

The following commentary is based on a paper delivered by Stuart Meck, AICP, of APA's Research Department at the International Conference on the Certification of Planners, Shanghai, China, June 9-11, 1998. The conference was co-sponsored by the City Planning Department of the Ministry of Construction, People's Republic of China, Tongji University in Shanghai, and the Shanghai Urban Planning Admin-

istration Bureau. The conference, which drew planners and academics from 30 provinces in China, and planners from Great Britain, Hong Kong, and the U.S., was intended to provide Chinese planners with perspectives on implementing a national certification system, a goal for 1999 for the national Ministry of Construction and Ministry of Personnel. See "AICP in China," 64 *Planning* No. 8 (August 1998) at 32.

Certification, Licensing, and Registration of Planners

By Stuart Meck, AICP

Perhaps no other issue prompts as much raging professional debate and strong opinion in the U.S. as whether planners should be subjected to an independent assessment and affirmation of their knowledge and skills through certification, licensing, or registration systems. Will planners get more respect from their colleagues in the design (architecture, landscape architecture, and engineering) and legal¹ professions if they are somehow officially "recognized"? Once planners are so recognized, will interprofessional nitty-gritties be resolved and will turf battles then end? Will communities consequently get better, more rigorously developed and legally defensible plans? And will the public interest be served?

A few definitions are in order. "Certification" refers to a nongovernmental mechanism by which an organization recognizes individuals as having met certain criteria or possessing certain knowledge (measured through an examination) associated with a profession. The American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), a professional institute of the American Planning Association (APA), certifies planners.² "Licensing" is a term that describes statutory control over the right of individuals to practice a profession or engage in an occupation. New Jersey is the only state that licenses planners. "Registration" is statutory control over the use of a title associated with a particular occupation or profession. Michi-

gan is the only state that registers planners. Licensing and registration are common in certain design professions such as engineering, architecture, landscape architecture, and even interior design.

This commentary discusses the American experience with such systems, the development and nature of the AICP certification process, the structure of the state licensing and registration boards, and the manner and scope of state examinations. It concludes with some observations concerning when certification, licensing, or registration are or are not desirable.

CERTIFICATION

AICP was created when the former American Society of Planning Officials (ASPO, established in 1934) and the American Institute of Planners (AIP, established in 1917 as the American City Planning Institute) merged in 1978 to form the American Planning Association. The purpose of the merger, among other things, was to blend the strictly professional and academic perspective of AIP (which had chapters in many states) with the special perspective of ASPO, a national organization concerned with both professional issues and issues, such as training, relevant to elected and nonelected nonprofessional planning officials. AICP's creation was intended to maintain the professional presence within APA through a certification examination, continuing education, and adherence by certified planners to a separate code of ethics and professional conduct (with the prospect of disciplinary action for violating the code).

Up until 1976, AIP administered a special oral examination to persons who wanted to become members. In order to take the examination, a candidate had to be currently engaged in professional planning, have been an associate member of the institute for at least two years prior to the examination (unless AIP waived this requirement based on education and experience), and have completed a combination of education and experience. For example, you could take the examination with two years of experience and a graduate degree from an AIP-recognized planning program or with four years of experience and a graduate degree from a planning program that was not recognized by AIP.

The oral examination was conducted by a three-person panel of examiners (the author took the oral examination in

Stuart Meck is principal investigator for the American Planning Association in Chicago on its GROWING SMARTSM project, a long-term effort to draft the next generation of model planning and zoning legislation for the United States. He is a licensed professional planner in the State of New Jersey and registered professional community planner in the State of Michigan. He has 27 years of experience as a planner. The author thanks Megan Lewis, AICP, a research associate in APA's Research Department, for her judicious review and editing of the original draft of this commentary.

1. For a discussion of some of the boundary issues between planners and attorneys related to the unauthorized practice of law, see Mark Bobrowski, *Planners and Lawyers: Toward a Division of Labor*, 1991 *PLANNING AND ZONING HANDBOOK*, Ch. 3.

2. The AICP Commission has eight members elected by ballot from the institute's membership and who are also APA members: a president, a president-elect or past president, and six commissioners who are selected from districts that include various states as well as foreign countries. Membership in AICP was 10,108 in March 1998.

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1974). The panel included one planning practitioner, one academic, and one member of the AIP Membership Committee. The examinee was encouraged to review a list of AIP-recommended readings that attempted to account for the diversity of approaches to comprehensive planning.

