

N C A R B

June 2010



**Architectural Organizations  
and the Practice of  
Architecture in the  
United States**

**ABOUT NCARB**

The National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB) is a nonprofit corporation comprising the legally constituted architectural registration boards of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands as its members.

**MISSION STATEMENT**

The National Council of Architectural Registration Boards protects the public health, safety, and welfare by leading the regulation of the practice of architecture through the development and application of standards for licensure and credentialing of architects.

*Architectural Organizations and the Practice of Architecture in the United States*  
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**INTRODUCTION**

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 organization representing those state boards and works with its Member Boards to establish registration or licensing policies.

With respect to the registration process, each architectural organization 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 architectural registration boards of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Its only members are those boards. Each jurisdiction has a governmental authority that registers and regulates architects. Typically, the authority is vested in a Board of Architecture composed of architects and lay persons appointed to the board by the governor of the state. Without registration issued by the board, no one may engage in the practice of architecture nor use the title “architect” within that jurisdiction. In addition to issuing registration to persons the board considers qualified to practice architecture, each board watches over the practice of architecture within its boundaries and disciplines 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 include 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. Each jurisdiction (and not the federal government) controls 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 boards that many architects conducted their practice in several states and, therefore, needed to obtain registration from several state boards, the 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 U.S. jurisdiction. This plan, conceived by the boards working together, gave rise to the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB).

NCARB is not a governmental agency. It is a federation of all the Member Boards that register and govern the practice of architecture. The Member Boards formulate the rules and policies of NCARB and elect NCARB’s officers and directors. Working with the Member Boards, NCARB establishes national standards for certifying qualified architects. (NCARB standards are described in the NCARB publication *Handbook for Interns and Architects*.) These standards have been recognized by every Member Board as adequately rigorous to allow the Member Board to register the NCARB Certificate holder generally without further examination or other demonstration of his or her qualifications.

This national certification system has worked because the standards applied by NCARB are largely the same standards applied by each Member Board in judging an applicant for registration. Every Member Board uses the NCARB Architect Registration Examination® (ARE®) as its written examination to test the knowledge, skills, 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 Member Boards similarly require the IDP. NCARB requires a professional degree in the

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study of architecture from a program accredited by the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) or the Canadian Architectural Certification Board (CACB); most Member Boards mandate the same requirement.

NCARB's certification standards also encompass U.S. architects lacking a degree from a NAAB or CACB program and architects registered in foreign countries. Once again, most Member Boards have adopted these provisions.

Because this national certification system has worked so well for so many years, architects licensed in the United States may seek work in many jurisdictions other than their home jurisdiction and are able to obtain registration in other states with ease. The success of the system requires the close cooperation of the Member Boards and NCARB. Over the years, Member 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 Member Boards. As an example, until the late 1970s very few states required a degree from a NAAB-accredited program for initial registration. Then a number of Member Boards decided that the public would be better served if such a requirement were enacted. Effective 1984, NCARB, in turn, adopted this degree requirement for certification. Thereafter, many of the remaining jurisdictions enacted a similar requirement. While architecture is regulated on a board-by-board basis, there is a healthy appreciation for uniform standards among the Member Boards.

In addition to setting the standards for national certification, NCARB recommends rules of conduct that a majority of the Member Boards have adopted as their own rules and which serve as a basis for disciplining architects. Several Member 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 registration renewal requirements. From time to time, NCARB publishes legislative guidelines that advise state legislatures on how a Member Board may best operate and publishes white papers dealing with important regulatory issues affecting the practice of architecture.

NCARB serves as the principal U.S. "spokesperson" when representatives from other nations seek agreements to facilitate architectural practice between nations. When the standards of another nation are comparable in all respects to those required for NCARB certification, NCARB has been willing to explore the establishment of an 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.

When the requirements of another nation have some similar and some dissimilar aspects, NCARB has been willing to explore other types of agreements including allowing the other nation's architects to practice in the United States by affiliating with a U.S. architect.

A non-U.S. architect who meets NCARB's standards may obtain the Certificate. Neither citizenship nor residency is required in order to obtain the Certificate.

**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. Approximately one-half of the registered architects in the United States are members of AIA.

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.

The AIA encourages research about architecture and supports architectural education. AIA acts as one of the four organizations (with NCARB, AIAS, and ACSA) funding and supporting the academic accreditation process. From time to time, as with AIA's *Handbook of Professional Practice*, AIA pays 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. Also, in partnership with NCARB, the AIA created and maintains the "Emerging Professional's Companion," an online resource that supports interns in acquiring comprehensive experience.

The AIA is the official voice of U.S. architects in the deliberations of the Union Internationale des Architects and the Pan-American Federation of Architects' Associations. It has played a significant role as a partner with NCARB in the development of agreements leading to the free flow of architectural services across national boundaries.

The American Institute of Architects is the voice of the architectural profession and the resource for its members in service to society. 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)**

ACSA was founded in 1912 to advance the quality of architectural education. Representing over 200 architectural education programs worldwide, including all of the accredited degree programs in the United States and Canada, ACSA provides a forum for ideas on the leading edge of architectural thought. The association maintains a variety of activities that influence, communicate, and record important issues. Such endeavors include annual scholarly meetings, workshops, publications, awards and competition programs, support for architectural research, policy development, and liaison with allied organizations. ACSA, together with the AIA and NCARB, funds the National Architectural Accrediting Board, and nominates faculty members to serve on accreditation visiting teams.

**NATIONAL ARCHITECTURAL ACCREDITING BOARD (NAAB)**

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

Note that the institution is not accredited—rather, it is the program of study leading to a degree that is accredited. Many institutions with accredited degree programs also offer degrees in architectural studies that 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.

The NAAB establishes general criteria by which programs are evaluated. Currently, it publishes 32 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. The 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 visiting team typically comprises persons recommended by AIA, AIAS, NCARB, and ACSA. 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.

The NAAB was founded in 1940 by AIA and NCARB. Currently, its members are the AIA, NCARB, ACSA, and AIAS. AIA, NCARB, and ACSA each nominate 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 the 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.

**AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTURE STUDENTS (AIAS)**

Founded in 1956, the AIAS is the largest American organization for students of architecture. It represents nearly 7,000 students and other emerging professionals at almost 150 chapters (in North America and several foreign countries). The 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, internship, and examination of future architects. For example, the 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. The organization has also taken the lead in working with NAAB to improve the quality of the instruction and the learning environment in school-based design studios. Furthermore, it works with AIA and NCARB to improve the mentoring of future architects.

Each year, the organization sponsors numerous conferences and student design competitions. Its award-winning publication *Crit, Journal of the AIAS*, is the premier source of and the only international journal of student design work.

The AIAS helps to fund and is a voting member of the NAAB, giving students a voice in the accreditation process. A representative of AIAS participates on every NAAB team visiting an institution for accreditation. The AIAS also has a representative on the ACSA Board of Directors and on the AIA Board of Directors.

## Architectural Organizations and the Practice of Architecture in the United States

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

National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB)  
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202/626-7547 FAX  
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Washington, DC 20006  
202/785-2324  
202/628-0448 FAX  
[www.acsa-arch.org](http://www.acsa-arch.org)

National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB)  
1735 New York Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20006  
202/783-2007  
202/783-2822 FAX  
[www.naab.org](http://www.naab.org)

American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS)  
1735 New York Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20006  
202/626-7472  
202/626-7414 FAX  
[www.aias.org](http://www.aias.org)