



Where did you first learn about the IDP? A friend? Professor? A blog? Or NCARB's web site? Read this article to discover the realities of some common IDP myths.

With so many communication and networking vehicles available today, it's easy to become both informed and misinformed. Interns need a clear understanding of the path to licensure to stay on course. The following "mythbusters" will help you do a reality check at the start of your career.

## MYTH

**The IDP takes too long.**

## REALITY

**IDP is typically completed in three to four years.**

Since there is no lock-step timeframe in the Intern Development Program (IDP), it is up to each intern to determine—by choice or by default—how long the IDP takes. According to the 2009-2010 *AIA NCARB Internship and Career Study*, the majority of interns believe they will finish the IDP in less than four years (59 percent)—and the majority of interns do in fact complete it in less than four years (50 percent). Another 30 percent complete the IDP in four to six years.

The quantitative research interpreted results from 10,500 survey respondents made up of past or existing interns. The study conducted by The Rickinson Group achieved a 95 percent confidence level.

Some interns do take upward of 10 years to complete a program that usually takes less than half that amount of time. The reason for the hold up? Life gets in the way. Circumstances like marriage and

starting a family crowd into the spare time a person has. Those who finish the IDP in the three to five year time typically make a plan and stick to it.

"You can be an intern as long as you want. It's your choice," says Harry Falconer Jr., AIA, NCARB, Director, Intern Development Program. He personally completed his internship in a three-year duration; however, it was four more years before he was licensed. Friends of his on the same career path were interns for both longer and shorter periods of time.

That's one of the great things about the program—each individual sets his or her own pace. But of course, the flip side of that flexibility is that delays can happen as human nature and life circumstances can interfere with the best-laid plans.

Seth Ballard, AIA, NCARB, Principal of Ballard Mensua Architecture, Falls Church, VA, said he wished he had prioritized and completed both the Architect Registration Examination® (ARE®) and the IDP much sooner than he did. Marriage, overtime, growing work responsibilities, and ultimately the arrival of four children helped that path stretch over 17 years. "If I had chosen to fast track IDP, I no doubt would be much further along in my career," he said.

So the truth is that fulfilling 5,600 IDP hours over a period of three years (which equals 6,240 employment hours) or four years (8,320 hours) as a full-time employee is not unrealistic. The reality is that it is up to you.

## MYTH

**Any architectural education or any firm experience is sufficient to prepare you to practice architecture independently.**

## REALITY

**Not all educational and internship experiences are created equal.**

Standards are in place so that interns who want to be architects stay on course and eventually fulfill their dreams.

Those standards have evolved over the past several decades as leaders in the profession have determined what is necessary for students and interns to ultimately practice architecture in a way that ensures the public's health, safety, and welfare. The fact of the matter is that not all academic opportunities or all firm-supported internships, despite how well-intentioned, meet those standards.

"I do not believe that simply any architectural education or firm experience should be sufficient to earn the right to practice architecture," said Crystal Brokaw, AIA, NCARB, LEED AP, NOMA, a newly registered architect working at LSY Architects, Silver Spring, MD. "As I look back through my journey, I realize what each component of this process taught me, and I remember how great it felt as I began to connect the dots and see the big picture. As a new architect, I am still connecting the dots every day."

It behooves the intern, then, to manage his or her post-degree efforts as an important aspect of joining the profession.

NCARB helps interns do that in two ways. The Six-Month Rule adds reporting deadlines to the process of recording IDP credit throughout an internship. NCARB's vetting of training hours in this way happens incrementally so that any unqualified experiences or unauthorized sign-offs are identified in a timely manner instead of at the presumed conclusion of an internship three years later. Also, NCARB's electronic Experience Verification Reporting system (e-EVR) adds a reporting structure to the process and gives interns a convenient way to track their progress in accordance with the Six-Month Rule.

## MYTH

**The IDP program is tougher and more structured than it used to be.**

## REALITY

**Only a half-truth as it is more structured ... and with a reason.**

The process is not tougher, but it is more structured, and that is meant to benefit interns, according to Falconer. Otherwise, some poorly managed internships might involve too much inconsequential work that may make some firms happy, but will not contribute to an individuals' comprehensive training to ensure that he or she gains the knowledge and skills required for the independent practice of architecture.

