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EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, NCARB

This issue of *Direct Connection* cautions those taking the ARE to mark carefully the line between sharing exam experiences and sharing exam content. The ARE is designed to test for the ability to practice independently as an architect, including the honest and ethical completion of education, internship, and examination.

The following is an explanation of how the ARE is developed and delivered.

## Letter From the Executive Vice President

by Lenore M. Lucey, FAIA

Architects and emerging professionals frequently ask us how the ARE is developed. Let's begin with some basic but essential facts. NCARB's only members are the individual boards in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands—a total of 55 members. Each member board has from 5 to 19 members. Most jurisdictional board members are architects; however, a considerable number of boards also include engineers, landscape architects, interior designers, geologists, land surveyors, and public members.

All together, the Council volunteer pool comprises approximately 420 "member board members." Every year, from each of these boards, come some 150 or more volunteers who sit on approximately 37 committees that do the work of the Council. Among those committees are the Committee on Examination (COE) and its many related subcommittees and task forces. The largest group is the ARE Subcommittee, which itself

includes a steering group, as well as subcommittees for each division: Pre-Design, General Structures, Lateral Forces, Building Design / Materials & Methods, Mechanical & Electrical Systems, Construction Documents & Services, and Graphics 1, Graphics 2, and Graphics 3. Three additional subcommittees (Grading, Graphic Pretesting, and ARE Technology) also report to the COE. Additionally this year, three separate task forces (Integrated Scoring, Vignette Enhancement, and the Alternate Item Type) were assembled in support of the exam.

Each committee represents many days of meetings and hours of homework, research, and pretesting for its members. On the average, each committee meets three times during the NCARB fiscal year. Each meeting is typically two full days of work, with serious amounts of homework in between. Each divisional ARE committee writes new questions for their division, crits and revises new ques-

tions, periodically reviews current questions in the “pool,” and also acts as “pretesters” for new questions written by other divisional committees.

Once questions have passed this level of testing, they are reviewed by psychometric professionals from Thomson Prometric, revised if necessary, and formatted and entered into the computer pool of ARE questions. At this point, the questions begin appearing on tests.

Each ARE division contains some questions that are being pretested. These questions are not identified to the candidates nor are they included in candidate scores. What

there are numerous different versions called “scripts.” Again, taking the same graphic division over again—even many times—will not yield a repeat script. The computer makes sure of that.

And just how is the ARE graded? By computer; however, all of you who work with computers know they will only do what you tell them to. The grading component for the ARE is the single most sophisticated program in the computer-testing world. NCARB is recognized as having the most advanced computerized performance test currently available.

Again, a cadre of NCARB volunteers—all architects—works with specialists at

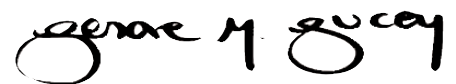
Graphic divisions are aggregated into bundles that are all computer scored at the same time. This may mean grading is completed up to three weeks after a division is taken, depending upon when you test in the cycle. Following grading, scores are sent to the candidate’s member board. Each board has different procedures for processing the scores before sending them to the candidate. Generally, boards are very responsive in processing score reports; however, this process can add an additional week or more to the score delivery time frame.

After you pass your final division, your member board will note that in their files. Depending upon their process, you will receive an invitation to secure your license by completing several steps and paying jurisdictional fees. At this point, you will be joining approximately 2,000 emerging professionals who complete their last division of the ARE each year.

Candidates who enrolled in the ARE Record program following completion of IDP and who have an accredited degree, will be certified—at no cost—by NCARB as soon as we receive notification of licensing in a jurisdiction. Architects certified under this program are eligible for three years of reduced certification renewal fees as they become established.

NCARB invests a lion’s share of resources to exam development, delivery, and security for a very simple reason: The ARE represents an integral standard of the architecture profession. Our last cost study showed annual ARE expenses at \$2.8 million and A R E i n c o m e at \$1.9 million.

We at NCARB welcome your comments and questions. Please contact us at [customerservice@ncarb.org](mailto:customerservice@ncarb.org).



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pretesting does for the ARE is verify the validity and statistical aspects of a question, helping us determine if it is a sound question for testing that aspect of knowledge. A similar, though more complex process, takes place for the graphic divisions where volunteers create graphic problems for the skill to be tested.

Changes to divisions are made regularly to keep questions and graphic problems current. Within the multiple-choice divisions, there are numerous forms, all taken from NCARB’s extremely large pool of available operational questions. This is the reason that if you have to take a multiple-choice division over again you will never see the same questions. In addition, two (or more) people taking the same division, at the same time, at the same test center actually will not be taking the same test. Each will have a different set of questions.

In the graphic portions, different questions are called “vignettes”; within vignettes,

Thomson Prometric to set grading parameters, constraints, allowances, and other information the computer needs to know in order to evaluate graphic solutions. In addition, we work continually with Thomson Prometric to randomly review completed computer-delivered graphic solutions for quality assurance and accuracy. Obviously, multiple-choice divisions are much simpler to grade; standard Thomson Prometric computer programs are used for those divisions.

Many ARE candidates want to know why, if the ARE is computer-based and computer graded, it takes so long to obtain their results. There are two reasons. First, while we have the most sophisticated test, we also have a very small number of people testing compared to other professional examinations—35,000 ARE divisions a year versus more than 200,000 divisions for an examination such as nursing. We are not able to grade each individual exam as it is taken.