

Building a Profession

A Sociological Analysis of the Intern Development Program

With most jurisdictions requiring its completion, the Intern Development Program (IDP) has become the primary architectural internship program in the United States. This article reports findings from the first empirical assessment of IDP since its inception almost twenty-five years ago. Current and former interns from IDP and from traditional unstructured internships were surveyed. Their experiences are examined to assess whether IDP provides a superior internship. In addition, the structure of IDP is analyzed, revealing some of its inherent limitations. These findings are discussed in the context of the structural challenges facing the profession and suggestions for reforming internship are presented.

Image 1: A lone figure hunches over a computer in an open-plan office cluttered with blueprints and coffee mugs. It is late. His eyes are blurry with fatigue, and the sound of his clicking mouse echoes through the office. One thought plagues him: "Is this what all my hard work in architecture school was for? Endless hours on CAD, doing redlines and bathroom details?"

Image 2: Two figures stand hunched over a desk. They are deep in discussion about some design changes that have been made to a set of drawings. Tapping his finger on the drawing for emphasis, the project architect pushes the intern to think about the practical implications of the choices. His questions are tough, and the intern struggles to integrate what she knows about good design with these challenges.

These vignettes suggest possible moments in the professional life of an architectural intern. The first caricatures the "CAD jockey," an intern whose internship consists of mainly menial, unchallenging work. The second is an idealized picture of internship in which training is based on close mentoring by an experienced architect. Here, internship functions effectively as a link between formal education and practice. The uncomfortable realization that the experiences of many interns were best reflected in

the first vignette was the impetus for the Intern Development Program (IDP), a nationally administered "structured" program that attempts to address the deficiencies of the traditional unstructured, three-year internship. With the recent adoption of IDP by the state boards in California, New York, and Missouri, 93% of jurisdictions require or will require the completion of IDP before a candidate may sit for the Architectural Registration Exam (ARE).¹ It is no overstatement that, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, IDP is synonymous with architectural internship in the United States and its territories.

Unfortunately, the accomplishments of IDP are unclear, and the role of internship in the profession continues to be vexed by contradiction and short-fall. Writing seventeen years after the establishment of IDP, Boyer and Mitgang argue that internship is "the most troubled phase of the continuing education of architects," and concede that there is a "broad consensus" that the "Intern Development Program has not, by itself, solved the problems of internship."²

Surprisingly, internship has received little attention from researchers.³ Given this, our knowledge of internship is largely speculative and individualistic. This does not, however, reflect the profession's indifference; internship remains a topic of concern and controversy. With the 1996 publication of Boyer and Mitgang's comprehensive study of the

profession, interest in internship intensified. Their research spawned several internship-related initiatives by the five collateral architectural organizations, the most ambitious being the Internship Summit.⁴

The present research was commissioned and funded by the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB) — the architectural organization with administrative control of IDP — in anticipation of this summit.⁵ This article summarizes the study's major findings, grounding them in a structural analysis of IDP and the profession. It concludes with a set of suggestions for reforming architectural internship.

The Function of Internship

Although its form may be a source of disagreement, the necessity of an internship is relatively uncontroversial. In their survey of architectural schools' alumni, Boyer and Mitgang found that a majority of architects agreed that "certain kinds of technical and practical knowledge are best learned in the workplace itself, under the guidance of experienced professionals."⁶

Architecture is not unique in its internship requirement; engineering, medicine, and education all require similar periods of practical experience. What these occupations have in common is that they are all "professions." Wilensky offers the classic sociological definition: "Any occupation wishing to

exercise professional authority must find a technical basis for it, assert an exclusive jurisdiction, link both skill and jurisdiction to standards of training and convince the public that its services are uniquely trustworthy.⁷ Central to a “profession” is its claim to a body of specialized technical knowledge.⁸ This knowledge may be both scientific and nonscientific: an architect’s knowledge of structural engineering and her design skills are both “technical.” Also implied in this definition is the exercise of subjective “professional judgment.” The distinguishing point is that the knowledge is specialized, not commonly available, and requires extensive formal training and experience.

The “sale” of professional knowledge presents a dilemma: because of its technical and specialized nature, the client/consumer cannot independently judge its quality. Mechanisms are required to ensure that individuals claiming professional status warrant it. Because of the need to assure competency, professions also claim exclusive jurisdiction over this knowledge and claim the right to restrict entry to the field. A legitimate monopoly is effected through legal-sanctioned training and examination requirements, and justified by the protection it affords to the “health, safety, and welfare” of the public.

Professional competence, however, can be verified only by those holding this knowledge; the expert judges the expert, and the profession polices itself. To maintain its legitimacy, the profession must demonstrate to the public that entry and evaluation mechanisms are applied independently of individual economic interests and in the service of the public. Likewise, individuals wishing to enter the profession must believe that there are good reasons for mandated requirements for entrance. Given this, the perceived legitimacy of the processes of assessment and credentialing are critical.