The four questions were as follows:

- (1) "Discuss the comprehensive planning process in general." This question was based on the reading list.
- (2) "Explain how your area of concentration relates to the other substantive elements of the planning process." Examinees were allowed to select one of 12 areas of concentration, including planning law, transportation planning, urban design, and economic planning.
- (3) "Explain the kinds of public policies and programs which might be effective in directing or influencing change with reference to your specialization."
- (4) "Analyze critically one of five quotations which reflect important current issues in your field of concentration." The quotations were provided to the examinee at the time of the test. The examinee was asked to relate this quotation to the comprehensive planning process.

The oral examination took about one hour. It was tape-recorded and then reviewed by the AIP National Membership Standards Committee to make certain there were no irregularities. The examination was very similar in tone and style to a defense of a thesis or dissertation, with some fairly rigorous probing by the three examiners (as this paper's author recalls). It required preparation and outlining of the answers by the examinee. Each AIP state chapter had a committee that was responsible for screening and counseling applicants for the examination.

One account of the AIP examination by John Mullin, AICP, a professor of planning at the University of Massachusetts, was that it was like being "examined by a jury of 'grand old men' . . . traumatizing [but also] a bit like being ordained [like a minister]." Mullin observed that while the oral examination was "clearly subject to the biases of the examiners," there was something to be gained by confronting a jury of one's peers and convincing them of one's worth. See M.A. Heideman, "Professional Planning Credentials: What AICP and PCP Mean to Michigan's Planning Community," *Planning and Zoning News* (Lansing, Michigan, April 1993) at 6.

Nonetheless, the oral examination was discontinued by AIP about a year or so before the merger, in large measure because of questions over its objectivity and ability to test planning knowledge fairly. For example, if two examiners were your professional enemies or tedious academics who simply liked to debate—rare as this is in the planning field!—you could expect a fairly rough oral examination. Some planners felt that to pass the oral examination you had to be part of a "good old boy" network of older, more conservative planners who shared similar values and perspectives. Except for a one-year period of "grandfathering" immediately after the merger, AICP has administered a multiple-choice, written examination since 1979.

The examination is overseen by an Examination Specifications Committee, a standing committee of AICP, and administered by the Educational Testing Service, a private organization based in New Jersey. The committee has five AICP members,

appointed by the president of AICP, with an additional AICP member from and appointed by the New Jersey Board of Professional Planners. The members serve four-year terms and represent private, public, and academic perspectives.

The committee meets every other year, reviews the outline of subject matter on the examination, and writes new questions to add to the pool (although any AICP member can propose questions). AICP periodically administers a job analysis survey that helps it determine what activities and functions planners are actually performing on the job, what skills they employ, and which functions and skills they regard as the most important. This survey helps the committee develop additional questions.

AICP has two other committees that assist in the examination's administration. There is an Exam Review Committee that consists of AICP Commissioners who take the exam themselves and suggest improvements to it. In addition, there is an Exam Maintenance Task Force that actually reviews new and revised questions in the final draft of the examination before they are added to the test. The task force meets twice a year in the Washington, D.C., area. The members also review problem questions flagged by the Educational Testing Service after each administration of the examination.

The examination is given each May at various testing centers around the U.S. Examinees must meet AICP's current education and skill requirements in order to sit for it. See Appendix. A number of APA's chapters hold examination preparation sessions, and typically there is an examination preparation session at APA's annual national planning conference. In addition, each chapter has a position known as "professional development officer," an AICP member whose job is to counsel applicants for the examination. The Chapter Presidents Council, which represents the 46 chapters in APA, also publishes an examination preparation manual that contains sample examination questions as well as essays that provide overviews of the various topics that the examination covers. AICP is developing its own training program to aid in preparing to take the examination (but is not giving away any of the answers).

Some 1,000 to 1,300 people sit for the examination, which has a pass rate of around 70 percent. After the examination is given, AICP surveys the examinees for comments about the test. Test-takers are not bashful about making known their feelings about the quality and relevance of the questions, the examination preparation manual available from the Chapter Presidents Council, and the degree of preparation required to pass the examination. These responses are taken seriously by AICP.

