Your career in architecture

BSA ► Boston Society of Architects/AIA

Welcome!

This brochure explains architects' education and licensing requirements.

The Boston Society of Architects (BSA) prepared this brochure as part of its career-services program. Since the 1980s, the BSA has sought to improve the level and quality of information available to students considering architectural careers.

If you're preparing to study architecture or other design disciplines at a college level, be sure to attend the BSA's annual **Architecture/Design College Fair** in Boston. For more information, visit *architects.org/collegefair*.

If you have questions, contact the BSA anytime at 617-951-1433 x221 or *bsa@architects.org*. Visit our website at *architects.org*.

You
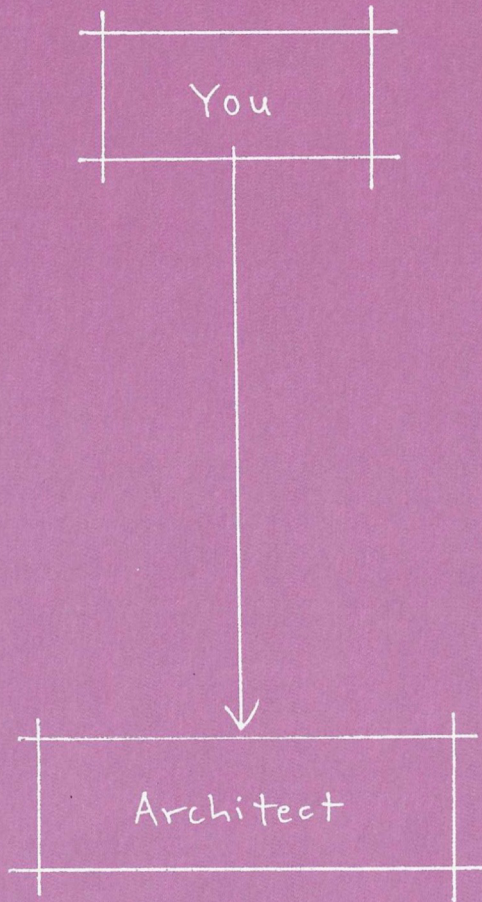
Architect

Architecture and architects

Architecture is the art and science of designing buildings and other structures. Architects design interior and exterior spaces for living, working and playing.

A broader definition of architecture includes all aspects of what is called **the built environment**: town planning, urban design, landscape architecture and interior design.

Architects are responsible for translating the needs of a specific client—a homeowner, a business, an institution or a government agency—into a physical, built solution. Architects have to understand thoroughly the various building methods available and legal and building-code requirements that might affect their projects.

In addition to practical elements such as cost, construction and current technologies, successful architectural design is driven by the creative manipulation of mass, space, volume, texture, light, shadow and materials in order to create an aesthetically appropriate and functional space.

Architects may design, draw, build scale models, write, supervise or manage. They also may teach, perform research or consult.

Architects can do more than design space: they can serve as advisors on a broad range of clients' needs such as long-term business planning, relocation planning, human resources and space-use planning, facility maintenance programming and dozens of other services.

Architects practice within the boundaries set by national, state and local regulations, such as building codes, fire-prevention codes, zoning ordinances and industry conventions. In addition, legislative and regulatory bodies such as historical commissions, community groups, design-review boards and public agencies often review proposed projects during the design process.

An architect's greatest responsibility to the public is safety. This encompasses structural stability, protection from the elements and from fire and, of course, support of the activities for which the project has been built.

On another significant level, **architects share a strong code of ethics, a passion for design and an unusual level of personal joy that enriches the profession**.

If you are interested in a career as an architect, it is best to begin early. Your own environment—at home, in school and in your community—is a good laboratory for study. By learning to "see" buildings, spaces and their relationships, you will become sensitive to a range of design elements. Notice the effects of color, texture, light and shape—the "tools" of architecture—and consider how spaces and places "feel" when you are in them. Analyze your reactions and see if you can connect them to design elements. Look for rhythm and pattern, simplicity and ornament, old and new in your environment, and notice the variety in your community. Think about the values expressed in the design of your house, school and city hall.