Formal education and internship, then, serve dual purposes in the profession. They are foremost places of training — where specialized professional knowledge is gained — but they are also sites of credentialing. The process of credentialing has two

levels. First, the client must be guaranteed that the professional claiming to be an “architect” has mastered the requisite skills. In formal education (usually an undergraduate program in the case of architecture), this is accomplished through grades and a structured curriculum. Second, the competence of the trainers and the institution must be assured. Can those who judge judge effectively? In a university, this is achieved through minimum standards of training for professors and regular faculty assessment. The program and institution are evaluated in an accreditation process in which the rigor of the program and the competency of the faculty are judged by outside evaluators.

The constellation of skills and abilities that make up “architecture” are multifaceted and complex; it is widely recognized that no one type of training can impart this knowledge nor one measurement judge its mastery. Thus, although they are experienced sequentially by the individual, I would argue that formal education, internship, and the professional licensing exam are functionally parallel and complementary. Internship, for example, is not simply a time to prepare for the licensing exam but a setting for the acquisition of unique skills. Similarly, the ARE is limited in its ability to measure the more qualitative aspects of architectural skills. By making internship mandatory, it also serves as another means of credentialing, ensuring a certain amount of guided practical experience before someone may claim the title “architect.” Thus, internship is both a means to and a measure of specialized architectural knowledge.⁹

The Intern Development Program

In the early 1970s, NCARB and the American Institute of Architects (AIA) convened a “guide force” to explore ways to move internship beyond the grim figure of an intern laboring exclusively on toilet room details. The result was the Intern Development Program, designed to “improve the quality of internship through an organized network of activi-

ties and resources that recognizes the diversity of formal education and practice settings, the needs and interests of interns, and the profession’s commitment to promote high standards of architectural practice.”¹⁰

The official goals of IDP are as follows.

1. Define areas of architectural practice in which interns should acquire basic knowledge and skills.
2. Encourage additional training in the broad aspects of architectural practice.
3. Provide the highest-quality information and advice about educational, internship, and professional issues and opportunities.
4. Provide a uniform system for documentation and periodic assessment of internship activity.
5. Provide greater access to educational opportunities designed to enrich training.¹¹

A note on the language used in these goals is needed because it masks the fundamentally regulatory nature of the program. Although the national organizations may design a program, it is the state boards — legally empowered through state licensing and title law — that regulate the profession, including internship. Thus, although these goals state that IDP “defines areas of architectural practice” and that it “encourages additional training,” when the program’s completion is required for licensing, the program effectively mandates that interns gain training in these areas. NCARB may assert that the IDP is not meant as “a series of registration requirements and conditions,” but it functions as such for most of the nation’s interns.¹²

Interns enroll in IDP by paying a fee to NCARB to establish a record. The intern is responsible for finding employment in a suitable context. Periodically, the intern completes a training unit (TU) report — verified and signed by their employer — recording the number of “training units” completed in sixteen areas of practice. A training unit represents eight hours of work and seven hundred training units are required for completion of IDP. (The

training units distribution scheme is presented in Table 4.) Once an intern has fulfilled the minimum requirements, his or her record is transferred to the state board certifying them to sit for the ARE.

The IDP also requires a degree from, or enrollment in, an architecture program accredited by the National Architectural Accreditation Board. In addition, interns may not count work experience gained in periods shorter than ten consecutive weeks if working at least thirty-five hours per week or six months if working at least twenty hours per week. The “training setting” requirement requires that at least one-third of the seven hundred TUs be gained under the “daily supervision of a registered architect” and in an organization whose primary practice is architecture.¹³

The Experience of Internship

It is reasonable to assume that state boards require IDP because they believe it provides superior training to an unstructured, three-year internship. The current research provides an empirical test of this assumption. If IDP is meeting its goals, IDP interns should exhibit greater levels of satisfaction, perceived learning and mentoring, and experience more diverse training than those not enrolled in IDP. On the other hand, if Boyer and Mitgang are correct in their assertion that IDP has failed to ameliorate the long-standing problems of internship, we should see few differences between the groups.

Two groups of interns were surveyed: interns currently enrolled in IDP and those in unstructured (non-IDP) internships in California and New York (“current interns”).¹⁴ A second survey targeted individuals who had already completed an internship of either type (“former interns”). In all, the experiences of 934 individuals are reported here.¹⁵ A breakdown of respondent characteristics is provided in Table 1.

