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A CORA Position Paper

Architecture Imperiled

The majority of architects in America have been ill-served by the institutions that support and regulate our profession. The American Institute of Architects often promotes membership over service, self-recognition over relevance and words over action. In academia and journalism, style and image are too often valued over substance and use. Government has eroded the recognition of our profession's authority and its unique role in preserving the safety, efficiency and beauty of construction.

This loss of credibility has occurred over the last generation and has imperiled our practice with disastrous consequences in the current economic crisis.

Our Crisis of Credibility and Its Impact

This collective abrogation has threatened the historic role of architects as the voice of reason and insight in construction and compromised our worth to the common culture.

The act of licensure itself has become a test of perseverance rather than reflective of excellence. The wide disparity among state requirements, especially with regard to continuing education, trivializes the legal recognition of our status as society's agents of safety, utility and beauty in building design. Licensure is now conditioned on continuing professional education that primarily serves as a profit center for the institutions that sanction them, often providing programs of dubious value.

The dissipation of our credibility has been exacerbated by the parallel system of professional accreditation – LEED certification. Architects have always been the leaders in enacting, promoting and innovating sustainable design principals and licensure should reflect that.

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As architects have become increasingly marginalized in influence and worth to our culture, neither academia nor journalism has supported the historic role of the profession as a consistent voice of value in construction. Rather than provide exposure of social relevance and innovative engagement, these beacons and mirrors of our profession remain focused on a cult of personalities and abstract formal expression. Promoting an exclusive orthodoxy, these previously objective platforms for diversity, contextual influences and craft position the profession of architecture as an elitist endeavor - a disastrous image in a time of economic distress.

Not surprisingly, all levels of government have responded to society's increasing perception of our profession's irrelevancy by creating an ever-tightening web of regulatory oversight. The perceived incapacity of architects to provide holistic, relevant building design has allowed government to sanction alternatives to the use of licensed architects.

A Call to Action

There are concrete positions that can re-establish our credibility in a time when our society has questioned the value of all goods and services. We propose the following reforms and reinventions be enacted by the institutions cited:

- 1) That all states recognize licensed architects as critical to the regulatory approvals of any construction requiring a building permit, including houses.
- 2) That alternative forms of practice across related professions be encouraged by academia and institutions that support our profession, such as the AIA.
- 3) That Continuing Education or Professional Practice Certification requirements be administered only by institutions accredited to confer professional degrees in architecture or by NCARB with consistent national standards applicable across all states, and that a minimum commitment of pro bono professional practice, teaching, or mentoring be required for continued licensure.
- 4) That all licensed architects be conferred legal status equivalent to LEED certification as part of their licensure, with NCARB, NAAB, and the AIA working together to promote and provide equivalent sustainability standards in all present legal, policy and regulatory recognitions of LEED certification.
- 5) That the NAAB include a base curriculum requirement for school accreditation that requires mentoring, internship and building experience of students with licensed architects in the tradition of apprenticeship before a professional degree is conferred.
- 6) That the AIA re-allocate its national budget to facilitate regional gatherings, versus national, by streamlining its headquarters staff and downsizing its national committee structure.
- 7) That all institutions that support our profession, including the AIA and its local chapters, recognize residential architecture as a unique discipline and dedicate an appropriate portion of their budget to that effort.
- 8) That diversity of stylistic focus be prioritized in academic curricula as outlined by the NAAB, journalistic publication criteria as evidenced in calls for projects and editorial policy, and by all AIA competitions.

It is imperative that this message has the greatest ability to effect change when it is presented at the AIA National Convention in June, and we seek your support. Therefore, we ask you to endorse this message

by sending Duo Dickinson an email at duo.dickinson@snet.net as soon as possible. With your help, we can affect change to the larger, less responsive organizations that represent us.

We need to hear from you as soon as possible, so please e-mail Duo with your thoughts, questions or comments.

Respectfully,

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