Visit the design classes of a school of architecture, tour the offices of a local architecture firm, and read books and magazines on architecture to gain a broad understanding of the nature of an architect's work and the values of the profession. There are also opportunities to use summer employment as a vehicle to gain a better understanding of buildings and how they are built, including office internships or working on a construction crew.

You

School

BArch
(5-6 years)

BA + MArch
(6 years)

BA or BS + MArch
(7-8 years)
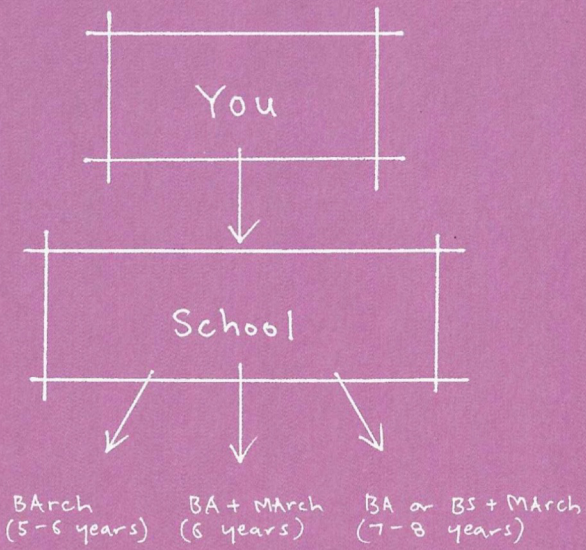
School

To become an architect, a professional degree is necessary.

Students who discover an interest in architecture at an early age might take some design-related classes in their school's art department. Many architecture colleges offer summer programs for high-school students.

There are then three different educational paths an incoming college student can choose. They are:

1. *A five- or six-year program that leads to a Bachelor of Architecture degree*

2. *A four-year undergraduate, pre-professional degree program followed by a two-year graduate architecture program that leads to a professional Master of Architecture degree*

3. *A three- to four-year professional Master of Architecture degree for students who have already received an undergraduate degree in another field of study*

The total number of years in school is dependent on the degree you choose. A master's degree requires more time, but also provides a well-rounded education.

Before college

The discipline of architecture is best studied from the perspective of a broad-based academic background, although a college preparatory program strong in arts, drawing, history, mathematics and physics is helpful. Communication skills—writing, listening and speaking—are important to develop. However, **you do not necessarily need to study architecture in high school in order to be adequately prepared**.

Among the issues you might consider in choosing a college are location, size, private versus public, cost, scholarship opportunities, enrichment programs, facilities, philosophy, reputation, faculty and kinds of degree programs.

Resources that may be of help as you select a school include discussion with current students, faculty and alumni and promotional materials provided by the school including websites, annual college fairs and campus visits.

Financial aid is available through the federal government (for U.S. citizens), the American Institute of Architects/American Architectural Foundation (AIA/AAF) and the schools themselves. In addition, local chapters of the AIA may provide scholarships for students; the BSA can provide a listing of these chapters.

After college

Having some level of relevant work experience during college is helpful; employers are usually more interested in people with such experience. It can be beneficial to contact alumni from your school for job-search advice or even an informational interview. In addition, there are placement services for architects and many AIA chapters have electronic or other career services.

Your education won't end when you graduate! The architecture profession (and the building industry as a whole) is sensitive to changes in the economy—boom and bust cycles are not unusual and it is not uncommon for entry-level professionals to have several different jobs in the first few years after graduation. There is nothing wrong with this; in fact, it is the rule more than the exception. This situation has advantages in that it exposes you to different offices and their varied ways of designing, running projects, marketing and managing a business, all of which will be beneficial complements to your formal education.