When interns were asked to rate the quality of their internship, more than half (58%) said it was “good” or “exceptional.” (See Figure 1.) When asked how much they were learning from their current employer, three out of four felt they were

learning “quite a bit” or “a great deal.” Similarly, reflecting back on their entire internship, 57% of former interns found it to be “good” or “exceptional,” and seven out of ten felt that they had learned “quite a bit” or “a great deal.”

Given the program’s goals, IDP interns should evidence higher satisfaction ratings and higher rates of learning. The surveys, however, show no statistically significant differences between IDP interns and those in unstructured programs on either question. Similarly, no differences were observed for former interns.

We were also interested in what IDP interns thought about the program. The majority of IDP interns (64%) felt the program contributed somewhat or significantly to their internship. Twenty-two percent felt it had “no effect,” and 14% felt IDP detracted somewhat or significantly from their internship experience. Former interns were less positive; almost one-quarter (22%) reporting that IDP had detracted somewhat or significantly from their internship.¹⁶ These are not rave reviews; although a majority feel the program helps, a substantial number of current and former interns doubt IDP’s effectiveness.

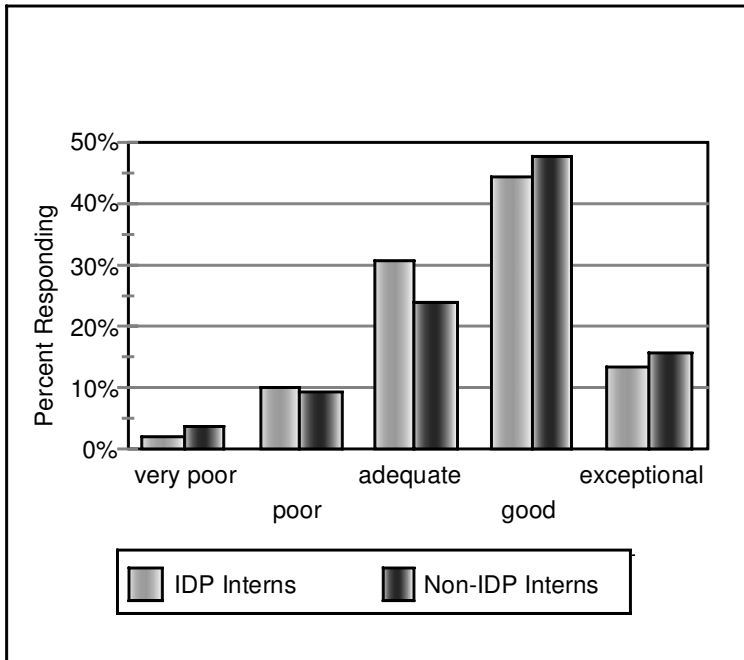
An optimist might consider the glass mostly full: many interns seem to be having good experiences in their internships. That three out of five interns rate their experience as “good” or “exceptional,” that 75% of interns feel they are gaining significant knowledge and experience from their firms, and that the majority of those enrolled in IDP find it helpful, could be considered a success. The glass is, however, also partially empty. Should we not question the success of an educational program in which 43% of the participants feel their experience is “adequate” at best and “very poor” at worst, and one out of four feel they are learning little to nothing? Can a program be justified when more than one-third of participants feel it does not help or even detracts from their experience?

At the beginning of this article, two contrasting images of internship were offered. Embedded within are assumptions about what makes a good internship: diverse experience and quality mentoring. Participant observation of various architectural meetings made it clear that these characteristics are virtually synonymous with “good internship.” When asked about their current firm, approximately one-quarter of interns said they were very satisfied with

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics.

	Current Interns		Former Interns	
	IDP	Non-IDP	ID	Non-IDP
Number of respondents	415	115	199	205
% Women	32%	37%	33%	27%
% Minority	21%	36%	9%	27%
Asian	6%	16%	3%	12%
Hispanic	6%	9%	3%	5%
African-American	4%	4%	1%	3%
Other	6%	7%	3%	7%
Mean age	29	35	31	37
Architecture degree	84%	65%	94%	71%
Months in internship	25	43		
Traditional architecture firm	77%	75%		
Median size of firm	25	20		

1. Quality of internship.



the diversity of experience they were getting. Almost half (45%), however, reported being “not at all” or only “somewhat satisfied.” Indeed, 41% reported having to change jobs to gain more diverse experience. Interns were also asked to estimate how much time they had spent working in the sixteen areas of practice in the last three months. Not surprisingly, construction documents (CDs) monopolized the time of most. Just over half (58%) reported spending most or all of their time in the last three months on this activity. In contrast, 66% of interns reported gaining no experience on engineering-related activities during the same time.

If IDP is meeting its goals, IDP interns should be more satisfied with the diversity of experience they are receiving than those in traditional unstructured internships. However, IDP interns were no

more likely to be satisfied than were non-IDP interns. However, a few small differences were noted. IDP interns reported spending slightly more time on design, with non-IDP interns reporting more time spent on project management. In addition, more non-IDP interns reported spending significant time on construction documents.

