

Lighting Certifiable

Despite being the only one present that could not speak Hebrew, I was asked to participate in a lighting roundtable at the Dead Sea. The topic we were discussing at the 50th Annual Lighting Conference was establishing credentials for lighting professionals. Israeli specifiers were frustrated and angry about the ability for anyone regardless of competence to promote themselves as a lighting professional. It demeaned the skilled practitioners and negatively impacted the public perception of quality lighting. The heated discussion reminded me of what it was like here before the NCQLP. There were many certification programs but the variety and their either narrow or simple requirements diluted recognition and effectiveness of the credentials. When most of our influential industry associations committed to the NCQLP, we began a process to distinguish our profession among the architectural trades. We have now distilled the industry certifications down to just a few, all with a special focus.

For the purposes of this article we will review the following credentials and their relevance to specific careers within our industry...

CLC	Granted by the American Lighting Association (ALA)
CLEP	Granted by the Association of Energy Engineers (AEE)
CLMC	Granted by the international Association of Lighting Management Companies (NALMCO)
LC	Granted by the National Council on Qualifications for the Lighting Professions (NCQLP)

There are other certifications that can be of benefit to lighting professionals that are not included because lighting is only one aspect of the certification. An example of this is the Accredited Professional (AP) granted by the U.S. Green Building Council. This credential would be beneficial to establish credibility and helpful for specifiers working on LEED or other “green” building projects. The AP exam primarily covers construction industry knowledge unrelated to lighting. Currently the AP designation does not require proof of continuing education or professional activity as do all of the others noted above but the USGBC is now “examining the re-certification process”.

The Certified Lighting Consultant (CLC) requires that applicants first become a Lighting Specialist (LS) by passing an exam based on the Residential Lighting Training Manual sold by the ALA. Additional requirements include either 5 years experience in the lighting industry or 40 hours of Certification Board approved education courses prior to completing the CLC application. A set of blueprints with specifications is mailed to the applicant and they are given 6 months to complete and return it for approval by ALA. The emphasis for the CLC is on residential applications. Lighting showroom personnel and others involved with home lighting design would receive the most benefit from this certification.

Al Thumann, the founder of the Association of Energy Engineers (AEE) shared with me one of the advantages of achieving certification. He said that “professional credibility is retained with the individual”. The advantage this offers is obvious in a market that encourages frequent job changes. The Certified Lighting Efficiency Professional (CLEP) is one of several certifications offered by the AEE but the only one focused on lighting. Over 14,000 professionals are currently certified in AEE programs, about 500 of whom are CLEP’s. Preparatory seminars are conducted by AEE and the process includes acceptance of a candidate’s application and fee prior to sitting for the exam. This is not aimed at designers. The demographics lean toward “end users, owners and practicing consultants”. The emphasis on energy efficiency is especially relevant with rising energy costs, growing awareness of the environmental consequences of energy consumption, increasingly restrictive energy legislation and tax deductions for efficient lighting designs. Mr. Thumann points out that this is the only certification with “efficiency right in the title”.

NALMCO also offers several nationally recognized certifications. The Certified Lighting Management Consultant is uniquely aimed at owners, principals and project engineers involved with lighting management companies. Randy Breske, NALMCO President differentiates the CLMC recipients as “hands-on professionals that actually work with the technology not just specify it”. Randy adds that certification allows his customer base to demonstrate expertise in their areas. He noted projects that require specifications to be overseen by a CLMC. “We live and breathe what we do” says Randy making the distinction that they do not just “design, build and walk away”. “We are there to maintain it” he adds referring to the ongoing service typically provided by lighting management companies.

On the lightingwizards.com website it says “LC (lighting certification) from NCQLP...is the closest thing that the lighting industry has to PE (professional engineer) in the engineering field”. NCQLP is an independent, non-profit, certifying board. The supporting member organizations include IESNA, CEC, DOE, NEMA, EPA and many other influential groups. Rob Cilic, the President of the NCQLP notes the singular charge of the organization, they provide certification. They do not sell educational material or conduct seminars. Growth has been steady with over 1400 LC’s now practicing worldwide.

Attaining the LC signifies a “working knowledge of lighting design and application”. Many project specifications require that an LC oversee or sign off on the lighting design. The Federal General Services Administration stipulates that lighting for buildings falling under GSA authority be done or supervised by persons having an LC certification. Six areas of knowledge are included in the LC exam with lighting design accounting for about 35% of the questions. The skill sets holding LC credentials include Electrical Engineers (27%), Lighting Designers/Consultants (26%), and Manufacturers’ Representatives (22%). The remaining mix is spread across all other career choices in our industry. 65% of the LC’s belong to the IESNA.

We are fortunate that recognized professional credentials are available to distinguish individuals that demonstrate a commitment to continue learning and developing their lighting skills. Anyone can call themselves a lighting designer or an energy efficiency specialist. Unless we have metrics to measure knowledge levels it is difficult for those outside of our industry to discern the competent and committed professionals from the posers. Certainly there are qualified people working in all areas of lighting that have not yet pursued or have chosen not to attain an industry certification, they are just harder to identify.