In the May 1997 examination, 265 test-takers returned the evaluation form. See box, Comments on the AICP Examination on page 5. Of that number, 176 (66 percent) thought the examination questions were representative of the basic skills and knowledge areas required for the practice of city and regional planning, 75 (28 percent) said they did not, and the remainder, 14 (around 6 percent), had no response.

The majority of test-takers (189 or 71 percent) said that there were quite a few areas that were underrepresented on the examination, including legal aspects of planning, planning history, review of subdivisions, physical design, and zoning. A similar majority of test-takers (153, or 58 percent) pointed to overrepresentation of questions on geographic information

Comments on the AICP Examination

- ◆ "I believe the examination is biased toward large metropolitan planning departments."
- ◆ "A passing grade might qualify one as an able bureaucratic but not as a skilled planner."
- ◆ "Too much of the exam was slanted toward the area of management, which is beneficial to the small majority who happen to be employed with experience at the managerial level. Not enough questions were devoted to the day-to-day activities of general planners."
- ◆ "Basically the test seemed to focus on decision-making ability and proper managerial skills. But a lot of the answers seemed to be splitting hairs."
- ◆ "The exam seemed to be [weighted heavily toward] economic analysis and theories of office management. These should continue to be part of the examination, but most city planning agencies don't practice these on a regular basis for line employees."

Source: American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), "May 1997 AICP Examination Responses" (1997, unpublished internal report).

systems, economics, political bias and public participation, budgeting, the planning process, management styles, and housing (including questions on the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development). Many of the test-takers criticized the style of the examination, which uses "scenario" or "story" questions in which a fact situation is presented and a number of questions are based on the situation.

One examinee concluded: "The AICP exam seems to be a moving target."

NEW JERSEY: LICENSURE OF PLANNERS

In New Jersey, the practice of planning is subject to a state-wide licensing law.³ The state Board of Professional Planners, consisting of five professional planners, oversees the licensing process for professional planners (PP). It also issues certificates for planners-in-training, who are potential candidates for a license and who meet certain educational and/or experience requirements. The statute describes the practice of planning as:

the administration, advising, consultation or performance of professional work in the development of master plans in accordance with the provisions [of the state statutes] . . . and other professional planning services related thereto intended primarily to guide governmental policy for the assurance of the orderly and co-ordinated development of municipal, county, regional, and metropolitan land areas, and the State or portions thereof. . .⁴

3. The law governing planners in New Jersey appears at *NEW JERSEY STATUTES ANNOTATED*, Title 45, Chapter 14A (1997). The administrative rules governing the operation of the State Board of Professional Planners appear at *NEW JERSEY ADMINISTRATIVE CODE*, Title 13, Chapter 41 (1997).

4. *N.J. STAT. ANN.*, Sec. 45:14A-2(c). The statute also adds that "[t]he work of the professional planner shall not include or supersede any of the duties of an attorney at law, a licensed professional engineer, land surveyor or registered architect of the State of New Jersey." *Id.*

Candidates for licenses must satisfy a combination of education and experience requirements. For example, a person with a graduate planning degree must have a minimum of three years of full-time practice in professional planning. The examination, according to the statute, must cover: (1) the history of urban, rural, and regional planning; (2) fundamental theories, research methods, and common basic standards in professional planning; (3) administrative and legal problems, instruments, and methods; (4) current planning design and techniques; and (5) planning law, procedures, and practices as contained in the New Jersey Municipal Law Use Law, which governs planning in local government. *See N.J. STAT. ANN.* § 45:14A-9(c).

The New Jersey Board uses the AICP written examination to test for general planning knowledge. In addition, applicants must pass a separate multiple-choice examination to test for knowledge of New Jersey statutes, including those on state, county, and municipal planning, wetlands, affordable housing, and land-use regulation in coastal areas and certain environmentally sensitive areas. The state board provides applicants with a list of statutes and administrative regulations on which they are to be tested.

One impact of the statute is that the state and its political subdivisions may employ or appoint licensed professional planners only for work with the title or job classification of professional planner. Moreover, if you hold a license as a professional planner it is not necessary to take additional civil service examinations for the position in government. Licensed professional planners are required to use an embossing seal on planning documents and maps and to affix their signatures to them in order to demonstrate personal responsibility for their work when it is submitted to public authorities.