Interns were also asked to rate how easy or difficult it was to get experience in each area of practice. Not surprisingly, both types of interns reported little difficulty getting experience in construction documents. In contrast, bidding and contract negotiation, building cost analysis, and programming were the areas most likely to be reported as somewhat difficult or difficult to get experience in. Although non-IDP interns were more likely to report having difficulty gaining experience in sche-

matic design (40% versus 30%), a majority of interns — regardless of internship program — reported that it was not difficult. Interestingly, IDP interns were more likely to have difficulty getting experience in engineering systems coordination, bidding and contract negotiations, and building cost analysis. However, most interns — regardless of program — found it difficult to get experience in these areas.

Former interns were asked to consider their internships and rate how difficult it was to gain experience in each practice area. Their responses mirrored those of current interns. Former interns reported the least difficulty getting experience in construction drawings and the most difficulty in bidding and contract negotiation, programming, and building cost analysis. Compared to those who had completed IDP, practitioners who completed unstructured internships had more difficulty gaining experience in programming, schematic design, design development, and document checking.

Former interns were also asked to rate their perceived competency upon completion of their internship in thirty-six key architectural skills (rather than areas of practice). The pattern that emerges is all too familiar. In general, former interns felt the least competent in the business-side of the profession (for example, determining a project’s feasibility) and the best prepared in traditional aspects of design development and administration (such as preparing CDs for a project review). Almost three out of four former interns reported being “not at all prepared” to deal with postoccupancy evaluations.¹⁷

A number of statistically significant differences between IDP and non-IDP former interns were noted. In areas with a high level of perceived competency and where a difference between the two groups was observed, a larger percentage of former IDP interns reported competence than did non-IDP interns. For example, whereas 86% of non-IDP former interns felt “adequately” or “more than adequately” prepared to “integrate all documents” in engineering systems, almost all (94%) IDP interns

felt competent. In areas in which a large percentage of former interns reported low levels of competency, a larger percentage of non-IDP interns reported feeling “not at all” prepared. The gaps between the two groups ran from 10% to 23%. The largest gap was in the skill of “collecting, organizing and evaluating programming-related data.” In all, statistically significant differences were noted for eighteen skills and abilities, and those who completed IDP consistently reported higher levels of perceived competency. (See Table 2 for a list of problematic competency areas.)

Another goal of IDP is increasing the quality of mentoring, the individualized technical and professional guidance an experienced architect can offer. Two-thirds (67%) of current interns reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the level of mentoring they were receiving from their employer, and the remaining third felt they were not getting adequate mentoring. IDP interns were no more likely than non-IDP interns to report satisfactory mentoring. Considering their internship on the whole, former interns were less likely (60%) to be satisfied with their mentoring. But again, no differences between those who had completed IDP and those who had completed a traditional unstructured internship were noted.

When asked to rate their firms’ commitment to providing quality internships, approximately two-thirds of current interns felt their firm was committed. They were less sure about the commitment of the profession: only 44% felt that the profession evidenced a moderate or high level of commitment to internship. Non-IDP interns were more likely to feel that their firm and the profession lacked commitment.

Current and former interns were also asked to list the three best and three worst aspects of their internship. Interestingly, as Table 3 illustrates, the resulting lists are remarkably similar. Whereas some interns laud the diverse experience they are getting, another group complains about a lack of diversity.

Table 2. Areas Where Former Interns Felt “Not at All Prepared.”

Competency Area	IDP	Non-IDP
Programming		
Using data collection methods for programming	17%	31%
Collecting, organizing, evaluating programming data	11%	34%
Setting forth client’s requirements	19%	31%
Researching/assessing POEs		71%*
Determining project’s feasibility		48%*
Building Cost Analysis		
Analyzing and evaluating construction costs		51%*
Specifications and Materials Research		
Preparing an outline specification		34%*
Preparing a CSI format specification standard	41%	51%
Translating construction requirements to specifications format	37%	49%
Producing plan based on the specs. for client/owners		54%*
Document Checking and Coordination		
Applying standard document checking procedures	16%	30%
Bidding and Contract Negotiations		
Completing bidding/contract forms		49%*
Following appropriate bidding procedures	29%	42%
Project Management		
Managing contracts, personnel, budget of a small project	37%	51%
Administering agreements		53%*
Managing contractual relationships	48%	59%
Office Management		
Understanding economic trends	54%	67%
Understanding firm’s organization/financial mgmt. system	40%	56%
Marketing	33%	54%

*No significant differences were observed between the groups on this item.

