

# LICENSURE MATTERS



**AIA**  
Kansas City



**IT IS CRUCIAL  
TO ALWAYS  
REMEMBER  
THAT YOU  
CANNOT DO  
YOUR BEST  
WORK UNLESS  
YOU ARE A  
WHOLE HUMAN.**

*Eddie Tavio, AIA*

# EDDIE TAVIO, AIA

**How long did it take for you to complete your experience and all of the divisions of the exam?**

My first two years out of school I worked at a startup firm so I focused on completing my experience across all the subjects first. I started testing my third year out of school and took a total of 3 years to finish all my tests.

**What was your study/test taking strategy?**

I started with practice exams to see what I knew based on my experience then studied the material that was lacking. There was a lot of study content out there, and it is mostly all good content, so it can be overwhelming to sift through it all. Your goal is to pass these tests so take as many practice ones over and over again and narrow down additional study materials to the gaps on your knowledge.

**How did you stay motivated?**

It's tough! Schedule your tests before you even start studying to give yourself a clear deadline, otherwise you will get lost in the study grind and delay scheduling your tests. Always remember that you are only going to get busier and busier as you progress in your career, so make sure you prioritize these tests before your professional and personal responsibilities grow.

# EDDIE TAVIO, AIA

## **Why was earning a license important to you?**

For me, it was the culmination of my education. After years of school and long hours of studio, I wanted to look back and say "I did it." Even if you don't plan to start your own firm or sign your own drawings, there is a great pride and confidence in going through the licensing process and presenting yourself to colleagues and clients as a license professional that powered through the entire process.

## **How did your firm support you in your journey to licensure?**

Populous was extremely supportive throughout the entire process with study materials, study hours, and covering the costs of 12 tests total if you needed to retake.

## **How do you maintain work-life balance?**

Architects staddle this very fine line between art and science, and because of that it is nearly impossible to not get emotionally attached to your projects and give them your absolute attention. It is crucial to always remember that you cannot do your best work unless you are a whole human.

## **What is your advice for others?**

Schedule tests before you even start studying, give yourself deadlines, and don't be afraid to fail (you probably will). Don't get hung up by small things – remember everything is worth one point and you don't have to be an expert in every sub section. These tests are about gauging your general competency and moving onto the next exam, so do not let perfection be the enemy of good.

# EDDIE TAVIO, AIA

What are 3 skills that every architect needs in their toolkit?

## **Become a possibilitarian**

No matter the challenges, always look for the possibilities.

## **Have courage when tackling challenging projects and challenging clients**

Courage is the magic that turns dreams into reality.

## **Art is at the core of our profession**

Never shy away from talking about design just for design's sake – beauty gives people hope. It's important.



**AIA**  
Kansas City

**REMINDE  
YOURSELF  
THAT A  
F-A-I-L IS  
NEVER  
GOING  
TO SHOW  
UP IN YOUR  
REGISTRATION CREDENTIALS.  
YOU ARE HUMAN AND  
FAILING DOES NOT DEFINE YOU!**



*Emma Castro, AIA*

# EMMA CASTRO, AIA

## **How long did it take for you to complete your experience and all of the divisions of the exam?**

A little over eight years. It was a long time span that was packed with the emotional rollercoaster of a terrible economic recession.

## **What was your study/test taking strategy?**

The studying/testing strategy was not much of a focus in my registration path – for me having a completion and survival plan was more important to get me going. I made simple rules that I would abide by, and those were:

- Keep trying until you are done! Giving up was simply not an option.
- Stick to your schedule! Do not reschedule tests unless there is a real emergency. Deadlines will come and go, but your registration is your personal project, so be your best advocate and talk to your PMs and PAs (they were there too at some point!)
- Keep yourself surrounded by positive people and by those who are willing to share their knowledge with you. I do not care who you are and how smart you could be; you are a better person by channeling good vibes and being open to comments and admitting you still have so much more to learn from others.
- Remind yourself that a F-A-I-L is never going to show up in your registration credentials. You are human and failing does not define you!

