

BACK TO SCHOOL

A PRIMER ABOUT CONTINUING EDUCATION

BY JEFF STEPHENS



ALTHOUGH DESIGN/CONSTRUCTION PROFESSIONALS MAY LAMENT THE YEAR-END RUSH TO FULFILL THEIR CONTINUING-EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS, most would agree that staying abreast of best practices is vital in the rapidly changing green-building industry. Varying program designations, including Continuing Education Units, Continuing Education System, International Learning Units and more, make the process of tracking credits challenging. Technology is fundamentally changing the delivery and measurement of continuing-education programs, and providers are offering design/construction professionals more choices that fit their individual needs.

WHAT'S A CEU?

Continuing education in the design/construction field certainly has its share of acronyms, many of which are used erroneously by novice providers. Despite its widespread use, the term Continuing Education Unit, or CEU, was created by (and belongs to) the International Association for Continuing Education and Training. IACET is a nonprofit association founded in 1968 whose mission is to ensure quality continuing-education and training programs. Designed as a measurement of continuing education, one IACET CEU is equal to 10 contact hours of participation in an organized continuing-education experience. Time-based approaches to continuing education, such as IACET's, are the oldest and most common measurement systems. Thousands of educational programs worldwide meet IACET's Criteria and Guidelines and only IACET Authorized Providers who undergo a strict reauthorization every five years can award the

IACET CEU. Design/construction organizations such as the American Institute of Architects currently accept the IACET CEU.

CONTINUING EDUCATION AND LICENSURE

Within the design/construction field, it is important to draw the distinction between continuing education required for licensure—sometimes referred to as Mandatory Continuing Education—and that required for accreditation or membership in a professional organization, such as AIA.

For many professions in the design/construction industry, state governments develop and administer licensure programs, and MCE is education required to retain licensure. For example, approximately 36 states and 10 Canadian provinces have implemented an MCE license requirement for architects. All state licensing boards consider one contact hour equal to one hour of credit, and most require between eight and 12 credits per year.

Because the primary purpose of state licenses is to protect the health, safety and welfare of the public by establishing standards of competence, continuing-education programs usually specify a minimum number of HSW credits to help practicing professionals meet their license requirements. Most professional organizations support a policy of mandatory continuing professional education.

COLLABORATION NOT COMPETITION

Design/construction professionals are fortunate when it comes to continuing education in that there is a lot of collaboration among professional organizations. AIA has one of the most fully developed CES applicable to the design/construction field, and many groups recognize AIA's CES. AIA members successfully must complete 18 learning unit hours, or contact hours, each year, with at least eight of the 18 LU hours relating to HSW. (Keep in mind that an LU hour is not the same as a CEU. One CEU is equal to 10 contact hours or 10 LU hours.)

The International Interior Design Association requires its members to complete 1.0 CEU (10 hours) of continuing education during a two-year period. The Construction Specifications Institute requires its certificate holders to meet 2.4 CEUs (24 hours). The American Society of Landscape Architects offers its Continuing Professional Education Provider program, which approves content, to help landscape architects meet state license requirements. Informal arrangements among the various design/construction member organizations generally allow one group's classes to count toward another's requirements though there are exceptions, such as with HSW topics.

The U.S. Green Building Council currently is conducting a pilot program that approves the green-building content in other organization's programs. With the blossoming of green-building topics in continuing education, USGBC's goal is to ensure quality content for the design/construction industry and not in developing its own continuing-education system. However, USGBC has publicly stated its LEED AP program will incorporate continuing-education requirements in 2007.

OUTCOMES-BASED STANDARDS

Similar to every other discipline, technology has created dramatic changes within continuing education. Time-based systems (CEU) originally were developed because professionals attended training sessions in a classroom-type setting; a 16-hour program was twice as

"good" as an eight-hour program and therefore deserved twice as much credit. As the tools (or mediums) for delivering continuing education expand to include magazine articles (see "Creating Sustainable Commercial Interiors," page 85), online multimedia presentations and (soon) podcasts, the efficacy of time-

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based systems diminishes. Despite its larger time commitment, an online presentation using a dial-up connection is certainly less effective than the same presentation using broadband.

The Learning Resources Network has developed the International Learning Unit, an outcomes-based alternative measure to the time-based CEU approach. According to LERN, 0.1 ILUs are gained by an outcome-based evaluation composed of five content items learned with a pass rate of 80 percent. A common method of evaluation is a test. Other acceptable evaluations include demonstrations, essays, evaluated online discussions, presentations and other outcome-based evaluations. The ILU is not a quality-assurance measurement for the content of the learning; approving agencies that adopt the ILU model, such as state boards, colleges, associations or employers, ensure the content is appropriate.

ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

Continuing education is a vital component to the design/construction field, and changes offered by technology are bringing a wealth of opportunities. Just think, in the near future, a design/construction professional may receive continuing-education credits by reading an *eco-structure* article, watching a Webinar about a related topic, downloading a Q&A podcast and then participating in an online examination. The mix-and-match possibilities only are limited by our imagination. ♻️

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