



Paul Pompeo

IN MY DECEMBER COLUMN , a reader asked the following question: “What kind of weight does LC hold? A lot of people with the LC portray themselves as lighting consultants, which they’re not (it stands for ‘Lighting Certified’). This seems to upset some real specifiers.” I replied as follows: “As far as ‘holding weight’ goes, it depends whom you’re talking about. As far as people with LCs upsetting specifiers, that’s a new one on me—I’ve never heard of that. I haven’t heard of any sort of negative reaction towards someone with an LC...” Well, I may never have heard that before, but I did soon afterward.

Once the issue was published, I received a number of e-mails indicating that the design community may indeed have a very different view of the LC accreditation than the manufacturing side. As a result, I decided to turn the tables in this column; instead of answering questions, I’ve asked them. I went to several professionals from the design and engineering side of our business, as well as one person (Stan Katz) from the manufacturing end to get their views on the LC.

Taking part in the Q&A discussion were Emlyn Altman (Emlyn Altman Visualization), Faith Baum, Illumination Arts LLC, Jim Benya (Benya Lighting Design), David DiLaura (University of Colorado at Boulder), Stan Katz (Bright Lighting), Anton Lama (Hillmann DiBernardo & Associates), David Mintz, the Mintz Lighting Group, David Penasa (University of New Mexico), Mark Seegel (Levine & Seegel), Gary Steffy (Gary Steffy Lighting Design) and John Tappenden (Duncan & Miller Design).

How does the LC affect designers? Is there really confusion in the marketplace about what the LC represents?

Baum: Many specifiers—especially lighting designers—face an unfair marketing challenge when it comes to the LC credential, and many are quite angry about it. What I am referring to is the use of the letters LC by a manufacturer or manufacturer’s rep to suggest that they have the same skill, training, experience and independence as an independent lighting

designer. Many reps obtain the LC credential and then claim to “give away” lighting design services to their customers. But the test allows someone with no aesthetic design experience or talent to become an LC, which is often misunderstood or misinterpreted to stand for “Lighting Consultant.” However, many of us have felt forced to take the test and maintain our LC status in order to combat the use of the credential as a weapon against the independent lighting design community.

Mintz: The controversy concerning the validity and use of the LC designation has been raging for years. There has been extensive dialogue between the IALD and the NCQLP in an attempt to get the NCQLP to monitor and control the use and misuse of the LC appellation. I can assure you that very few specifiers regard the LC program as a positive. We find ourselves challenged by people who have never designed a lighting layout, but have managed to pass a test which has little to do with lighting design expertise.

Katz: There’s always going to be some quarter that is negatively impacted as a *perception*, because it’s a perception more than anything else. But, overall, this is an industry that is not licensed or *regulated*, and to have some means to establish a basic competency level is good!

Then, from the designer’s perspective, what’s the value of the LC?

Penasa: I think certification is a good idea, in theory. If your full time profession is lighting design, then I don’t know why you wouldn’t want to obtain it. It lets people know you have a certain minimum level of lighting qualification. Personally, I’d like to have the credential. But most owners I’ve worked for in the past are unaware of the LC, or for that matter what makes someone qualified to do lighting design (other than past experience with the person or referencing their past projects).

Benya: In the lighting industry, we have a choice. As a community, we can

rally to make lighting more important, more professional and help prevent its disintegration into commoditization. We can work to prevent future lighting designs from being “created” by unqualified personnel.

Altman: I’ve been spending a significant amount of time studying for the 2005 exam. Although having an LC is not mandatory, I felt obtaining the LC is an important step for me to become a more effective and marketable lighting designer.

Tappenden: In my experience the certificate is not much often discussed by independent lighting designers. Within this community, achieving IALD professional status tends to be the primary goal. Also, the LEED certification has recently become a topic among designers.

Does the LC make sense for the engineer?

Penasa: I personally have not pursued the LC. Even though my greatest interest in the A/E profession is lighting, it has always been a relatively small part of my engineering work.

Seegel: While it is nice for lighting designers to add the LC to their business cards, it really is of little value for a professional engineer. The lighting designers are still not entitled to sign the Title 24 calculations in California and there is no Code requirement to have a lighting designer, LC or not, involved with a project.

Benya: LC is not just for me—after all, as a PE, I already have the legal right to design lighting. It is for all of us, because as we all know, lighting is not electrical engineering, or for that matter electrical contracting, architecture or any other major licensed profession.

What do you think about the LC exam itself and the recertification process?

Altman: I will admit that the LC exam itself is daunting. I am not a big standardized test taker and, although NCQLP gives some review materials

for an extra \$75 fee, my study-mates and I felt that what they gave us was not enough. The outline with course readings was helpful in breaking down the content covered, but it was not always up-to-date, such as when they included a book in the outline without the corresponding publication information. When asked about it, NCQLP said the book was out of date, so it was not included in the recommended reading publication details list.

Penasa: It pretty much would require me to attend a major lighting conference (e.g., the IESNA Annual Conference or LIGHTFAIR) nearly every year to maintain the certification.

Benya: We can help ensure that lighting will become ever more efficient and sustainable, and work to eliminate light pollution. We can prevent snake oil and bad retrofits by marginal contractors. To do this, we need to set a minimum standard, and it is LC. For someone who knows lighting, LC is not that hard to get. To someone who doesn't know a T8 lamp from a broomstick, LC is a huge obstacle. LC is the college degree in lighting we all don't have.

Tappenden: I see the LC as something of a benchmark. Those in the industry who have attained the qualification that I know personally are all accomplished, respected professionals.

DiLaura: The LC exam is a reasonable, elementary gateway that helps the public know that whoever passes has the absolute minimum amount of lighting knowledge and experience thought to be necessary to participate in the lighting profession.

Does the LC elevate the entire profession?

Lama: I am uncertain...about the benefits of the certification. I personally have always heard mixed messages.

Benya: Giving up on LC is giving up on lighting as a profession. We all must stick together and participate in LC and IESNA, the two organizations just for lighting and serving our whole community.

Tappenden: Generally it shows a commitment beyond the usual requirements of an understanding of basic lighting principles and indicates an individual who is concerned with professional development and lighting as a wider cause.

Steffy: I fully support the premise, goals, and implementation of the LC program by the NCQLP. Frankly, of all the programs, causes, and movements in the field of lighting, the LC is the broadest, most reasonable, most cost-effective, and most worthy to bolster quality of light.

DiLaura: In an industry plagued with commoditization, elementary and advanced credentials can help us establish and maintain a professionalism that is now under steady erosion.

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