

The goal of the 2006 Core Competency Study was to find out if interns are being adequately trained in all 16 IDP training areas and whether they are capable of performing the required tasks independently after completing the IDP.

THE CORE COMPETENCY STUDY: Why Did We Do It? What Did We Learn?

by Stephen D. Dent, AIA, IES

The Intern Development Program (IDP) was created to ensure that interns in the architecture profession would gain experience in the complete range of competencies required for the independent practice of architecture upon completion of the program. For a number of years, some interns and members of the profession have expressed concern over whether interns are being adequately trained in all 16 IDP training areas and whether they are capable of performing the required tasks independently after completing the IDP. This discussion, however, was limited to anecdotal information and opinion—not the ideal way to evaluate the program. The IDP Coordinating Committee (now IDP Advisory Committee)—whose members include representatives from each collateral organization and other organizations with a stake in IDP—decided that real data was needed prior to proposing refinements to this essential component of an intern's development.

The Core Competency Task Force was formed to develop, conduct, and evaluate a study of former IDP participants to assess the extent

to which core training competencies have been acquired and retained. The task force worked with NCARB's test development and psychometric consultant, Prometric, to develop a comprehensive survey. In May of 2006, the survey was delivered electronically to over 9,000 interns and recently licensed architects who had enrolled in the IDP in the previous five years. More than 1,700 completed surveys were received.

The heart of the survey asked respondents two critical questions about each of the 43 core competencies that are included within the 16 IDP training areas:

Indicate the extent to which you were TRAINED in the core competencies during your entire IDP experience:

- (0) Not at all
- (1) To a small extent (observed others performing the task)
- (2) To a moderate extent (performed the task with assistance)
- (3) To a great extent (performed the task with little or no assistance)

Indicate the extent to which you have DEMONSTRATED the core competency following completion of IDP:

- (0) I have not performed the task since completing IDP.
- (1) I have required supervision to perform the task at a basic level.
- (2) I have performed the task accurately at a basic level, but need supervision to handle complex and/or unusual issues.
- (3) I have performed the task accurately even when handling complex and/or unusual issues/situations.

When asked these questions about the Construction Documents training area, 86 percent of surveyed interns reported that they were TRAINED to a moderate or great extent in this core competency. And 94 percent of surveyed interns responded that after completing the IDP they have DEMONSTRATED the ability to perform this core competency at a basic or complex level.

CORE COMPETENCY RATING

Training Area	Indicate the extent to which you were TRAINED in the core competency during your entire IDP experience		Indicate the extent to which you have DEMONSTRATED the core competency following completion of IDP	
	Not at all/ Small Extent	Moderate/ Great Extent	Task Not Performed or Required Supervision to Perform	Performed at Basic or Complex Level
1. Programming	46%	54%	27%	73%
2. Site and Environmental Analysis	37%	63%	21%	79%
3. Schematic Design	22%	78%	9%	91%
4. Engineering Systems Coordination	17%	83%	7%	93%
5. Building Cost Analysis	62%	38%	43%	57%
6. Code Research	31%	69%	16%	84%
7. Design Development	12%	88%	6%	94%
8. Construction Documents	14%	86%	6%	94%
9. Specifications and Materials Research	55%	45%	38%	62%
10. Document Checking and Coordination	18%	82%	7%	93%
11. Bidding and Contract Negotiation	55%	45%	42%	58%
12. Construction Phase: Office	35%	65%	21%	79%
13. Construction Phase: Observation	36%	64%	21%	79%
14. Project Management	45%	55%	28%	72%
15. Office Management	40%	60%	22%	78%
16. Professional and Community Services	37%	63%	19%	81%

The bold numbers denote areas of concern by the Core Competency Task Force.

On the other hand, when asked about the Building Cost Analysis training area, 62 percent of those surveyed said they were NOT TRAINED (not at all or to a small extent) in this core competency. Only 5 percent of the respondents said they could perform this core competency accurately when handling complex and/or unusual issues/situations.

These two examples illustrate the range from the highest to the lowest of the survey results, and show that the IDP is neither an unqualified success nor is it, in any sense, a failure. It is a program that is a qualified success for most of areas: over 70 percent of interns feel they

Better training is also needed in these areas:

- #1 Programming
- #2 Site and Environmental Analysis
- #6 Code Research
- #12 Construction Phase: Office
- #13 Construction Phase: Observation
- #14 Project Management
- #15 Office Management
- #16 Professional and Community Service

The survey also asked participants to rate the QUALITY of their IDP experience with respect to the core competencies within the 16 training areas. More than 75 percent

Study and work to bring *all* aspects of the IDP into the “good” and, preferably, the “excellent” range. It is vital that interns have adequate training and experience in all of the training areas in order to meet the primary goal of the Intern Development Program: to provide a comprehensive training program that assists interns, as emerging professionals, in acquiring the discipline, integrity, judgment, skills, and knowledge necessary to legally practice architecture independently.

The Core Competency Study is one of a number of studies, including the 2007 *Practice Analysis of Architecture*, that have provided a base of information and data upon which to make justifiable and needed changes and improvements to the Intern Development Program. For the past three years, the Committee on the IDP and its various task forces, with strong support from the NCARB Board of Directors, have been developing a number of revisions to the program that will be rolled out over the next few years in order to make the IDP stronger and more effective.

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can perform at an acceptable level in 13 of the 16 training areas after completion of the IDP. In five of these areas the rate exceeds 90 percent!

The survey also shows that although many interns did not receive adequate training from their supervisors or fellow professional staff in one or more area, they often achieve competency through their own efforts. In all training areas, the percentage of interns reporting the ability to perform a task is significantly higher than they rate their training experience. This is a strong testament to the power of *learning by doing* and reinforces the value of an internship.

Nevertheless, the survey reveals that interns need improved training in the following areas:

- #5 Building Cost Analysis
- #9 Specifications and Materials Research
- #11 Bidding and Contract Negotiation

of respondents indicate they had a “good” or “excellent” overall IDP experience in the following training areas:

- Schematic Design
- Engineering Systems Coordination
- Design Development
- Construction Documents
- Document Checking & Coordination

This result is consistent with the general perception among interns that their experience in the IDP is more focused on the core of office practice (designing and documenting the design) and less focused on the related areas that constitute a comprehensive understanding of architectural practice. These overall ratings of the quality also reinforce the pattern of results regarding the strengths and weaknesses in intern training.

All architectural professionals who are connected to the IDP—as supervisors, mentors, or employers—should take a hard look at the findings of the Core Competencies