## **How did you stay motivated?**

Refer to cardinal rule number 3 from above! Mentors, study buddies, friends and family were the best supporting system. At the end, they all felt like they passed the tests with me and earned an architecture license too!

# EMMA CASTRO, AIA

## **Why was earning a license important to you?**

I've always believed that one should always complete a task or a project that he or she starts. For me, becoming an architect was a project I began the moment I enrolled into college, and I was determined to complete the cycle. I wanted to be free to say out loud (and proudly) that I was an architect.

## **How did your firm support you in your journey to licensure?**

Populous was extremely helpful. The firm provided great study materials, then they paid for testing up to two times, in case you failed the first time around, and you were given hours to study or take exams without using your PTO. With that kind of support, it is impossible to not pursue a license.

## **What do you think is the biggest challenge that the profession currently faces?**

The lack of diversity across the board. We need more women in leadership roles and staying in the profession for longer careers. In addition, we need to support the underrepresented ethnicities by providing more scholarships that encourage them to enroll in architecture. This is a very cost-prohibitive degree, and their presence is affected from the get-go. If both of these groups make it into the big meeting rooms, we can only have a more informed and healthier architectural profession.

## **What is your advice for other going through the process?**

Keep showing up! This is only a portion of your career that you'll look back at with a weird combo of nostalgia and pride. You will build tremendous endurance by going through this process. Complete the project and give yourself the luxury of calling yourself an architect.

## **Anything else you'd like to share?**

Having a study system in place with some of my friends and coworkers kept me accountable and motivated. In addition, running after studying kept me sane, and allowed me to feel some sort of balance in the middle of all the testing madness.



**LESS IS MORE. I'VE FOUND THAT  
FOCUSING ON FEWER THINGS  
MEANS GETTING MORE DONE.**

*Dan Siroky, AIA*



# DAN SIROKY, AIA

## **How long did it take for you to complete your experience and all of the divisions of the exam?**

It took me 4 years to complete the experience requirement, aside from working some construction during architecture school that later counted for supplemental experience. It took about 18 months to complete the exams (ARE 4.0). I was finished with my exams almost 2 years prior to completing the experience.

## **Why was earning a license important to you?**

I knew getting licensed would offer me more opportunities in the field, throughout my entire career. Personally, I've also taken a technology-focused career path and being licensed both helped me prioritize advocating for active project work (and not just project support), but I also saw it as a way to add some weight to my experience, while not being in a more common role (PA/PM/etc.).

## **How did you stay motivated?**

Taking the exams in blocks with extended breaks kept the whole process feel less daunting and I didn't feel like I was constantly studying. I also made sure to enjoy the small victories with a beer or a nice meal. Even celebrating just completing the exam before finding the results helped keep things positive. Finally, having a good number of coworkers going through the same process kept me motivated. Being able to talk about progress, struggles, and having a healthy dose of competition felt better than going at it alone.

# DAN SIROKY, AIA

## **What was your study/test taking strategy?**

For overall exam strategy, I tried to break up the 7 ARE 4.0 exams into smaller groupings, with 2-3 tests per group and took breaks in between. This made the whole process feel less daunting and allowed me to take longer breaks to enjoy life.

I decided to take advantage of motivation throughout the process. I put two of the tougher exams at the beginning of the process when I was motivated to the process started. This also made the process less of an uphill battle, having two of the toughest exams out of the way. Then, I put the easier exams in the middle, when my motivation was low from having spent so much time already and not even being halfway done. Finally, I put one more tough exam at the end, when I was highly motivated to finally be finished, I put another tough exam.

As for studying for the exams, I would write out notes on the areas that weren't already familiar to me, using language and diagrams that made sense to me. I found that I could retain the information I copied down and ended up with a more concise version of what I was reading. I was sure to take practice exams often and used progress there to track improvement and identify gaps in knowledge.

