

Did you know that the computerized version of the Architect Registration Examination only has been in existence for a mere eight years? Prior to the ARE as we know it, architects faced a variety of exams that were first administered on a national level in 1965. Learn about the development of the ARE as well as some of the major personalities behind the exam and related Council initiatives.

## Celebrating 40 Years of NCARB Exams

by Bill Houseman

NCARB's most senior past president, by both association and the calendar, dropped by the Council's offices not long ago to pick a small bone. He is C. J. (Pat) Paderewski, FAIA, and he informed the staff that he wished they would correct an omission in the *History of NCARB* special paper.

It troubled him, he said, that this document contained no mention of the Council's first national examination: the historic seven-part, multiple-choice exam (plus design and site tests). He was interested in seeing this exam milestone duly recognized, for both institutional and prideful reasons. It not only was the first NCARB examination produced and made available in all states and territories, but it also was launched in 1965, the year of Paderewski's presidency.

Small wonder, 40 years later, that Paderewski, now 96, felt it was high time the Council gave the old "seven-parter" and its authors their rightful credit. For one thing, it

was the exam many of today's most senior practitioners sat for; for another, he will doubtless take satisfaction, as one past president who never skips an NCARB Annual Meeting, in celebrating the exam's 40th anniversary in late June in Miami Beach.

### THE SEVEN-PART EXAM DEBUTS

Soon enough, the staff agreed that Paderewski's recollection was on target. Proof turned up in the form of a report delivered by the late Ralph O. Mott, FAIA, to that year's AIA convention on June 15, 1965. (If NCARB raised monuments to past leaders, Ralph Mott's would have to be one of the first. He served on the Arkansas Board for an astonishing 31 years. In his Council leadership roles, he articulated a vision of universal reciprocity that might be achieved through a consensus of all member boards.) "During the past year," he told the AIA membership, "NCARB has prepared objective type examinations for all NCARB examination subjects except design and site planning. These new examinations are now

## THE PROFESSIONAL EXAMINATION AND THE EQUIVALENCY EXAMINATION

By 1971, six years' work had been invested in developing an entirely new set of examinations: a Professional Examination for those candidates who had an accredited degree, and a new Equivalency Examination for those who lacked one. *Architectural Record* and others called them "revolutionary."

As chair of the Examination Committee, E. G. Hamilton, FAIA, affirmed the exams' philosophical foundation in 1971 when he wrote, "NCARB holds that the protection of the public health, safety, and general welfare means no less than providing a satisfactory environment, that such an environment means one that is clean and safe, as well as functional and beautiful."

The Professional Exam especially excited many in the profession (and dismayed others). Influenced perhaps by an eco-fervor that had entered the profession's consciousness, it laid heavy emphasis on environmental and aesthetic content. Two of its four parts were labeled "Environmental Analysis" and "Architectural Programming." The others were "Design and Technology" and "Construction." All were in a multiple-choice format, and all were machine-graded. Only the Equivalency Exam candidates were required to sit for a 12-hour site and design test. Why not candidates for the Professional Exam?

The Examination Committee and others offered a rationale that the candidate holding an accredited degree might be presumed to have gained the requisite graphic skills in school, and that it was the Professional Exam's intent to test for the candidate's judgmental abilities.

While a complimentary tip of the hat to the schools, this explanation didn't sit well with every member board. A significant number of the boards insisted on administering the 12-hour design tests to all candidates. Letting the accredited degree holders skip

available for use by all of the state boards." Mott went on to express both his expectations and his humility. "When we have uniform examinations and uniform grading . . . we will have removed one of the roadblocks in the path of simplified reciprocal registration procedures. These examinations may be less than perfect, but who among you designed a perfect building for your first client—or your most recent client?"

## ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS CATALYZE EXAM CHANGES

The seven-part exam was fated to be short-lived. By the mid 1960s, NCARB, like countless other public and quasi-governmental organizations, had become deeply affected by an environmental awakening across the United States. A scant year after the seven-part exam was established, a blue-ribbon committee developed a long-range policy "to cope with the drastic changes underway in education and in the profession."

the graphic portions proved to be one of a series of issues that contributed to the Council's decision to undertake its first ambitious, full-scale analysis and validation study of the examination process. The results of this study were applied in the development of yet another examination: the Architect Registration Examination (ARE).

## INTRODUCING THE ARE

By 1984, the ARE and computer technology had both matured at such a pace that this exam virtually commended itself to be transformed from a pencil-and-paper exam to a computerized version. At that point in time, no learned profession had attempted to develop such an examination, and it was considered daunting that the only "graphics minded" profession was the first to take the plunge.

A computerized ARE constituted an enormous risk for NCARB: in time required, in the hundreds of thousands of dollars invested, and in the will to make it happen. There came a critical period when the Council was bearing the dual financial burden of supporting the paper-and-pencil version while investing in the development and initial administration of the computer-delivered ARE.

