

Recently licensed professionals—or RLPs—bring a fresh perspective to the Architect Registration Examination question-writing process.

FRESH EYES FOR THE EXAM

With over 60 members, the ARE Subcommittee is NCARB's largest volunteer committee. It also has one of the biggest jobs—developing content for the Architect Registration Examination® (ARE®). Committee volunteers are subject matter experts who write questions—or “items”—for the exam. They include Member Board Members from across the country, Canadian Board Members, and recently licensed professionals (RLPs).

“The recently licensed professionals are a tremendous asset to the development of the ARE,” said Dennis S. Ward, AIA, NCARB Region 3 Director and former chair of the ARE Subcommittee. “Their familiarity with the computer delivery of the ARE allows for

them to point out aspects that more senior members of their committees may not have taken into consideration.”

“In addition, their energy and fresh approach leads to lively group discussions that rightly question the validity of each item and its value within the test,” said Ward. “This in turn helps to keep the ARE fresh and current while greatly adding to the process of developing a practice-based examination that tests the knowledge and ability of the candidates, thereby creating a stronger ARE.”

Recently, three of the RLPs who serve on the ARE Subcommittee reflected on their experience.

Holly Grambort, RA, LEED AP, graduated from Tulane University where she earned both a bachelor and master of architecture. She is a project manager at Brandstetter Carroll, Inc. in Cleveland, OH, where much of her recent work has focused on recreation and educational facilities. She was a graphic vignette pretester in 2007 and participated in the ARE 4.0 Cut Score Study in 2008. Grambort joined the Building Systems division of the ARE Subcommittee last fall and currently serves on the Site Planning & Design division.



Terance B. White, AIA, joined the Programming, Planning, and Practice division of the ARE Subcommittee in 2009 after participating in the 2004 and 2008 Cut Score Studies and being a graphic vignette pretester in 2006. He holds a Bachelor of Science in architectural studies and a Master of Architecture from the University of Utah. He is a project architect at Naylor Wentworth Lund Architects PC in Utah where he focuses on commercial and education projects.



Katheryn Terwelp, RA, LEED AP, has served on the Construction Documents and Services division of the ARE Subcommittee for four years. Like Grambort and White, Terwelp was a graphic vignette pretester before joining the subcommittee. She graduated from the University of Minnesota with a Bachelor of Architecture. Today, Terwelp is an associate with Smith Group in Phoenix, AZ, where she specializes in university buildings and convention centers.



How did you become involved in NCARB?

Grambort: I received a phone call from Kekku Lehtonen, Assistant Director, ARE Development, asking me if I was interested in participating in an ARE graphic pretest session. She said NCARB always needs recently licensed people for various pretests, particularly women since there are fewer of us in the profession. It sounded like an interesting opportunity and a nice way to meet some new people.

White: NCARB First Vice President/President-elect Ken Naylor is the president of the firm I work for. He suggested that I participate in the Cut Score Study back in 2004. I did and found the work with NCARB to be rewarding enough to seek out other opportunities to participate.

Terwelp: Jerry Ritter, one of the principals in the firm where I used to work, has served on the Minnesota State Board and been involved with NCARB for years. He recommended me for a graphic vignette pretest. From there, I “graduated” to the ARE Subcommittee.

How are items developed for the ARE?

Terwelp: Committee members are divided into eight groups and asked to write questions or vignettes pertaining to a particular topic or area of knowledge that the exam covers.

Grambort: The item writers receive a specification for the content areas for their division. After some instruction on the technicalities of writing items, we crack open our reference materials, dive in and start writing. The items we submit are screened and formatted by Prometric and sent back to the group to review. Each item is looked at multiple times by multiple people, and we edit and rewrite them as a group.

White: Then these items are pretested by members of another division. If they are acceptable at that point, they are put in the pretest pool and included on exam forms to see how they perform in an actual testing environment. Vignettes are developed in a similar process, but all pretesting is done by volunteer, recently licensed architects, not by actual candidates.

Terwelp: Candidates from all over the United States and Canada pretest the items, but they don’t know which items are the pretest questions. This gives us an accurate record of how candidates react to each item. Prometric runs the psychometrics on the test questions to see if candidates are answering correctly or incorrectly and to determine if they are too easy or too hard. Any items that have issues are flagged.

Grambort: We review, edit, and rewrite items that aren’t performing as expected. If they can’t be fixed, they are thrown out. The rewritten items go back for another round of pretesting, and eventually make it into the operational items pool.

White: If they are performing acceptably, the items are included in an actual exam.

Terwelp: So you see, it is a very lengthy process from the time an item is written to when it actually becomes part of the exam.

What have you learned by serving on the subcommittee?

White: There is a ton of work that goes into every single item written for the ARE. After completing the exam a few years ago, I walked away feeling as if it was very fair. Now, after having seen the process I can understand why I felt that way. Each item is minutely scrutinized for relevance and importance.

Grambort: The subcommittee members are genuinely trying to make the ARE fair. I promise that we don't sit around trying to come up with trick questions and really obscure facts! And, the Prometric staff does a great job at evaluating the structure of the items to make sure they are consistent.

Terwelp: I have learned that because architecture is an ever-evolving field, the exam needs to keep up with changes in the profession.

What has surprised you most about your experience on the committee?

Terwelp: I was impressed by the experience level and diversity of the committee members. It is very interesting to hear how people run their practices and what is happening in other areas of the country. It is also interesting to learn about the subcommittee members' different areas of focus and types of practice. Sometimes we get so involved in our own projects that we lose sight of the broader field of architecture. It is good to see so many people involved on these subcommittees and in their communities.

Why do you think it is important for recently licensed architects to be on the committee?

Terwelp: I think it is important because we are closer to what is being taught and the experience level that is being tested. We are more familiar with the Intern Development

Recently licensed professionals were first named to the ARE Subcommittee in 2004 on a trial basis. By providing the subcommittee with perspective, inspiration, and a more current connection to the candidate population, their inclusion has proven to be a resounding success.

"Some of our recently licensed members were among the ARE's more vocal critics. But, after being a part of the ARE vignette pretest process and then helping to develop the exam, they are now some of its most ardent supporters," said Ward. "We encourage any recently licensed professional who is interested in developing an exam that truly tests the knowledge, skills, and ability of a candidate to practice architecture to get involved." **DC**

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How much time is involved in serving on the subcommittee?

White: There is a meeting about every three months. Each meeting lasts between two to three days with travel days before and after. In between the meetings there is homework that can take between 20 to 50 hours to complete depending on the assignment. The assignments include writing items, reviewing items, researching source material for items, reviewing appropriateness of test forms, etc.

Is there anything that you wish you had known about how ARE items are developed when you were taking the ARE?

Grambort: Had I known how items are developed, I might have spent more time studying the references that NCARB lists for each division. Many of those books are used during meetings and while developing items.

Program (IDP) and the expectations set for candidates who sit for the exam.

Grambort: With any group of people, diversity is important. Many of the committee members have been practicing architecture for 30 or 40 years, and I think RLPs help inject the viewpoint of someone operating with a different knowledge base. It's particularly important when it comes to aspects of sustainability, new technology, and other content areas that the new reference materials are focusing on.

White: It is a chance for some of us who are newer to the profession to become enlightened to the realities of practice. It helps us expand our horizons and broaden our contact base.