I would take the night before the exam off. I had been studying for weeks already, so if I didn't know it at that point, I probably wasn't going to cram that extra info in and I would usually feel more relaxed and focused when I did so.

# DAN SIROKY, AIA

## **How did your firm support you in your journey to licensure?**

My firm offered study materials, paid for the cost of passed tests, as well as time off to take the exams.

## **How do you maintain work-life balance?**

Knowing that being well-rested, social, and fulfilled at home makes me better at my job. I enjoy cooking, cycling, weight-lifting, and reading which help me come to work ready to get things done.

Less is more. I've found that focusing on fewer things means getting more done. Trying to do it all means missing deadlines and making mistakes.

## **What is your advice for others going through the process?**

See the process as a learning opportunity and not just a hurdle to jump over. It was exciting when I could use knowledge I learned from studying at work to be better at my job, and vice-versa.

Figure out how you learn best. I would guess a lot of prospective architects are visual learners, and I found that videos and diagrams were easiest to remember. I used anything that helped me remember the concepts: mnemonic devices, sketching, writing, acronyms.

Use forums/communities like ARE Coach to ask questions or ask for feedback, no matter how small it seems. Your questions may help others taking the exam in the future and prevent small but costly mistakes.

Bring snacks to the testing center.

**TOMORROW WILL ALWAYS BE  
HARDER THAN TODAY TO START,  
AND IF YOU MAKE EXCUSES NOW,  
YOU'LL ALWAYS FIND EXCUSES  
LATER.**

*Rebecca  
Roberts, AIA*



# REBECCA ROBERTS, AIA

## **How long did it take for you to complete your experience and all of the divisions of the exam?**

I started my tests with the ARE Success Team in January 2016 and finished all 7 sections of 4.0 in 9 months. The AXP hours took another year to finish up since Kansas still requires the full 5600 hours.

## **What was your study/test taking strategy?**

Other than joining the ARE Success Team (which I highly recommend), my strategy was to over-study. I wanted to read and listen to everything I could get my hands on. I also tried to find places away from home so that I could keep myself from other distractions (napping and Netflix were the big ones). It's not typically socially acceptable to nap in a coffee shop.

## **How did you stay motivated?**

I would usually try and plan something fun to do in the free week after the test. It always gave me something to look forward to while studying. Additionally, I would take Friday off from studying. It gave me a good chance to catch up with friends and family since I would pretty much ignore them the rest of the week.

## **Why was earning a license important to you?**

It wasn't until I was in school that I realized I couldn't be an architect from school alone. I knew that if I put it off at all, it would just be harder and harder to find the motivation to get back into the school mentality of studying and testing. I also wanted to work abroad at some point in my career. While the license itself doesn't typically transfer, it definitely helps to show the skills and motivation I have.

# REBECCA ROBERTS, AIA

## **How did your firm support you in your journey to licensure?**

When I first started my testing, I sat down with the partners to discuss what the firm offers. I would recommend doing this early on. Their policy was to pay for all the tests one time. Basically, if you pass, you get reimbursed. It really helped with motivation since any test I failed I would have paid for out-of-pocket.

## **Where do you find inspiration?**

Anytime that I'm stuck or overwhelmed, I find hiking to be very helpful. It's not going to work for everyone (ew bugs), and not everything needs to mimic a beehive, but I find it helps to clear your mind without the distractions of the people, cars, technology, etc. that we find in our everyday life. We have a ton of great parks throughout the city and a botanic garden on both sides of the State Line. I try to include a small hike on most vacations now too. There are some National and State Parks that most people don't know about that are amazing!

## **What is your advice for others going through the process?**

Just do it. Tomorrow will always be harder than today to start, and if you make excuses now, you'll always find excuses later. There are a ton of resources through the AIA and KC firms that you don't have to go through the process alone.