You

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School

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Internship / ARE and licensing
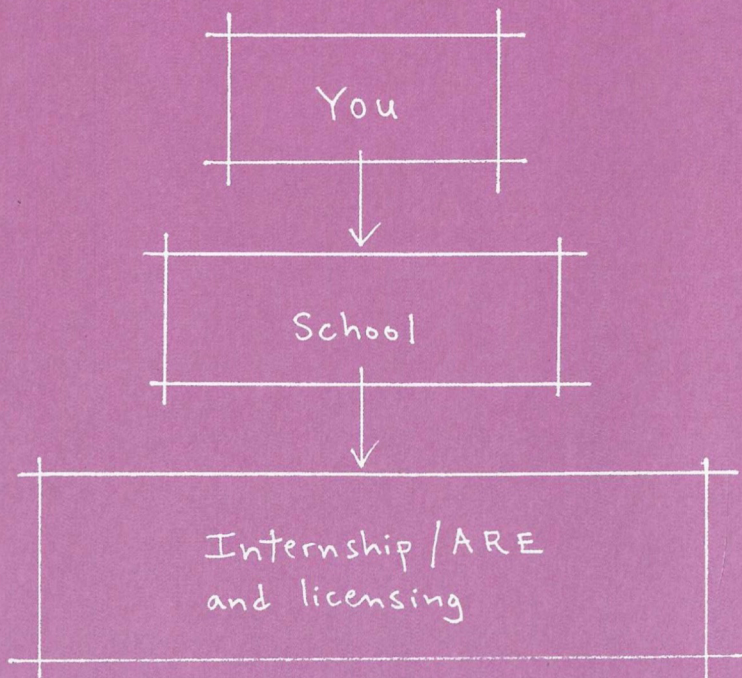
# Registration and licensing

After graduation, most architecture students pursue registration so they can practice professionally. Only registered professionals can use the title "architect" to describe themselves and their services.

Those who do not become registered and work under the direction of a supervising architect may be called designers or project managers or one of many other roles available to graduates.

Registration as a professional architect involves a structured internship program and completion of a rigorous examination. The **Internship Development Program (IDP)**—designed to ensure that you gain experience in various aspects of the profession—can take from three to five years to complete. The **Architect Registration Exam (ARE)** tests your knowledge and skills.

Upon passing the ARE, you will receive your state license to practice architecture. (You can apply for registration in other states for a fee, but each state has its own licensing board and requirements may differ; you do not receive a "national registration.") Registration entitles you to sign or "stamp" any documents prepared by you in the state(s) in which you are licensed and carries with it legal responsibilities for public health, safety and welfare.

Architects are required to complete continuing-education courses every year in order to maintain their licenses.

You
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School
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Internship / ARE and licensing
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Architect
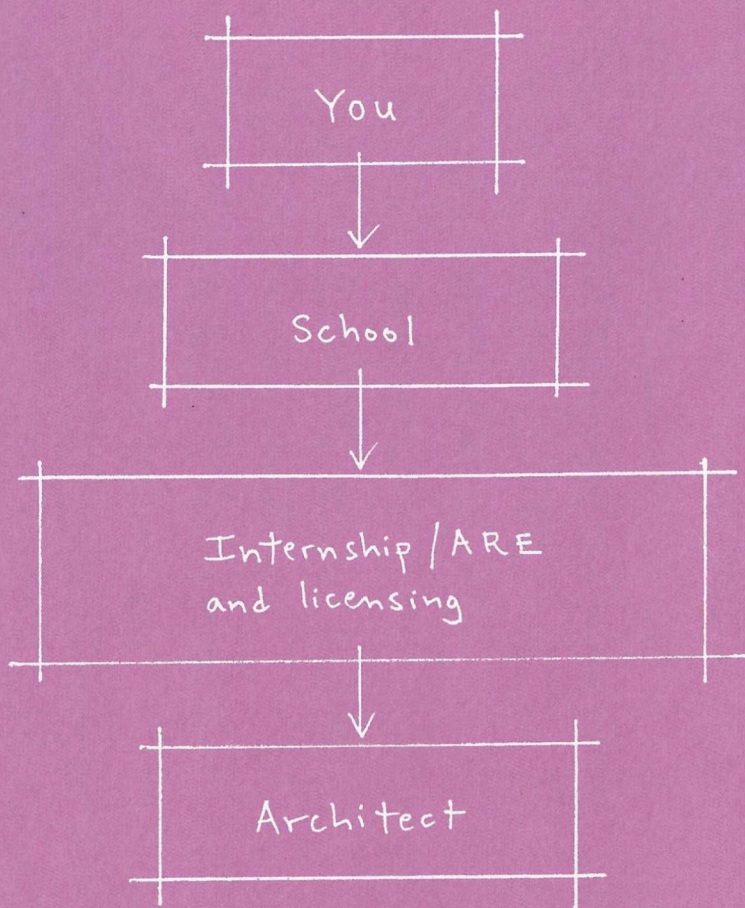
Career opportunities

