
THE INTERIOR DESIGN EXPERIENCE PROGRAM: HIGHLIGHTING THE NEED

*Buie Harwood, FIDEC, Honorary FASID, CID/VA, NCIDQ #013256
Professor Emeritus, Interior Design, VCUArts
IDEC Historian & Chair, IDEC 50th Anniversary Task Force*

The Interior Design Experience Program (IDEP) developed from an important need in the interior design profession. In 1990, there were no universal or standardized guidelines, no approved structure, and no evaluation process for professional interior design work experience at the entry level. And, many design professionals did not understand or value the requirements needed for this type of program. This missing experience link was a crucial component in the sequence of education, experience, and examination in the interior design career path. Requirements in the interior design career path were supposed to provide a system for evaluating the quality, responsibility, and ability of a person to meet minimum standards and guidelines for professional competency and development” (Harwood, 1995, p.44).

At the same time, all requirements in the career path were under scrutiny in the legal registration (licensing) arena. FIDER (formed in 1971; now CIDA) addressed educational requirements in both two-year and first professional degree level programs, but there was no accepted minimal educational standard for legal registration. NCIDQ (formed in 1974; administers the interior design qualification examination) evaluated

work experience requirements for examination candidates, but there were no approved universal experience guidelines to follow, and there was great diversity in candidate backgrounds. NCIDQ also coordinated legal registration efforts for the interior design profession, which throughout the 1980s, highlighted concerns about “the responsibility and qualifications of interior designers to make decisions regarding the health, safety, and welfare of the general public” (Harwood, 1995, p. 39). Additionally, “licensing boards either accepted the NCIDQ experience requirements or developed their own often without research or universal agreement between the boards” (Harwood, 1995, p. 45).

It was generally recognized by leaders in the interior design associations and licensing coalitions in North America that the public needed to be assured that anyone using a title or having a professional license had the appropriate qualifications. Because of these missing requirements and qualifications, architects and others in the licensing arena were challenging the substance and quality of the interior design career path, causing great concern among members of professional interior design associations.

The concept of a monitored work experience program in interior design was 1) recommended in 1975 in the ASID Report of the Internship Task Force; 2) identified in 1984 by professional leaders in The 1995 Hypothesis; 3) proposed in August 1988 by the FIDER Board of Trustees for graduates with a first professional degree level education; 4) approved in September 1988 by the Interior Design Issues Forum; 5) endorsed in December 1988 by constituent associations of FIDER; and 6) unanimously endorsed in May 1989 by the major interior design associations in North America. By the end of 1989, it was clear that an entry-level apprenticeship program was important to the professional practice community.

Eventually turf wars for professional recognition and project work resulted in a formal letter of agreement on title registration between the architectural and interior design professions (Harwood, 1995, p. 47). In December 1989, the Accord Agreement on interior design title registration was signed between ASID, IBD, ISID (IBD and ISID later merged to help form IIDA), and the American Institute of Architects (AIA). One of the requirements for legal registration stipulated in the agreement was

the development of a monitored internship program.

Consequently, interior design association leaders, on behalf of their associations, initiated a research study to define the need for an entry-level work experience program and to develop it. By 1991, a few interior design organizations had appointed research team members that included Dianne Jackman representing FIDER as past Chair, Ron Veitch representing IDEC as past President, and the author representing NCIDQ as past President. These selections were supported by the other association leaders. Because of our previous leadership roles, we had a good perspective on how to connect education and examination together in the career path to arrive at the IDEP solution. We also were committed to what we were doing on behalf of the profession, were excited about doing it, were tenacious in our team discussions, and were stubborn enough to stand up to the pressure of dissension.

We first prepared a proposal for the development of an entry-level apprenticeship program in interior design, which we named the Interior Design Experience Program (IDEP). The objectives for the program were: “1) to bridge the gap between formal education and competent professional practice; 2) to link the process of educational accreditation by FIDER with that of professional examination by NCIDQ; and 3) to address the need for quality experience required of NCIDQ candidates, by licensing boards, and by interior design associations” (Harwood, 1995, p. 47). This concept was fully endorsed by all major interior design

organizations. The stated purpose of IDEP “was to provide a structured training program for entry-level interior designers through a monitored, salaried work experience in preparation for professional qualification” (Harwood, 1995, p. 48). The program concept would parallel that of the Intern Development Program (IDP) offered by the architects, “so there could be immediate recognition and acceptance of its value to the design professions” (Harwood, 1995, p. 48).

The research program had three stages: 1) investigation through research, 2) development of the program and its content, and 3) development of the operational structure for implementation. We spent four years conducting the research, compiling the information, and submitting the final research report to NCIDQ. Then it took NCIDQ almost five more years to implement the program. And, it took even longer for the profession to finally fully accept and participate in IDEP. But, as the interior design profession has moved forward and its career path has been recognized, IDEP has proven to be a vital link in its “system for evaluating the quality, responsibility, and ability of a person to meet minimum standards and guidelines for professional competency and development” (Harwood, 1995, p.44). So, our efforts were definitely worth the legacy.

For additional reference, please see:

1. Harwood, B. (1995). An Interior Design Experience Program, Part 1: Defining the Need. *Journal of Interior Design*, 21(2): 39-51.
2. Harwood, B. (1996). An Interior Design Experience Program, Part 2: Developing the Experiences. *Journal of Interior Design*, 22 (1): 15-31.