

Thoughts on Professional Practice and Education

Article 3: Eliminate Experience Requirement for Licensing

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This is the third article I have prepared in a series giving thoughts on professional practice and education. This topic, I have no doubt, will leave blood on the walls – a metaphor only. I will have good friends that take issue with some of my thoughts. Old age allows opinions to be expressed in a manner that youth cannot do or does so inappropriately. When I was young, I often cared what people thought of my opinions. Having reached an old age, I have come to realize another person's opinion about me has never paid a single bill I owed. Living to an old age allows friends to mature and enemies to be cultivated.

I will not give a long discourse on my experience, education, and practice. Suffice to say my first of many survey licenses was achieved in 1978 before many that will read this article were born. I will even surmise that my last professional license, that of an attorney, was achieved before many readers of this article were born. I have seen and experienced much in my life that allows for many opinions.

In this missive I will touch the often-sensitive topic of experience requirements for the surveying program graduate. I will begin by stating I am not so much advocating for change as I am suggesting the profession consider changes. As is so often the case, the way a person did things in their past causes them to feel that way is the best way to do things in the future. I had six years of experience before obtaining my survey license. That is my story. Why isn't my way the best way in this case? Old age has taught me there is often a wide chasm between what was done and what should be done - what is wanted is not always what is needed.

I hoist the target as I once did forty years ago as a young Marine working the 'butts' at the rifle range. Here is the target: I suggest that experience not be required for licensing of a graduate of an accredited surveying program. There I have made my statement and shown the target. I can already hear the shots and bullets passing through my hoisted target from readers. Some reader is already writing to the editor stating in so many words, with heated passion, that my unsolicited advice is meddling and is not welcome. What is present, works. Perhaps that thought will be the consensus of most of those that read this article.

Why would I make such a statement? Surely as old as I am, I must recognize that experience has taught me far more than four years of surveying education, if not more. I must have learned important knowledge that was never available through education. My answer to both statements is a resounding 'yes.'

I must emphasize that important knowledge, complete knowledge, or extensive knowledge is not the purpose of licensing. Licensing's purpose is to protect the public. Licensing is to ensure the licensee has attained the minimum level of knowledge, established by the profession, that is thought necessary for competent practice.

Let us not fool ourselves in thinking two or four years of experience is a constant learning process for an individual. It is not. In many cases, experience is merely the repetition of a limited number of survey tasks repeated over many years. An individual that has spent four

years surveying urban lots has probably gained the extent of new knowledge after only three months of employment and after surveying one or two of their first urban lots.

Some readers will counter by claiming that rather than less experience, more detailed experience is required in the licensing application. The application would have to show various complexities and scope of services in order for experience to count. I would suggest that such specificity to experience qualifications will deny licensing for many individuals that work for small survey firms with limited clientele needs or individuals working for large firms that are slotted in specific services offered by the large firm. Such a move will further limit the number of licensees in our profession. The number of licensed surveyors is already suffering from a lack of new and younger licensees.

Back to my days in the Marines, I have cause to look at the large target over my head. There is a new hole from the shooter. The shooter states that my suggestion would allow someone to graduate, be licensed, and provide services to the public soon after graduation. Valuable property rights will be in jeopardy because services will be entrusted to the licensed surveyor without any experience. Incompetence will run unchecked within the profession. The professions' good reputation will collapse. Millions of dollars in property values will be jeopardized.

I think not. Over 34,000 lawyers graduate each year from law school. Every law school graduate can take the bar exam immediately following graduation. Within months of graduation every one that passes the bar exam can legally practice law. These new, inexperienced lawyers can prepare deeds, write estate plans, argue for clients in court, and so much more. Do they? Of course not. A very few perhaps but most work under the guidance of experienced practitioners. I expect the vast majority of surveyors licensed upon graduation after passing their exams will work for experienced surveyors. Very few would set up a practice on their own soon after graduation.

I could go on and shall do so only to beat this argument to reasonable size for some to swallow. There are over 14,000 pharmacists that graduate each year, are licensed after graduation and dispense controlled and potentially dangerous drugs. There are over 155,000 nurses that graduate each year and become licensed RNs mere weeks after graduation and make life and death health decisions for patients, dispensing drugs, taking care of injuries, and so on. There are over 10,000 officers commissioned each year without any prior experience in combat leadership that are placed in charge of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines or multi-million-dollar airplanes and make decision affecting lives in combat. (The Lord knows as a Marine sergeant I had my concerns about some new 2nd lieutenants.) I could go on with statistics and facts about ministers, doctors, dentists, cosmetologists, teachers, and other professions that allow graduates to have licenses soon after graduation. I believe I have made my point. Surveying and engineering are in a small minority of professions that continue to require experience in addition to their education before licensing.

So, what is wrong with requiring experience before licensing? I believe it hinders efforts to attract new members to our profession. For an eighteen-year-old high school graduate, the time it takes to obtain a four-year surveying degree along with four-years of relevant experience to become licensed as a surveyor is a long commitment. The high school graduate

can be a licensed engineer in the same time, or become a teacher, nurse, military officer, accountant, forester, electrician, and plumber four years sooner or a lawyer, doctor, dentist, pharmacists, minister, veterinarian, occupational therapist, and architect in one year less. Must the surveying profession erect barriers upon roads that few choose to travel anyway?

Having given my opinion, I now offer advice by suggesting the NCEES model law be changed to allow licensing with a four-year degree and state legislatures adopt this option. At the very least, states should allow graduates to take both their fundamentals of surveying and professional surveying exams near graduation allowing licensing as soon as experience has been achieved. Some licensing boards have already adopted this option. I will speak more on this latter option in a subsequent article.

† Other books and articles by Knud can be found at <https://umaine.edu/svt/faculty/hermansen-articles/>