Some are receiving quality mentoring, while others find a lack of mentoring to be one of the worst things about their internship. Some interns praise IDP for its structure, and others find it burdensome.

Discussion of Findings

“To be direct, I believe the entire internship program is bogus. . . . [It is a] disconnected bureaucracy. Sweep it clean and start again.” (37-year-old former intern)

“I think IDP is on the right track. Older architects . . . conveyed to me a lack of structure in their early training until they happened upon a mentor.” (26-year-old former intern)

Table 3. The “Best” and “Worst” Things about Internship.

Best	Worst
Current Interns	
Diverse experience	Lack of diverse experience
Great employer/mentor	Lack of mentoring
Structure	NCARB regs/paperwork
Honing technical skills	Low pay
Former Interns	
Diverse experience	Lack of diverse experience
Great employer/mentor	Lack of mentoring
Continued learning	NCARB regs/paperwork
“Real” experience	Low pay

Which intern is right? Is IDP a “disconnected bureaucracy” or is it “on the right track?” When asked to assess their internship, few differences were observed between IDP and non-IDP interns. IDP interns were more likely to report being satisfied with mentoring and their firm’s commitment to internship. However, they were no more likely to feel their contributions were valued or to be satisfied with their level of job responsibility. IDP interns seemed to work slightly less on construction documents, but non-IDP interns gained more experience in project management. Perhaps most significantly, practitioners who completed IDP (“former interns”) reported feeling competent in more areas of practice after their internship than did their counterparts who completed non-IDP internships.

In general, IDP interns seem to be having a slightly better time of it. Even so, although differences between the two groups are noted, there is more variation within the groups than differences between them. In other words, the variety in the quality of internship among interns is striking, but the type of internship program fails to explain most of the difference.

Undoubtedly, the quality of an internship is highly dependent on the ability and commitment of the employing firm.¹⁸ Boyer and Mitgang (1996) made a similar observation when they concluded that “[t]he success of internship. . . appears to rest on the good will and the resources of the employer and the assertiveness of the intern.”¹⁹ This begs a very important question. If the quality of internship is primarily firm-dependent and we find few differences between IDP and non-IDP interns, can the profession sustain an argument for legally mandating IDP? To address this, I turn to an analysis of the structure of IDP and the profession to explore why IDP has not had a greater effect on interns’ lives.

Structural Limitations of Internship within the Profession of Architecture

IDP has “not solved the problems of internship,” for four primary reasons. First, IDP is not actually a

structured internship. The promise of structure is that it requires diverse training, protecting an intern from the fate of a “CAD jockey.” It should be impossible, then, to work as a CAD jockey and complete IDP. To test this, a hypothetical allocation of IDP units was constructed by assigning all elective units to construction drawings. This example is presented in the last two columns of Table 4. Contrary to the promises of IDP, the resulting legitimate allocation of experience results in the intern spending almost two years of a three-year internship working on construction documents. Granted, most interns would not choose this allocation, but nothing in the program prevents it. It appears that IDP, with all of its administrative overhead, requires little more diversity than a traditional unstructured internship.

Second, although internship serves a crucial and parallel training function to formal education, it is not subject to similar credentialing procedures. IDP assumes rather than assures the competency of employers to mentor. Of course, we might assume the competency of the trainer because the majority of experience must be earned under the supervision of a registered architect. However, as teachers and students know all too well, professional competency does not necessarily translate into competency in teaching those skills. Employers, unlike faculty members, are never evaluated as trainers. Their “curriculum” is never appraised by an independent organization such as NAAB. Indeed, internship — as a formal, institutionalized, and legally mandated step in the making of “an architect” — is a mostly opaque and unregulated process. Not surprisingly, the quality of training interns receive is highly variable. Of course, many interns receive quality training, and many employers are committed to interns’ development. There is, however, nothing within IDP that ensures this.

Third, IDP problematically assumes the good will of employers. In college, students pay directly for their training. Although there are times when the interests of faculty and students conflict, in

general, their goals — quality education and training — tend to mesh. In contrast, in an internship the primary relationship is that of employee-employer. The intern wants work that increases their skills and knowledge, but the employer must utilize the intern’s existing skills most efficiently. A predictable outcome — especially during an economic downturn and within struggling firms — is an employer best served by keeping inexperienced interns working on construction drawings and unskilled tasks, and an intern frustrated by the lack of diversity, creativity, and challenge in her or his work.

Although these conflicts of interest are well known, the structure and administration of the IDP does nothing to address them. Rather, IDP simply assumes the goodwill of the employer, regulating only the intern who is arguably the weaker party in the relationship. It is the intern — IDP or not — who must push for diverse experience with his or her employer. If the employer refuses, the only legitimate course of action for the intern is to change jobs. Ironically, IDP’s duration requirement limits this option because, regardless of the conditions of work, an intern must stay at a job for the required length of time or lose all experience accrued at that firm.

