling is another recently licensed professional who has worked his way up the ARE ladder. He also served on the spring 2004 ARE Cut Score Study, an experience so positive that he had little hesitation accepting a role on the ARE Subcommittee.

“I am continually amazed at the quality of people that are involved in the ARE Subcommittee,” Echterling explained. “The majority of the people in these [groups] have reached

some incredible heights in their careers. I feel out of place at times, but everyone is so nice and willing to share their experiences.”

Now 43, Echterling brings a steadiness to the item-writing deliberations that his fellow group members admire. General Structures division coordinator John E. Enkemann Jr., AIA, explained, “Bill is older than most recent candidates—which could explain [the] ease with which he contributes. There is no shyness or apprehension in his discussion. He carries his weight very well.”

Enkemann also noted, “Where he offers the greatest input is when some of us more seasoned veterans use our years of experience in our crafting of an item, he might explain that a new intern might not have that insight, which causes us to re-write the item to accommodate that fact.”

In spite of the workload, Echterling is more than willing to serve as an item writer. He said, “[T]he rewards involved are well worth the effort. It is a good feeling to work together with our group and be able to put together a

set of questions that are relevant and able to test the ranges of required information.”

For ARE Subcommittee Chair Ron Blicht, the inclusion of young architects in the item-writing process is an unqualified success. Blicht affirmed, “The recently licensed professionals have been a tremendous improvement in the ARE development process. They are bringing a fresh outlook to the development of new items, and the understanding and review of existing items from an intern’s perspective. This experiment . . . has been rolled out in every [division] of the ARE process, and hopefully will be a permanent improvement that makes the ARE the best of its type in the testing industry.”

*Gerald (Gerry) S. Hammond, FAIA, a former Materials & Methods coordinator, is credited with the suggestion to add recently licensed professionals to the ARE Subcommittee. Hammond is the president and chief executive officer of Steed Hammond Paul Inc., an architecture firm based in Ohio. DC*

**Marcene Kinney, AIA**, is an associate at GBBN Architects, a leading architectural firm in the greater Cincinnati region. In addition to her volunteer work for NCARB, Kinney is an active member of state and local AIA chapters in and around Ohio. She currently serves as the legislative liaison for AIA Ohio. Kinney is a former employee of NCARB’s Region 4 Director, Scott C. Veazey, AIA.

**Jefferey P. Hunt, AIA**, is a graduate of Ball State University. He currently works for Craig Architects, Inc. The small firm located in Grand Rapids, Michigan has completed a variety of projects including a high-end restaurant, day spa, museum, and numerous tenant sites. Hunt has been a registered architect for more than two years.

**William Echterling, AIA**, earned a bachelor’s degree in environmental design from the University of Colorado at Boulder and completed fifth-year classes at Montana State University. He currently is an architect in the Houston office of PageSoutherlandPage, one of the oldest major architectural/engineering firms in the United States. Echterling works on educational projects and has been a registered architect for nearly five years.