

Thoughts on Professional Practice and Education

Article 9: Multiple Discipline Licenses and Certifications

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This is the ninth article I have prepared in the series offering thoughts on professional practice and education. In this article, I discuss multiple discipline licenses and certifications. Contrary to many of my other articles, I doubt there are opposing sides that wish to argue or advocate for or against what I write. Though I suppose there will always be one or two readers that may wish to dispute what I have written.

I use the term 'license' and the term 'certificate' to indicate separate and distinct achievements. As I will use these terms in this article, a license is an authorization to practice that is governed by a separate government board. Various state laws require a person have this authorization in order to provide some defined service to the public.

A certificate, on the other hand, is generally an accomplishment used to indicate some special knowledge, achievement, or skill set of the certificate holder. Many certifications are controlled by private or government organizations that have taken it upon themselves to exert knowledge or skilled based dominion over some special body of knowledge or skill. The necessity of having the certificate to provide a service is usually governed by private contract, local law, or agency regulation rather than state statute or mandatory regulation.

What I mean by multiple licenses or certifications is that the licensed surveyor is also licensed or certified in some other profession, specialty, practice, or trade. For example, in addition to my surveying license, I also hold licenses as a professional engineer and attorney at law.

I don't think multiple discipline licenses or certificates are always necessary. I do think other professional licenses and certifications can be helpful and profitable especially if connected to land surveying services. I would estimate that half the licensed surveyors that have practiced for ten or more years hold other professional licenses or certifications along with their survey license. I think a vast majority find their licenses and certifications useful and profitable. After all, if not useful or profitable, licenses and certifications can be dropped or relinquished.

Some of the most common licenses that are held by land surveyors in conjunction with their survey license include: professional engineer, forester, landscape architect, attorney, realtor, and septic system designer.

Certifications are more numerous and widespread among surveyors. Certifications that are popular among licensed surveyors include: photogrammetrist, wetlands specialist, notary, OSHA, federal surveyor, project manager, floodplain manager, drone operator, and hydrographer, to name a few. The term 'certification' is often attached to the name of the specialty, the entirety abbreviated, and placed after the surveyor license such as a certified floodplain manager (CFM) or certified federal surveyor (CFedS).

Additional licenses are not easy to obtain and often require extra college courses, additional degrees, experience, and testing. Though there are exceptions to this statement such as the licensed real estate agent (realtor). I am unaware of any state that offers a realtor degree though I would not be surprised to be informed of some university program that does offer such a degree. Thirty years in college teaching has shown a degree is easily initiated at an institution based on the attraction of the degree name among the inexperienced youth rather than the needs of society or demands of the society.

I am not going to discuss how to obtain two or more licenses in detail since state law often governs the ease or difficulty of such endeavors. I believe two or more licenses is best obtained while young with grand plans or while old and unfulfilled dreams (bucket list), or frustrated with just one license. I make this statement because the work and effort required for the second license is not always commiserate with employment, family, and other commitments that the typical life of a middle age married adult with children will allow.

I should note that often one license can be obtained with just an undergraduate degree in surveying and a second license obtained with a graduate school degree in another field. Such is the case when obtaining a law degree.

Certificates are easier to obtain as they seldom require a specific degree, though wetlands specialist is often an exception requiring a degree focused on soil science, biology, or botany. Most certificates are gained by experience and testing or in a few cases, just testing. Information for obtaining certifications is readily available on the internet. Experience has shown that many certifications are gained by happenstances where services are performed in the area leading the practitioner to conclude the next step toward certification is easily taken or they wish to focus on providing certain services where a certification makes it more likely they will be contracted for the services.

I would encourage surveyors to seek licenses or certifications in fields or services they enjoy or wish to pursue. I would encourage young people about to embark on the path to a surveying career to examine their options and to make the most of their college experience. I suspect I am not the only person that wishes they had deviated somewhat in youthful pursuits to make the most of a professional career.

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