When faced with these contradictions, interns and employers do not, as the surveys reveal, limit themselves to strictly legitimate courses of action. The two most serious ethical breaches are the falsification of TU reports and the withholding of employer signatures. This leads to the fourth limitation of IDP: it has few enforcement mechanisms. As criminologists well know, a law that provides neither enforcement nor penalties for violation is no law at all. One 27-year-old former intern said, “NCARB/IDP is a joke. Anyone can lie about what they have done and when.” If this is the case, are interns and practitioners correct when they complain that it is “just paperwork?”²⁰

When we began our assessment, no formalized procedures were in place to verify the accuracy of TU reports. The few known violations were especially egregious cases discovered by alert data entry

Table 4. IDP Training Unit Allocation and “CAD Jockey” Example.

	Training Units	% of Total	IDP “CAD Jockey”	
			Units	% Total
Category A: Design and Construction Documents				
Programming	10	2.2%	10	1.4%
Site and environmental analysis	10	2.2%	10	1.4%
Schematic design	15	3.2%	15	2.1%
Engineering systems coordination	15	3.2%	15	2.1%
Building cost analysis	10	2.2%	10	1.4%
Code research	15	3.2%	15	2.1%
Design development	40	8.6%	40	5.7%
Construction documents	135	29.0%	445	63.6%
Specifications and materials research	15	3.2%	15	2.1%
Document checking/coordination	10	2.2%	10	1.4%
Category A allocated units	275	59.1%		
Additional elective units required in A	75	16.1%		
Category B: Construction Administration				
Bidding and contract negotiation	10	2.2%	10	1.4%
Construction phase — office	15	3.2%	45	6.4%
Construction phase — observation	15	3.2%	15	2.1%
Category B allocated units	40	8.6%		
Additional elective units required in B	30	6.5%		
Category C: Management				
Project management	10	2.2%	10	1.4%
Office management	15	3.2%	25	3.6%
Category C allocated units	25	5.4%		
Additional elective units required in C	10	2.2%		
Category D: Related Activities				
Professional and community service	10	2.2%	10	1.4%
Other related activities	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Category D allocated units	10	2.2%		
Additional elective units required in D	0	0.0%		
Distributed TUs – allocated + elective	465	66.4%		
Additional electives	235	33.6%		
Total training units required	700	100%	700	100%

Columns 2 and 3 show the required allocation. Columns 4 and 5 illustrate “CAD Jockey” allocation where all elective training units have been allocated to construction documents.

clerks. Not until we reported our findings did NCARB develop in-house verification procedures. To date, no mechanisms for externally verifying experience are used. That several interns noted their employers will “sign whatever” and some admitted their employers pushed them to “put down anything” suggests this practice of falsifying experience may be more common than we might hope.

In addition, until recently IDP specified no penalties for violating regulations. New penalties for interns have been adopted, but they have not been widely disseminated. And, although there is evidence that some employers encourage interns to falsify TU documents — in response, for example, to an intern requesting more diverse experience — there are no mechanisms for punishing employers.

More disturbing are cases in which employers have used IDP requirements as leverage in the employment relationship. The following story, relayed by a 31-year-old IDP intern, is the worst example:

In one firm where I was treated so poorly that I wished to give two weeks notice I was informed my IDP forms would not be filled out if I left before the end of the project (a good two years away). . . . My only choices were to continue to work at the firm . . . , leave with nothing to show for the hell I went through or fill out the forms myself (and hope NCARB wouldn’t figure it out).

This story reveals a form of exploitation that IDP may unwittingly produce. Granted, few other interns reported such heavy-handed employer tactics. However, this intern’s story reveals that the structure of IDP in no way prevents it (and in fact may make it more likely).

It is clear then that IDP is not performing as a structured internship. Most importantly, while it adds legally mandated requirements for interns, it has not changed the requirements for employers. It functions for employers just as some interns report:

as “only paperwork.” For interns, IDP provides a model of diverse training, but it offers no institutional guarantees of diversity or effective protection against the exploitation that has plagued architectural internship.²¹

The Structural Limitations of the Profession

Professions such as medicine have effectively administered structured, mandatory internships for years and architecture has looked to these profes-

sions for guidance in fixing what ails its internship process. Medicine and architecture are both “professions,” but why does the latter struggle to provide quality internships? Boyer and Mitgang (1996) argue that structural constraints unique to architecture make it difficult for it to sustain a formalized internship. In the following discussion, I consider their insights in the context of IDP and assess what might be possible for architecture internship.

First, compared to professions such as medicine, architecture has a relatively low profit margin.

