

## FACE OF THE AIA

## What's in a Name?

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**Summary:** How many times have you seen the term “Intern Architect” used by employers, employees, AIA components, or NCARB? Did you know that this term is not legally defined or allowed in almost half of the states? Many articles have been written on the subject suggesting that it is time to institute an industry-wide title change. Among them is an article entitled, “**Let Them be Architects,**” by Erin Nunes Cooper, AIA, in the December 8, 2006, *AIArchitect*. Cooper states: “Professionals on the path to licensure can and do make real contributions to the field of architecture.”



Certainly we must all agree that the profession's future success depends in large part on how well we train and support the next generation of architects. These emerging professionals should therefore be recognized with a title more fitting of the value that they bring to the table.

As the IDP State Coordinator for Oklahoma, I regularly speak to groups of interns and practitioners around our state. Part of my stump speech is a reminder about what interns can and cannot call themselves. Without fail, someone in the group I'm talking with is surprised to hear me say that interns in our state cannot use any form of the word “architect” in their title. Although the rules and regulations are clear, the confusion persists.

Following a recent conversation with a group of young architects and interns, I decided to do some research so that I could adequately explain the situation to the AIA components in our state. Of the

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## REFERENCE

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54 jurisdictions that are members of NCARB, more than 20 prohibit any use of the word “architect” in describing a job title for anyone who does not hold a license. This means that interns in these states or territories cannot use a title such as “intern architect” or “architectural intern.” The rest of the states and territories allow the use of either of these terms or some suitable alternative (“architect-in-training” for example).

Support for the idea of a more suitable title for interns exists in the form of a documented statement published by the AIA. Position Statement 13 reads:

***Use of the Title Architect and Its Derivatives:*** “The AIA supports protecting the public by reserving the use of the term “architect” and its derivative forms to those individuals licensed as architects. In addition, the AIA supports the use of “architectural intern” or “intern architect” for graduates of NAAB-accredited degree programs.”

### **Toward a better title**

Clearly, the AIA is supportive of affording interns a better name. As we all know, however, the decision ultimately rests with each individual licensing authority. With the standardization of IDP and the ARE used to qualify a candidate, why shouldn't there be a uniformly accepted title for interns in all states?

The AIA National Associates Committee has spent a lot of time and effort studying this question. The NAC created a blog to give room for the discussion to take place. After having read many of the numerous entries in the [NAC blog](#), I can say with confidence, and not a lot of surprise, that this is a volatile subject. Scattered in the mix of hurt pride, feelings of resentment, and sense of entitlement, however, are some serious statements on identity and protection of the profession. People generally either hate the idea of allowing an “architectural” modifier to the title intern because they believe it is in some way diminishing the role of the architect, or they strongly believe that not allowing a better title is in some way disrespecting the intern.

Certainly, by allowing an intern to use some form of the word “architect” in describing their chosen career, the connection to the profession would be much clearer to those who would not otherwise understand what “intern” means. I know from my own experience as a former “intern,” it always felt as if something was missing from that title.

### **Does it affect HSW?**

As a licensed architect and a firm principal, I still believe this and suggest that a suitable transition title—something between student and licensed practitioner—is not only deserved, but appropriate. At the end of the day, the underlying question that must be answered is: Does calling an intern an “architectural intern” or “intern architect” in any way jeopardize the health, safety, and welfare of the public? My answer to this is a resounding “No.”

Interns, whatever their title, still cannot independently provide all services required of a licensed architect. They cannot enter into contracts, they cannot

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sign and seal drawings, and they cannot make decisions about life safety without the direct supervision of a licensed professional. The safety net is in place, and that net is the architect who is exercising responsible control. Changing the intern's title does nothing to alter that responsibility and accountability.

**who is exercising  
responsible control.**

What's in a name? The question is: What's not in the name that should be?

Join **the discussion** and offer your thoughts on a title change for interns.