There are many routes that can lead to a career in architecture.

Many architecture firms do a variety of work, although they often have particular areas of expertise. Some firms specialize in one area of work, often more complex types such as hospitals or airports.

Most architecture firms are small—80 percent of the firms in the U.S. employ 10 people or fewer. Although larger firms are more likely to be doing the largest projects, most firms are capable of handling a range of project sizes.

Architects often work outside architecture firms in community-design and urban-planning groups, corporations, private community-development corporations, schools, governmental facilities, public agencies and construction firms. Architects also pursue careers outside the more traditional paths, including working as educators, developers or architectural photographers.

For some architects, the excitement of professional practice comes from the mix of intellectual stimulation, technical challenges and "getting your boots muddy" at a construction site. For others, being one's own boss and making a living doing what one loves is its own reward.

Since practice and related career options span such a broad range, you can define your own place in the profession to satisfy your goals.
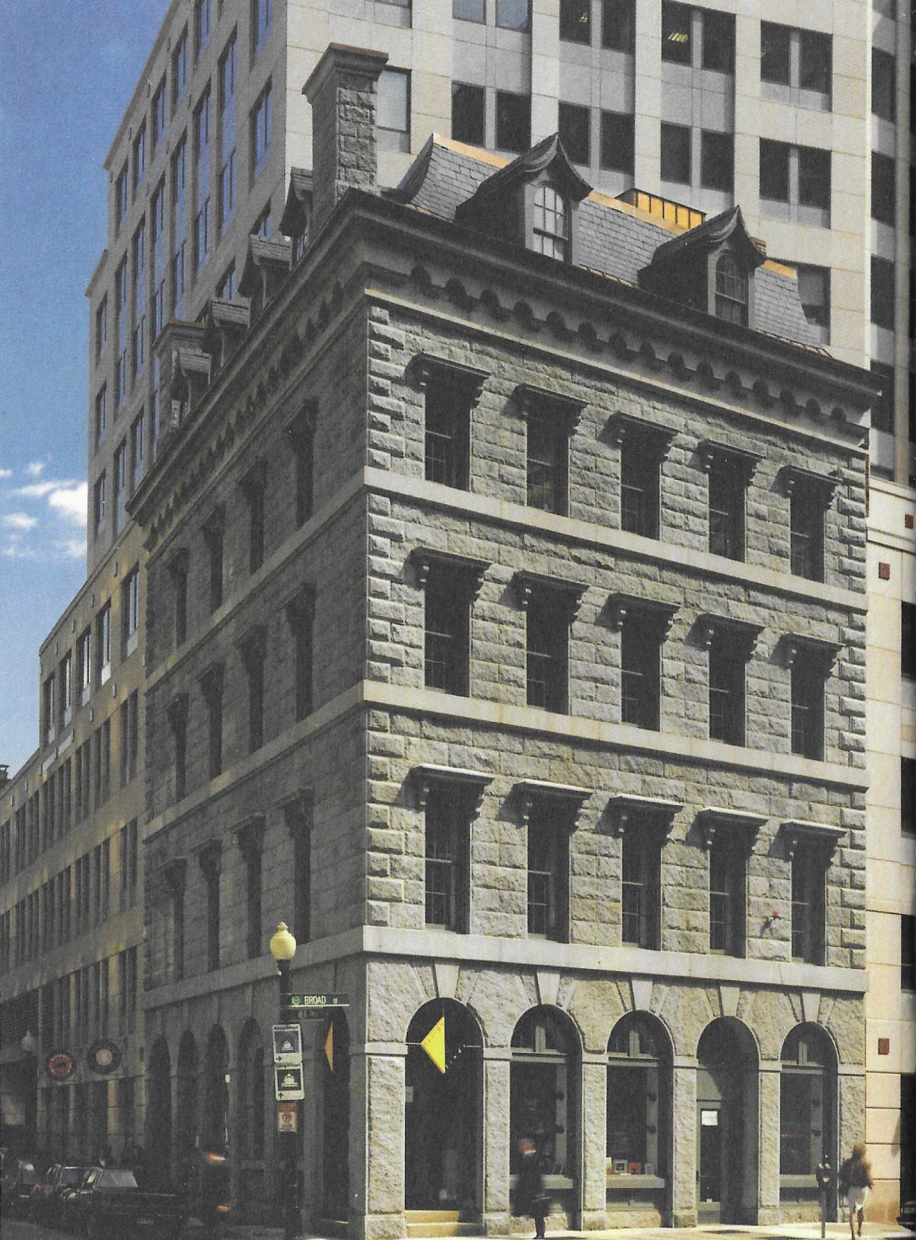
The BSA