Enactment of the statute was initiated by a group of New Jersey planners in 1957 and submitted to friendly legislators for consideration.⁵ One motivation was a feeling on the part of planners that the introduction of such a bill would give them official status and recognition, a justification that is common to other professions seeking registration or licensure. Also at the time the federal government made funds available to local governments for comprehensive planning under Section 701 of the Federal Housing Act of 1954; many planners therefore felt that, by establishing licensing, local governments could be assured that the persons they employed to undertake planning activities were qualified (and that they would get the consulting contracts or the employment). Finally, there were attacks by other professionals, such as engineers, claiming that planners were intruding into their professional territory. New Jersey planners believed that by defining what planning entailed, the profession could protect itself from these attacks (although it is not clear that these attacks were widespread or the problem was serious).

The bill was introduced in 1958, but it was opposed by professional engineers, registered architects, and land sur-

5. The account of the enactment of and litigation over the New Jersey licensing law was provided by Harvey Moskowitz, AICP, a planning consultant in New Jersey and former president of the New Jersey Board of Professional Planners. "New Jersey's Planning Licensing Law: A Suggested Course of Action," (speech given to the New Jersey Chapter of the American Planning Association, 1978, unpublished).

veyors, who felt it was an attempt by a small group of planners to intrude into their work and take away some of their business. Efforts to enact the bill languished for several years. In 1962, a bill was passed which, while establishing a separate board of professional planners, provided for the *automatic* licensing of professional engineers, registered architects, and land surveyors as planners, *without* taking the parts of the examination on general planning knowledge or on New Jersey laws and regulations.

The New Jersey Chapter of the American Institute of Planners sued to set aside the offending part of the statute on the theory that in providing for automatic licensing of the nonplanner professionals, the law did not have a rational relationship to the intent of the act to protect the public from incompetent planning and was therefore invalid. A trial court judge heard the case in 1966, agreed with that argument, and found the provision unconstitutional on federal and state grounds.⁶

While the planners won at the trial court level, the New Jersey Supreme Court reversed the lower court's decision, upholding the statute in 1966; there was a subsequent appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, which refused to hear the case on the grounds that it did not present a substantial federal question on which it could rule. See *New Jersey Chapter of the American Institute of Planners v. New Jersey State Board of Professional Planners*, 227 A.2d 313 (N.J. 1967), *cert. denied*, 389 U.S. 8 (1967). The law remained unchanged for many years, even though professional planners complained that it was unfair to them.

Ultimately the licensing law was amended in 1991 to require that licensed engineers, landscape architects, surveyors, and registered architects could practice planning as described in the act, but could not hold themselves out as professional planners. Today, if any of those design professionals wants to obtain a license as a professional planner, there is a requirement to pass *only* the part of the examination on New Jersey planning laws, but *not* the AICP examination on general planning knowledge.

MICHIGAN: REGISTRATION OF PLANNERS

Many of the same concerns that New Jersey planners had also caused planners in the state of Michigan to seek enactment of a statute providing for the registration of the title "professional community planner" (PCP) in 1966.⁷ According to one account, a Michigan planner was threatened with litigation for practicing engineering without a license by preparing population projections (certainly an odd charge). An attorney reportedly charged another planner with practicing law without a license by preparing the text of a zoning

ordinance. Heideman, *supra* at 7. In addition, the Michigan registration law was enacted in a era of plentiful federal funds for local comprehensive planning. Planners in Michigan were concerned about competing with other design professionals for consulting contracts in that state.

The statute provides that a registered community planner "may engage in the preparation of the comprehensive community plan including the preparation of planning studies which assist in the preparation or the implementation of the comprehensive community plan." MICH. COMP. LAWS § 339.2304(1). It defines a "comprehensive community plan" as "a unified document of text, charts, graphics, or maps, or combination of texts, charts, graphics, or maps, designed to portray general, long-range proposals for the arrangement of land uses and which is intended primarily to guide government policy toward achieving orderly and coordinated development of the entire community." MICH. COMP. LAWS § 339.2301(c). A registered community planner is required to place a seal upon the work for which he or she is responsible.

The statute has experience and education requirements. A candidate for registration must be of good moral character and shall have at least six years of planning experience in the type of work necessary for the preparation or implementation of comprehensive community plans, not less than two years of which have been in the United States. Only two years of planning experience is mandatory and certain degrees, like a doctorate or a master's degree in planning, can count for four years' credit. MICH. COMP. LAWS § 339.2306.

