

AIA WASHINGTON COUNCIL

ISSUE BRIEF



MODERNIZATION OF ARCHITECTURE LICENSING STANDARDS

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Paths to Architecture Licensure in Washington State

The traditional pathway to qualify for an architecture license is for an applicant to get an accredited degree in architecture (typically a master's degree from an accredited university or college), complete an internship and pass the national examination. There is also an alternative pathway in Washington that allows candidates to have experience only before taking the licensing examination.

The question has been raised of how these pathways compare. The information below is provided to answer that question.

KEY POINTS

- *Washington is one of only 12 states to have a non-degree option for licensure.*
- *39 states and the District of Columbia do not allow architects to become licensed if they do not have an accredited degree.*
- *Current state law only requires 8 years of experience in order to be eligible to take the licensing exam for those without a degree.*

Accredited Architecture Degree (5 ½ to 7 ½ years)

According to the National Association of Architectural Accreditation Boards, there are 4 accredited architectural degree programs and one in progress (Portland State) in Washington, Oregon and Idaho. These programs require a bachelor degree (pre-professional degree) in architecture, followed by the completion of a master's degree. It takes between 5 ½ and 7 ½ years to complete an accredited degree.

Accredited Degree in Architecture	W/Pre-professional architecture degree	W/Degree in related field	W/Bachelor degree (non-architecture)
University of Washington	6 Years	Not offered	7 years
Washington State University	5 ½ years	6 ½ years	7 ½ years
University of Idaho	6 years	Not offered	Not Offered
Portland State University	6 years	Not offered	Not offered
University of Oregon	6 years	Not offered	7 ½ years

Internship (3 to 6 years)

An applicant must complete 5,600 hours of supervised training experience in diverse practice areas as required by the Intern Development Program (IDP). The IDP is administered by the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB). Working full time, the program takes a minimum of 3 years to complete. However, because experience must be garnered a variety of practice areas, it takes an average of 4.6 years to complete IDP, according to an NCARB study.

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Examination (1 to 5 years)

Architects must also take a rigorous seven part examination administered by NCARB. Each section is scheduled for between 4 and 6 hours, for a total of 33.5 hours to complete the full examination. An applicant typically takes one section at a time – taking time off between each section to prepare for the next. A motivated candidate can complete the full examination in about a year. But, it is common for candidates to take more time in order to adequately prepare and to pass each section. Candidates must complete all sections of the examination within 5 years of the first section passed.

Non-Degree Route (8 years)

If an applicant does not have an accredited degree, current state law only requires 8 years of experience, which includes the completion of IDP, in order to be eligible to take the licensing exam.

National Standards

39 states and the District of Columbia do not allow architects to become licensed if they do not have an accredited degree. Washington is one of only 12 states to have a non-degree option for licensure. NCARB generally requires an accredited degree for NCARB certification.

NCARB does offer the “Broadly Experienced Architect” (BEA) program, which allows non-degreed applicants to become NCARB Certified. BEA Certification allows applicants to apply for licensure in 39 states.

The applicant must *first* have a license in a state. For licensure candidates without a degree it takes up to 13 years of experience to qualify to sit for the exam, depending on the state.

Once licensed in a state, the applicant must have completed between 6 and 10 years of “comprehensive practice experience” *after* licensure to qualify for NCARB certification under the BEA process. The options for comprehensive practice experience **as a registered architect** are:

- **Six years** for architects who hold a pre-professional degree in architecture that is a component of an accredited professional degree program.
- **Eight years** for architects who hold any other baccalaureate or higher degree.
- **Ten years** for architects who do not hold a degree (i.e. only have a high school diploma).

For the experience, an applicant must prepare a detailed dossier of his or her experience. The dossier must demonstrate the applicant’s learning through experience to meet the education requirements of the NCARB Education Standard. Personal involvement and the way in which learning through experience addresses the education deficiencies must be clearly explained both in the written descriptions and in the supporting documentation.

Thus, it takes applicants a minimum of 13 and up to 23 years to complete the BEA process.