The cause of this is debatable, but the fact of it is not. It is this fact that affects the quality and kind of training that firms may offer interns. Quite simply, many firms do not have the largesse to provide a rich mentoring/training experience for their interns. In contrast, they may find themselves dependent on the cheap labor that interns can provide.

Second, the demand for architectural services is relatively volatile.²² This presents a stability problem for any formalized training program that cannot, by definition, alter its standards to mirror changing economic conditions. In lean times, interns may find it difficult to find employment and will be unable to change jobs to gain diverse experience; similarly, employers will be even less able to provide training. Some interns will respond by leaving the field, which, in the short run, will alleviate the oversupply of workers. When the economy improves, however, employers may struggle to find qualified employees. One would think that this would result in better training because it places interns in a more powerful bargaining position. However, as some interns reported, the pressure of production often translates into increased specialization. For interns, this may mean being relegated to construction documents. In addition, because a strong market increases competition for employees, the unscrupulous employer may resort to “IDP blackmail” to keep quality interns. The bottom line is that economic volatility shifts power in the employee-employer relationship and affects the type and intensity of demands on firms. Both affect the quality of internship.

Lastly, training is conducted in diverse and dispersed firms throughout the nation. As Boyer and Mitgang note, architecture has nothing analogous to the “teaching hospital” of medicine. Boyer and Mitgang recommend the creation of “teaching firms,” but this recommendation runs counter to the economic realities of the profession. Certainly some firms could be so designated, but they would likely serve the elite of the profession, leaving the condi-

tions of most interns unchanged. It is unlikely that the site of internship will change from its historic location in individual firms. Yet this geographic and organizational fragmentation makes formalization and regulation of training exceedingly difficult.

It is not difficult to understand the regulatory conundrum facing NCARB. While it administers IDP, it could never have the regulatory power over employing firms required to truly formalize internship. In addition, the fragmentation of training sites makes oversight especially onerous and costly. The only option available to NCARB — and the method currently employed — is to regulate the interns who must participate in IDP based on their state’s licensing laws. As we have seen, this type of regulation does nothing to change the structural conditions under which interns work. As such, the problems of IDP may not be correctable.

A Modest Proposal: Addressing the Problem of Internship in Architecture

If IDP cannot be “fixed,” what can be done about internship? In this section, I propose some solutions, grounding them in the stated goals of internship, the previous analyses of the realities of interns’ work lives, and the structural constraints facing the profession.

First, the training unit distribution scheme must be redesigned to acknowledge the unique contribution to training and assessment that internship makes. An assumption permeating discussions of IDP is that internship training should mirror the full range of tasks that comprise architectural practice. This is evident, for example, in IDP’s training area distribution scheme. The reasonableness of this assumption is questionable if we reconsider the rationale for the dyad of training sites — formal education and internship — and the triad of evaluation sites — formal education, internship, and the ARE. Each are sites for the acquisition of unique skills and offer different methods of assessment. Ideally, they are complementary. The architectural

studio does an excellent job of developing students’ design capabilities, but schools of architecture may not be the best place to develop professional judgment. It is the complex conditions of everyday practice that provide suitable soil for this growth.

This is not a new idea; nonetheless, it is often lost when discussion turns to the design of internship programs. Rather than designing internship to be a comprehensive overview of architectural practice, the profession needs to consider the set of skills and abilities that are best learned, honed, and tested during internship. The complementary relationship between internship and formal education must be delineated and strengthened. Thus, I suggest that a core group of competencies best acquired in internship be compiled and that these areas form the core of any internship program.

Second, I suggest that the fulfillment of any system of experience be recommended rather than mandatory. That is, the profession should return to a required unstructured internship while continuing to articulate a set of suggested training experiences. One obvious advantage is that the administrative need for recording interns’ hours — a task born by the intern, their employer, and NCARB staff — is eliminated. As the previous analyses have shown, the potential disadvantages are negligible. IDP has never effectively compelled employers to provide diverse and quality training. It outlines what should happen but does not truly require it. The move away from mandatory experience acknowledges this and the structural constraints on the profession that make a formalized internship program untenable. Granted, this move may require significant effort to change individual states’ licensing laws requiring IDP. However, short-term administrative ease is not a legitimate reason for continuing a program that is costly, whose benefits are questionable, and that appears to encourage unethical behavior on the part of some interns and their employers.

I am not suggesting that the profession abandon its goal of providing quality internships. Rather, I suggest that this goal is better served by altering

the target. It is clear that the best predictor of a good internship is the firm at which the intern is employed. It seems reasonable then that internship may best be improved by focusing on interns' employers. Granted, there are clear limitations on the ability of NCARB or any other professional organization to regulate employers. There is, however, some latitude in providing incentives. For example, AIA and NCARB should develop continuing education programs to encourage the development of mentoring skills and the creation of internship programs within firms. These programs could provide ongoing technical advice for employers and a forum for firms to share their successes and struggles. Also, a voluntary professional credentialing process recognizing those individuals and firms that excel at internship training should be established. Credentials would be designated through professional titles such as "training firm," "excellence in mentoring," or "architectural mentor."