## **Anything else you'd like to share?**

One thing that really helped was to meal plan. I would cook a ton in the 'rest' week after the test (before we started studying for the next section) and make freezer meals. Then when I was busy studying, I could just pull out a meal to heat up. It really helped to not have to cook in the weeks leading up to a test but still get something other than takeout. Granted I also became a regular at the Dragon Inn and the Thai Place.



**IT IS  
IMPERATIVE  
THAT ARCHITECTS BE GREAT  
STORY TELLERS AND CONVINCING  
VOICES FOR THE VISION THEY DREAM  
UP FOR THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT.**

*Tabitha Darko, AIA*



# TABITHA DARKO, AIA

## **How long did it take for you to complete your experience and all of the divisions of the exam?**

It took me 3 years to complete my ARE exams in the 4.0 version and that also aligned with about how long it took to acquire all of the necessary NCARB hours. My first exam was Programming Planning and Practice taken after working a year in the field. Towards the end of the exam, I realized I had made a fatal error on a vignette while checking my work and quickly tried to re-do the drawing before the clock went out. Disappointingly, I was too late and walked away from the exam knowing without a doubt that I failed because of that one mistake despite all of the studying and doing well in the multiple-choice section. It took me another 10 months (almost an entire year!) before I shook the discouragement off enough to continue my journey to licensure.

## **What was your study/test taking strategy?**

My studying strategy was to allow about 3-4 weeks to read each section associated with the division I was taking. Once the foundation was laid, I would allot 2 weeks for practice exams and flashcards. Flashcards and the practice exams helped me the most in targeting learning modules that needed more refinement and understanding. The last 3 days of these 2 weeks were dedicated to practicing vignette strategies and timing myself. My primary study material of choice was Ballast, and I chose to spend \$500 to properly purchase all the resources and flashcards that came with it. Along with that, I had digital versions of Kaplan that were shared by colleagues and a loaned flash card desk from the 3.0 ARE exams.

# TABITHA DARKO, AIA

## **How did you stay motivated?**

What helped me stay motivated was having peers that were also working through the exams and knowing that I could share the difficulty of the process with others, treating myself to dinner with friends or something else I had been looking forward to post-exam, and sharing each pass... or even fail with my family and always getting the encouragement needed at each milestone.

## **Why was earning a license important to you?**

Licensure was important to not only gain a full understanding of the scope of responsibility that we are expected to perform and uphold as architects, but also to allow myself potential freedom and independence to design and construct my own work (should I choose to do so) during my career.

## **How did your firm support you in your journey to licensure?**

Thankfully, HOK is one of the most generous offices when it comes to the incentives and monetary expenses associated with getting licensure. We do have an acquired study material library for employees to borrow items from that provides some assistance. The office recently purchased a couple of licenses to **Black Spectacles** which is a beneficial ARE video prep series. On top of that, each employee gets up to 2 passes at each division fully covered (i.e. you could sit twice for each exam). The hours used to sit for the exam are also covered with full-time pay on the first try of each division, so you don't necessarily have to schedule a weekend time-slot every time. There is also a one-time bonus of \$1,500 when an employee achieves licensure.

## **What is your advice for others?**

I would say it's critical to diversify the study material that you use so that you have the best chance at being exposed to the material in various formats. Not all the exam is about regurgitating memorized facts, but rather taking understood concepts and applying it to important design scenarios that show your competency and mastery of the material.

# TABITHA DARKO, AIA

What are 3 skills that every architect needs in their toolkit?

## **Great verbal and written communication skills**

We are often not explicitly taught this skill in design school; however; it is imperative that architects be great story tellers and convincing voices for the vision they dream up for the built environment.

## **A forte for good construction methods and an understanding of constructability**

I think having this basis also gives architects the power to be more creative with design solutions because of an ability to propose how something can be achieved.

## **The ability and willingness to learn new methods and programs,**

because our industry is ever-changing as we learn new and more efficient ways to design and build.