Candidates for registration must pass a two-part examination, the first part of which is the AICP test and the second part a test on Michigan laws and regulations and on certain aspects of site planning and physical design. At one time, the Michigan-specific part of the examination included an elaborate seven-hour physical design problem. As this author recalls his examination in 1987, the requirement was to prepare a land-use and transportation plan for a city with a projected population of 40,000 in an area of four square miles and to write a narrative and analysis that provided the rationale and calculations (land-use density and intensity) for the selected design. This was an effort that required a huge amount of black coffee, many Prismacolor markers (not cheap), and much tracing paper. The candidate's design solution was reviewed by a jury consisting of three members of the registration board and three practitioners not on the board. According to a former Michigan board member, Mary Ann Heideman, "jury members could not agree among themselves about what constituted a passing design examination," and the requirement was dropped in 1991. Heideman, *supra* at 8. Now physical planning skills are tested through objective questions requiring map reading, computation, and zoning ordinance interpretation.

The board of professional community planners oversaw the administration of the two-part examination until 1996, when the board was abolished and its function transferred by executive order of the Michigan governor to the Michigan Department of Consumer and Industry Services, which oversees other professional licensing functions (the department now uses a committee of PCPs to advise on the examination). Shortly before it was dissolved the board enacted, by administrative rule, standards of conduct for professional commu-

6. *New Jersey Chapter of the American Institute of Planners v. New Jersey State Board of Professional Planners*, Superior Court of New Jersey, Chancery Division, Mercer County, N.J., Docket No. C-2055-63, 1-26-66, Stenographic Transcript and Oral Determination (holding part of the act unconstitutional on federal and state due process and equal protection grounds in that it failed to protect the public against the consequences of incompetent planning), reversed by 48 N.J. 581, 227 A.2d 313 (1967), *appeal dismissed, cert. denied*, 389 U.S. 8 (1967).

7. Michigan's professional community planner statute appears at MICHIGAN COMPILED LAWS, Article 23 (1995). The law is implemented by the general rules of the Michigan Department of Consumer and Industry Services, Rule 339.20001 et seq. (1998).

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nity planners.⁸ For example, a registered community planner must fully disclose personal or financial interests in any project undertaken. A registered planner must not make exaggerated, false, misleading, or deceptive statements in advertising, brochures, or other written or verbal representations to clients or potential clients. A registered planner, thankfully, is prohibited from offering or accepting bribes. Moreover, the standards of conduct require the professional community planner's reports to be "objective and disclose all relevant factors, but [must be] restricted to the registrant's area of knowledge and judgment." Mich. Dept. of Consumer and Industry Services, Rule 339.20033(7). Further, the planner cannot allow his or her professional seal to be used on any work that was not prepared under the direct personal supervision of the planner (the professional seal contains the planner's name and registration number). A planner must "not knowingly prepare plans that endanger the public health or safety or that will result in property damage." *Id.* at Rule 339.20035(8). Violation of these rules can cause a loss or suspension of registration.

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSIONS

A Good Idea?

Is certification, licensing, or registration of planners a good idea? And, if it is, under what conditions? It is obviously a lot of work (including the energy of volunteers) to set up such a system. The increased popularity of the AICP examination and the increased membership in AICP appear to be due to several factors. Planners have come to regard the successful completion of the AICP examination as an essential rite of passage, a test of basic planning knowledge, something that your professional ego requires. There is nothing external forcing planners to take this voluntary examination, yet upward of 1,000 to 1,300 do so on an annual basis.

In addition, AICP certification may possibly make a difference in top-level hiring decisions, although one cannot be conclusive about this since there hasn't been a study on it. If a planning director or a city manager is contemplating hiring a planner and has a choice between an AICP-certified planner and a planner who is not certified, in all likelihood the AICP planner will have the benefit of the doubt, all other things being equal. City managers are a group that likes to avoid risk (in the author's experience). For them, having an independent entity like AICP indicate that a planner has passed a reasonably objective test of applied knowledge is a way that the risk in employing a new planner can be minimized. Passing the test means the planner knows something about planning and a city manager will never be criticized by elected officials and citizens for hiring someone who is skilled in planning—at least one would hope so. Indeed, frequently in advertisements carried in APA's *JobMart* publication (as well as other publications) you will find the phrase "AICP preferred," especially for higher-level jobs for planning directors or consultants.