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I suggest that the profession support the creation of a "sixth collateral" that would serve the interests of interns. It is clear that the professional organizations as currently constituted cannot effectively represent the interests of interns. This sixth collateral would provide a way for intern's concerns to be given voice and, if effectively constituted and supported, could apply pressure to the profession to remedy them. When asked about this in the survey, almost three-fourths of interns thought that such an organization would improve the quality of internship.

It is my contention that the energy currently expended on IDP (the money, time, and expertise) could be better used by such an organization. Given NCARB's role as a conglomeration of architectural registration boards, it has never been an ideal site for the development and administration of an internship program. This sixth collateral, bolstered

by current NCARB staff expertise and reallocated IDP funds, and in conjunction with some of the recommendations proposed here, could go further in exorcizing the ghost of the CAD jockey than any training unit distribution form or heavy-handed attempts to regulate interns.

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Notes

1. Only Arizona, and the U.S. territories of Guam, the Virgin Islands, and the Northern Mariana Islands do not require IDP. New York and Missouri did not require IDP until recently; California will begin requiring IDP in 2005.
2. Ernest Boyer and Lee Mitgang, *Building Community: A New Future for Architectural Education and Practice* (Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie Foundation, 1996), pp. 115–116.
3. Ibid.
4. The five collateral organizations are NCARB, the American Institute of Architects, the American Institute of Architecture Students, the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, and the National Architectural Accreditation Board.
5. For an explanation of NCARB's larger regulatory role, see Robert Fielden, "The Evolution of Architectural Practice: National Certification and Uniform Reciprocity," in William S. Saunders, ed., *Reflections on Architectural Practices in the Nineties* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), pp. 96–102.
6. Boyer and Mitgang, *Building Community*, p. 115.
7. Harold L. Wilensky, "The Professionalization of Everyone?" *The American Journal of Sociology* LXX(2) (1964): 137.

8. Professions also hold their members to a professional standard of conduct. See "The Professionalization of Everyone." See also Francis Duffy, *Architectural Knowledge: The Idea of a Profession* (London: E and FN Spon, 1998).
9. Dana Cuff, "Celebrate the Gap Between Education and Practice," *Architecture* 85 (Aug. 1996): 94–95.
10. IDP Coordinating Committee handout, Apr. 1976 (revised Oct. 1996).
11. "IDP Purposes and Objectives." Available from <http://www.ncarb.org/idp/overview.htm>.
12. "Frequently Asked Questions About IDP." Available from <http://www.ncarb.org/idp/idpfaq.htm>.
13. NCARB IDP Guidelines (Washington, DC: National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, 2000).
14. Independent samples were drawn from each population. For a mailed survey, the response rate of 30% for the IDP interns is acceptable. The low response rates for non-IDP former interns (16%) and California interns (17%) is problematic because it lowers our confidence in the representativeness of the sample.
15. Inferential statistics allow us to ask whether differences observed in the sample (for example, the surveyed interns) can be assumed to reflect a real difference in the population (for example, all interns). If a difference in the sample is "statistically significant," we can be fairly sure that it reflects a real difference in the population. A probability level of .05 was the cutoff for accepting a difference as significant. Only statistically significant differences are reported here.
16. Comparing current and former interns on this question is complicated due to an error in question formulation on the former intern survey from which the response "no effect" was inadvertently omitted.
17. This lack is alarming if one considers the entreaties of Francis Duffy, former president of the Royal Institute of British Architects, who insists that the profession must recommend to client needs and the performance of buildings. Duffy, *Architectural Knowledge*, pp. 121–127.
18. Although it is beyond the scope of this article, a multiple regression analysis confirmed this, explaining 35% of the variance in interns' satisfaction with internship. The best predictive model included perceived level of learning, how much the employer was seen as valuing the intern's contribution, the diversity of the intern's experience, mentoring quality, the intern's age (negative), and the firm's perceived commitment to internship.
19. Boyer and Mitgang, *Building Community*, p. 120.
20. See also Beth A. Quinn and Susanne Monahan, "A Blueprint for Deviance: A Neo-institutional Explanation of Occupational and Corporate Misconduct." Paper presented at the Law and Society Association, Budapest, Hungary, July 4, 2001.
21. "Competency-based" internships will not solve the problem because it also assumes the competency and goodwill of the employer.
22. Judith R. Blau, *Architects and Firms: A Sociological Perspective on Architectural Practices* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1984).