

Life Long Learning

By Sandra C. Scanlon, PE; CO AES Board President

Recent legislation, Senate Bill 08-029, requires architects to complete continuing education every two years in order to renew their Colorado architect license. While this legislation currently applies to architects only, I am often asked how this will affect engineers and surveyors in the future. I can't predict the future for this type of legislation, but I can be certain that life long learning is a necessary evil if-you-will for all professionals.

Why did I call it a necessary evil? Consider my 12-year-old's response (too bad you can't hear the sound effects that went with it) when I told him he would need to continue to learn even after college - "Why can't they just teach you everything you need to know in school?" It is not possible to teach everything there is to know in college let alone in high school. Specialized vocations and careers required further specialized training, on the job training, and priceless learning from experience. Continuing education is a part of life for all of us.

Many people confuse continued competency and continuing education. They are not the same. Continued competency is the cyclical process of self assessment, education and reassessment. Continuing education is the action necessary to stay competent within an ever increasing set of skills in today's world. Essentially, each professional – architect, engineer or surveyor needs to embrace life long learning in order to stay on top of their game. At the NCEES national meeting last summer, the concept of the body of knowledge for each of the licensed professions was a hotly debated topic. Who defines the body of knowledge for a mechanical engineer or a land surveyor? While some individuals will argue that the body of knowledge necessary to perform is related to their job at hand, others will argue that a broader understanding of a larger body of knowledge makes for a better and more rounded professional.

And then there are those that opine that if you admit to needing more training, then you might be considered or admitting you are incompetent. To state, for example, that I want to take a seminar in power system analysis does not mean I am incompetent in that subject area. But it does mean that I want to expand the body of knowledge I possess in that subject area. Each of us should honestly assess where we need enhancements to our individual skill sets and actively seek continuing education.

It is my hope that every professional would not deem themselves as "know it alls" and thus never need any additional training in their careers. On the contrary, life long learning is a necessary evil if-you-will to stay on top of the ever expanding body of knowledge in our advancing society.