APA's own research on planners' salaries indicates that AICP membership has a strong positive effect on salary. A

1995 Planning Advisory Service report by Marya Morris, AICP, indicates that, leaving all other variables aside, the median salary for AICP members was \$51,000, whereas the median for non-AICP members was \$40,000 and the median for all respondents was \$45,300. See M. Morris, *Planners' Salaries and Employment Trends, 1995*, Planning Advisory Service Report 464 (July 1996) at 10.

Problem: Defining Planning Practice

The fundamental problem that AICP has faced is defining what the practice of planning is and then trying to formulate test questions that assess knowledge of that practice. The complaints about the examination discussed above point out how difficult it is to formulate an examination that is both challenging and reflective of contemporary practice, without being too devious or ambiguous. People who serve on the AICP Test Maintenance Committee are often planners with substantial professional and managerial experience and who like to concoct difficult, perplexing questions that portray value-laden situations or tough issues that they are currently facing, in lieu of questions that address topics that an entry-level planner would expect to master to pass the examination. This seems to be a continuing, and understandable, problem with the test. The fact that the AICP examination appears to stress social, economic, ethical, and political issues and downplays matters of physical design, zoning, site planning, and the environment says a lot about the conflicts facing the practice of planning in the United States and what it takes to endure or be successful as a planner.

Setting Up a Certification System

What are the basic elements of a certification system? For those who might be considering establishing a certification system for planners (such as planners in the People's Republic of China), you agree first on a definition of what the scope of planning is and then put that definition in clear and succinct language. Next, one must agree on what skills and knowledge a planner must have to practice. Both of these tasks could be separate conferences in themselves! This decision should be based on a survey of what planners in the field are in fact doing, not what someone contends they are doing. You may wish to consult with planning academics to determine what courses and readings are being required. One must stress that planning is not an academic pursuit, however, but rather an applied system of skills and knowledge to solve thorny problems of community growth and change. Planning has been and will continue to be about the real world.

Once that is done, there must be a body established to oversee the preparation, administration, and revision of the examination. Some rules will be necessary, of course, but one seems especially important: If certification is to mean anything, *everyone* who is to be certified must take the examination. No one should be "grandfathered" just because they have been practicing for a while or are "elder statesmen" in the field. Without the rigor of the examination, certification will not have any legitimacy.

Similarly, the development of the examination should be reasonably open and democratic. The process by which questions are developed should have lots of checks and balances to ensure that the questions are fair and pertinent to the practice of planning. They cannot be just a means to

8. New Jersey has similar ethical requirements that affect conduct of planners and other licensed professionals. See generally N.J. STAT. ANN. § 45:1-21 (suspension or revocation of any certificate, registration, or license). See also N.J. ADMIN. CODE, § 13:41-2.1 (enumeration of prohibited acts by professional planners).

Taking the Michigan and New Jersey Planner Examinations

Here is an excerpt from an account by the author after taking the Michigan and New Jersey examinations in 1987 and 1989, respectively, that describes the difficulty the examination process presents for an out-of-state applicant:

The New Jersey test consists of 100 multiple-choice questions of state planning statutes, regulations, and state level plans. Unfortunately, roughly 10 percent of the examination dealt with two lengthy, complex statutes not cited in the list-of-references brochure provided by the board. Not knowing the statutes on which one is to be tested is disconcerting enough, but it is particularly so for out-of-state applicants who can't absorb planning laws by osmosis.

Michigan does the same thing. The 80-question examination covers state planning and economic development laws, regulations, and planning programs, state court decisions, and selected federal regulations. Candidates for registration must also

solve a . . . studio-type land-use design problem with supporting narrative [this requirement has since been dropped, as noted].

Approximately 10 percent of the questions on Michigan planning law concerned statutes, administrative problems, and practices that were not included in the exam brochure, and the instructions on the design problem were, quite frankly, incoherent.

I also learned that, despite authorization in their statutes, neither state has reciprocity with the other. Applicants must spend a considerable amount of time, I found, recertifying their qualifications to the board. Indeed, New Jersey mandates that, of the five required references, *three* must be licensed professional planners there, certainly a roadblock to out-of-state applicants with no buddies in New Jersey [emphasis in original].

