

Crossing Firm Boundaries—Enhancing the IDP Experience

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SUMMARY

Lisa Burkholder, Assoc. AIA, and Tami Mullenix, AIA, describe the challenges they faced in earning IDP credits and the methods they employed to organize a study group. As a result of the study group, all members finished their IDP credits, and as of January 2007, most have completed their ARE divisions. Here the authors describe the group's process and the benefits of group study.

THE BIRTH OF A STUDY GROUP

We are part of a group of six intern architects who work at four different firms in the same city. During occasional lunch meetings, many of us reported facing similar challenges in our efforts to earn the necessary Intern Development Program (IDP) credits. We decided to form a study group to help each other deal with some of those challenges.

Some of the topic areas came easy; others proved much more difficult. Since our difficulties were similar, we sought out alternative methods for the more difficult credits. This is how we discovered the then-titled "supplementary education credits."

THE BENEFITS OF SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION

At first, the thought of adding supplementary education to our IDP studies appeared overwhelming. However, once we started studying together as a group, we found supplementary education to be a beneficial learning tool.

To start, the six of us formed an *AIA Supplementary Education Handbook* study group. This tool offered each of us the opportunity to earn 149.5 training units—or nearly 20 percent of the training units required to complete the IDP. Today, an online resource—the *Emerging Professional's Companion* (EPC, available at www.EPCCompanion.org)—has replaced the *Handbook*. An intern can receive up to 225 training units using the EPC, nearly one-third, or the equivalent of one year's worth of IDP.

This sounded pretty easy and a little too good to be true, but we were excited about the possibilities it

presented: just do the activities, get the credit, and potentially knock six months off the required time before taking the nine Architect Registration Examination (ARE) divisions. Although the exercises turned out to be more challenging and time-consuming than we anticipated, incorporating them into our internship experience was well worth it.

THE STUDY GROUP PROCESS

The six of us met one night a week to work on predetermined exercises. To increase efficiency, we developed an outline to clarify the group's completion goals and listed what each person needed to do to reach their projected completion date. We started with the sections the more experienced interns needed to finish to complete their IDP credits.

We chose a leader to assign roles for each activity; each group member compiled research on a specific aspect of a topic and led the discussion at the next meeting. During weekly two- to three-hour meetings, we worked through the sections we had researched beforehand, and we completed a few activities per meeting.

In working through each chapter, we were introduced to concepts that we did not address on a daily basis, including contracts, bid bonds, litigation, and professional ethics. The value of this process is that it prepared us for future experiences and, even more important, encouraged us to ask questions at work. We were able to initiate the learning process in areas to which we may otherwise have had no exposure.

To fully understand certain areas, group members brought up specific topics at work with principals and licensed architects. We would then share the insights we learned at work with the rest of the group and discuss how to ethically and professionally handle different situations. These conversations also shed light on how other firms handled similar situations. Also, our discussions about our individual internship experiences revealed that the role of an intern differs at each firm in terms of the types and levels of intern responsibilities.

Our study group afforded us exposure to situations that may have taken much longer to experience otherwise, which encouraged us to ask questions. We conducted interviews with various authority figures such as lawyers, insurance agents, and school superintendents. Even more importantly, we interviewed clients to better understand the public's perception of architects, which allowed us to market ourselves as highly involved, interested intern architects. Overall, we feel supplementary education allowed us to gain a wider knowledge base of the profession as a whole.

AFTER THE IDP

When we started the group, we were at different stages in the IDP process. Eventually, our six-person group divided into two study groups: IDP Handbook and ARE Preparation. When the three members finished their IDP training requirements, they rejoined the other three members to begin exam preparation. Currently, all the members have fulfilled their IDP requirements, so ARE Preparation is our primary focus-

The group continues to meet weekly at the local library and review topics based on which ARE division each person is taking next. We are all glad we formed this group, not only for the study help but also for the support system it created. It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the licensing process.

News about the new *Emerging Professional's Companion* and its advantages is spreading. We have helped several firms across the state form similar study groups. Although these groups are in their formative stages, they tell us that they already see the advantages of working together through the internship process.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Tami Mullenix joined FEH Associates in May 2002 as an Intern Architect after graduating top of her class from Iowa State University's architecture program. In 2006, she successfully completed her NCARB certification. Currently, she is serving a two-year appointment to the National IDP Coordinating Committee. Lisa Burkholder is an intern architect at MPlus Architects in Sioux City, Iowa.

RESOURCES

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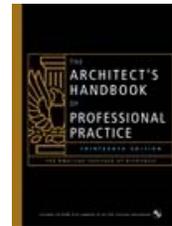
The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 03.02.07 New York Program Goes "Beyond IDP" for Exploring Mentoring
- 03.02.11 Making a Match: Formal Mentorship Requires Goals and Guidelines
- 03.02.12 Carrier Johnson: A Commitment to IDP

For More Information on This Topic

See also "Staff Development" by Laurie Dreyer-Hadley and Kathleen C. Maurel, Assoc. AIA, in *The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice, 13th edition*, Chapter 9, page 242.

See also the 14th edition of the *Handbook*, which can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by email at bookstore@aia.org.



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