That day finally arrived, and it was February 24, 1997. Then-President Darrell L. Smith, FAIA, reported, "NCARB inaugurated the Architect Registration Examination, delivered and scored by computer. This event marked the culmination of 13 years of work by an incredible number of people from both the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards and the Educational Testing Service." He continued, "The idea for a computer exam was generated at a Member Boards Workshop in 1984 and has been shepherded by each president since that time. . . I believe ARE 97 is our gift to future generations of architects and their entry into the profession."

Today, eight years later, ARE Version 3.0 remains a gift—both to the profession and the public it serves to protect.

## MILESTONES (AND A FEW POTHOLES) ON THE ROAD TO TODAY'S ARE

**1965:** A seven-part, multiple-choice, machine-graded registration examination, plus design and site-planning tests, is produced and made available to all 54 member boards. This exam is taken by applicants who hold an architecture degree approved by their boards.

Some boards, however, create reciprocity impediments by accepting applicants who are allowed to substitute practical training experience for formal education. This “equivalency” issue has thwarted NCARB in its quest for a uniform education standard since its earliest days.

**1969:** Annual Meeting attendees adopt a resolution titled, “Continuation of Studies Toward the Development of a New Examination.” It calls for the continuation of “a definitive study by a top-level committee of NCARB. . . toward the development of a new examination and procedure for its use.”

**1971:** Delegates vote to “phase out” the Seven-Part Examination and implement “a new Professional Examination.” While this new exam is to be taken by accredited-degree holders, a second Qualifying Examination will be developed for candidates “with combinations of education and experience in accordance with NCARB equivalencies.”

One ultimately divisive issue is introduced in the new exam concept: Qualifying Exam candidates are to be required to take graphic design and site planning tests; accredited-degree holders are not.

**1972:** The renamed Equivalency (from “Qualifying”) Examination is slated for its first administration in July 1973; and the first Professional Examination is administered the following December.

**1976:** With “sunset reviews” a subject of growing interest to legislative bodies, the NCARB Board of Directors appoints and charges a distinguished panel “with defining standards of minimum competence for professional practice and evaluating the Professional Examination in order to ascertain that it appropriately and adequately tests the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to qualify for such minimum competence.”

**1979:** NCARB undertakes an exhaustive “task analysis and validation study” (an early version of the Practice Analysis) involving various independent experts, profession-wide surveys, and psychometric analyses—all of which ultimately lead to the development of the forerunner of today’s Architect Registration Examination (ARE).

**1983:** Annual Meeting attendees decide that exam applicants need not take all divisions of the ARE at once; they may take it in parts.

**1988:** The Council’s first foray into computer-based testing of multiple-choice divisions begins, affecting two divisions. It is terminated after three years (in 1990).

**1989:** In anticipation of a computer-delivered ARE, Annual Meeting attendees ask the Board “to study the appropriateness of terminating the paper-and-pencil ARE” for all of the exam’s non-graphic portions. Three additional multiple-choice divisions are computerized this year.

**1992:** Annual Meeting attendees resolve that the ARE “may be rewritten in French for Canadian provinces and in Spanish for Puerto Rico, so long as all costs and security issues are borne by the governmental agency requesting such approval.”

**1994:** Pilot administration of the computer-delivered ARE (in six states and one Canadian province) is scheduled for fiscal year 1995-1996, with credit given for candidates who pass the divisions.

**1996:** The last paper-and-pencil ARE is delivered in June 1996.

**1997:** After a decade of R&D, the computerized ARE is up and running.

**1999:** Multiple-choice divisions move from variable-length exams to fixed-length exams.

**2001:** Second comprehensive study (see 1979 entry) of NCARB’s examination process—the Architecture Practice Analysis Study—is published. (The Practice Analysis is first organized in 1999 and conducted in 2000.) Its findings lead to “evolutionary improvements” to be incorporated in future versions of the ARE.

**2004:** ARE Version 3.0 is launched in February, representing the first of many recommendations from the Practice Analysis.

**2005 and beyond:** Exam-related committees and special task forces continue to work toward developing and fully implementing the recommendations of the 2001 Practice Analysis. **DC**

## ARE News Roundup

- Fees for all ARE divisions will increase by \$10, beginning July 1, 2005. This is the first fee increase for the computer-based exam since its inception in 1997.
- NCARB has announced that blocks of 25 experimental questions (known as testlets) will be delivered to candidates taking the Mechanical & Electrical Systems division,

beginning July 1, 2005. Candidates will have one additional hour to complete a testlet. Candidate performance on the testlet **WILL NOT** affect their score on the division. All candidates who successfully complete a testlet will be issued a \$100 check after the completion of the study during the first quarter of 2006.

- Reminder: The ARE Rolling Clock will begin “ticking” on January 1, 2006.

For more information about ARE news items and related announcements, visit the Council web site for further details ([www.ncarb.org/newsclips/index.html](http://www.ncarb.org/newsclips/index.html)).