Source: Stuart Meck, "Success Story," *Planning* 55, No. 12 (December 1989), at 36.

impose someone's pet social, economic, or physical design theory on the examinees, which can easily happen. Consequently, objective multiple-choice questions are preferred over essay questions and open-ended design problems. There should be a mechanism for test-takers to challenge and eliminate questions and answers that turn out to be dubious, deceptive, or just outdated;⁹ Indeed, sometimes you don't know until you give an examination which questions are really terrible.

It is desirable that there be a complementary program to assist and counsel younger planners prepare for and pass the examination through refresher courses, reading lists, manuals, and self-study. As noted above, this is a function that APA's chapters fulfill for AICP.

Finally, there must be a code of ethics to cover situations after professional certification as well as some type of continuing education, whether mandatory or optional, to ensure that practicing planners are continually exposed to new ideas.

About State Licensing and Registration

What about the concept of state licensing or registration as opposed to independent certification? In the U.S., there has not really been a public—as opposed to professional—outcry to license or register planners. The public is not overly alarmed over allegedly incompetent planning, at least not by planners themselves, and is not pushing for new regimes of professional regulation. We have enough of those systems now. Over the years, zealots have pushed licensing proposals in states like Florida and New York, but to date, both APA

and AICP members have been generally reluctant to support state-specific systems because of the potential for bureaucratic and professional abuse.

The motivations behind licensing or registration have had to do largely with conflicts between planners and other professionals—such as an engineer claiming a planner is invading his professional territory—or more often a desire to limit competition, to restrict the number of persons practicing in a state and thereby raise salaries and compensation. Restricting competition is not an appropriate public policy objective. With regard to controlling entry into a profession, licensing boards have the enormous (and unchallengeable) discretion to make it extraordinarily difficult to pass a state-specific examination by asking questions of such an exotic and abstruse nature that only someone who has long-term work experience in the state could answer the questions correctly. See box above, Taking the Michigan and New Jersey Planner Examinations.

AICP's Position on Licensing and Registration

In states where events or conditions make state licensing desirable (or inevitable), AICP's current policy, refined over a number of years, is that it will support its members to achieve licensing or registration of professional planners provided that: (1) the national AICP examination remains the basis for state licensing or registration for all applicants; (2) there is a written agreement between AICP and the state licensing or registration board setting terms for use of the AICP exam; (3) any supplemental examination administered by the state board shall be specific to planning practice in the state; (4) AICP members are not required to retake the national AICP examination for earning a state license or registration; and (5) state residency should not be required to attain or retain licensing or registration.¹⁰

10. AICP's policy—a very practical one—is the position that the author of this paper supports.

9. On the current AICP examination, there is a question about using a planimeter, a mechanical or electronic device for measuring area on a map. Few planners today use, much less recognize, a planimeter, since geographic information systems and computer-aided design programs will automatically calculate area. This is an example of a question that tests knowledge that is antiquated or of dubious importance.

Commentary

Apart from these circumstances, the American Institute of Certified Planners has refrained from advocating state licensing or registration of planners. It has preferred instead to have national certification through a national examination as the most appropriate means of attesting to planning competence. The increasing acceptance of the examination, as evidenced by the rising number of persons taking it, and the relatively few instances in which licensing or registration has surfaced in individual states over the past two decades, are a testament to the sensibility of the AICP approach.

Appendix: AICP Eligibility Requirements

When an applicant completes the AICP membership application, the following eligibility requirements must be met in order to take the written examination:

- Be a current member of the American Planning Association (APA);
- Be engaged in professional planning, either currently or in the past, as defined by AICP;
- Have completed, at the time of application submission, one of the combinations of education and corresponding years of professional planning experience listed in the chart below:

Qualifications Chart

Level of Education*	Total Years Professional Planning Experience Required
Accredited graduate degree in planning**	2
Accredited bachelor's degree in planning**	3
Non-accredited graduate degree in planning	3
Any other post-graduate, graduate, or undergraduate degree***	4
No college degree	8

*The education may be obtained before, during, or after the experience.

** Accredited degrees have been determined by the Planning Accreditation Board to meet standards approved by the American Institute of Certified Planners and the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning. AICP gives educational credit to applicants holding these degrees if the degree was received (1) during the period the university has been accredited (or previously recognized) and (2) by the time that an application for membership is filed.

*** Non-accredited undergraduate planning degrees and degrees in related and other disciplines (i.e. geography, architecture, history, music, etc.) at undergraduate and post-graduate levels.