The structure of the IDP is of great value to emerging professionals, according to Brokaw, who completed her IDP in 3.5 years and has since become licensed and certified. "If IDP didn't exist, and only a three-year working experience was required, what is to guarantee that an intern would experience every aspect of the practice? Would the intern even know what they had not experienced? IDP not only ensures that interns gain exposure to critical aspects of the profession, but it also impels interns to actively pursue those experiences at both the firm and academic levels."

New developments also create more opportunities to successfully complete the program efficiently. Most recently, NCARB has announced the ability to start an IDP internship as a freshman enrolled in a NAAB-accredited degree program, instead of the previous eligibility as a third-year student. [See IDP 2.0: The Final Phase and earlier eligibility dates on page 15.]

"Broadening the opportunities for interns to gain IDP hours ... will certainly help future architects to become more well-rounded and more involved in their communities," said Mike Frechette, intern at O'Sullivan Architects Inc., Reading, MA. Frechette completed his internship in four years and will soon take his seventh and final ARE division.



## MYTH

**The entire licensure process is in place to control the number of architects in the profession.**

## REALITY

**There are no such quota systems in the architectural profession.**

Each jurisdiction—and not NCARB—sets the standards and awards licensure to eligible candidates, regardless of the number. Neither the jurisdictions nor NCARB exercise licensure controls to provide greater economic advantage to existing practitioners.

What may be perceived as controls is probably the foundation of standards that all emerging professionals are expected to meet. These standards focus on education, internship experience, and successful completion of professional exams. Fundamentally, they are not intended to close the door, but to open the door to the independent practice of architecture.

“NCARB does not limit the number of interns that complete the IDP or manipulate ARE pass rates,” said Stephen Nutt, AIA, NCARB, CAE, Vice President, Programs. “NCARB establishes the standards, and those who meet them are eligible for licensure and certification. It is not about quantity—it is about competence. The goal is to ensure that emerging professionals continue to possess the knowledge and skills necessary to practice independently. It’s all about their ability to protect the public.”

It is equally true that the state registration boards and jurisdictions do not operate on a policy of exclusion, but one of

inclusion as interns prove their readiness to become architects through the standard means of education, experience, and exam.

## MYTH

**Ensuring a great internship experience is NCARB’s responsibility and is out of my hands as an intern.**

## REALITY

**Interns are empowered with the ability to create truly rewarding internships.**

The truth is that interns can and should ensure their internship experiences are on track and are professionally rewarding. This is why NCARB offers them so much helpful material, trains IDP coordinators, maintains a presence on social networking sites, and hosts various information events around the country throughout the year.

“Responsible interns are the best guarantee for their own smooth and effective completion of internships leading to licensure,” said Falconer.

Seth Oakley, NCARB, LEED AP, said he was glad he decided early to manage his internship himself. “I reasoned that a large firm would not be as flexible in allowing me to get time in the various disciplines and a very small firm could not take the hit on overhead if I was helping or doing tasks assigned to other employees,” he said. “Instead, I looked for a mid-sized firm that really embraced the IDP process. I simply asked about their attitude toward IDP and if they had any programs in place to facilitate the requirements of IDP.”

From there, he successfully completed his internship, became licensed in January, and certified in July.

“It was important for me to work at a firm that embraced the program and allowed me exposure to the various areas of practice IDP requires,” said Oakley, project manager at M+A Architects, Dublin, OH.

A less advantageous route brought Daryl Bray, AIA, LEED AP, to the same realization of the need to better manage his own internship.

“I had to take on a little more responsibility for maneuvering through the process, and even educating the principals on what IDP was all about,” said Bray of Scott&Goble Architects, Tulsa, OK, where he started as an intern and is now a principal and shareholder. He worked at a small firm at the time and few of the architects there had gone through the IDP.

Today, convinced of the value of the IDP to both the intern and the profession, Bray is a true believer in the process. Not only does he serve as an IDP supervisor to two interns in his firm, but he also serves on NCARB’s Committee on the IDP, is the former state IDP coordinator in Oklahoma, currently serves on the board of directors of AIA Oklahoma, and is president-elect for the AIA Eastern Oklahoma chapter.

“I am convinced that if a student begins his or her NCARB Record while in school and carries that record to the first employer, continuing to document IDP hours in a timely manner, the chances of that intern being more marketable and more well-rounded as a future architect greatly improve,” he said. **DC**