The Boston Society of Architects (BSA) is a nonprofit professional and public organization whose members are architects, other building-industry professionals and members of the public with an interest in architecture.

The largest chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), the BSA provides services, information and resources for its members and the public. The BSA's website offers information on careers in architecture, educational opportunities and ways for architects to become involved in their communities, as well as resources for other industry professionals and homeowners.

The BSA offers membership at a reduced cost for students while in school—including free membership for members of the American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS)—as well as a free, one-year professional membership upon graduation.

Boston Society of Architects/AIA
The Architects Building
52 Broad Street, Boston MA 02109-4301
617-951-1433 x221
bsa@architects.org
architects.org

Photograph by Peter Vanderwarker

More resources

ARCHcareers

ARCHcareers is a resource of the AIA and the AIAS with information on the steps to becoming an architect.
For more information on a career in architecture, see archcareers.org.

American Institute of Architects (AIA)

The AIA represents architects and allied professionals by promoting excellence in design and livability in our nation's buildings and communities.
1735 New York Avenue, NW
Washington DC 20006-5292
800-AIA-3837 or 202-626-7300
aia.org

American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS)

The AIAS is the voice of students in U.S. architecture schools.
1735 New York Avenue, NW
Washington DC 20006
202-626-7472
aias.org

Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA)

ACSA, unique in its representative role for schools of architecture, provides a forum for ideas on the leading edge of architectural education.
1735 New York Avenue, NW
Washington DC 20006
202-785-2324
For more information on a career in architecture, select "Students" at acsa-arch.org.

National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB)

NAAB provides leadership in and the establishment of educational quality assurance standards to enhance the value, relevance and effectiveness of the architectural profession.
1735 New York Avenue, NW
Washington DC 20006
202-783-2007
naab.org

International Interior Design Association (IIDA)

The IIDA's mission is to advance interior design through education, research and knowledge-sharing among interior designers.
222 Merchandise Mart Plaza, Ste 567
Chicago IL 60654-1103
312-467-1950
iida.org

American Society of Interior Designers (ASID)

ASID is an association of designers, industry representatives, educators and students committed to interior design.
608 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington DC 20002-6006
202-546-3480
For more information on a career in architecture, visit the "Students" section of asid.org.

Careers in Interior Design

A group of interior design organizations has compiled this helpful resource: careersininteriordesign.com.

American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA)

The ASLA is the national professional association of landscape architects.
36 Eye Street, NW
Washington DC 20001-3736
202-898-2444
For more information on a career in architecture, select "Career Discovery" in the "Education" section of asla.org.

National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB)

NCARB is the national association of state licensing agencies charged with safeguarding the health, safety and welfare of the public.
1801 K Street, NW, Suite 1100-K
Washington DC 20006-1310
202-783-6500
For more information on a career in architecture, select "Careers" in the "Resources" section of ncarb.org.