



Professional Licensure: Universal Designation

(2011)

Policy Statement

The American Society of Landscape Architects encourages all licensed landscape architects to use the *post nominal* letters “PLA” after their names to denote licensure, an abbreviation of the title “professional landscape architect.” The use of this common designation to signify licensure will better enable potential clients and the general public to identify licensed practitioners. It will also provide consistent recognition for the landscape architecture profession. ASLA supports the endorsement of the PLA *post nominal* letters by state licensure boards through regulation or policy.

Rationale

This policy encourages the universal use of a common descriptive designation that signifies the user has met state licensing standards as a landscape architect and possesses a valid, active license in the state. Licensees are encouraged to use PLA (professional landscape architect), even those who currently use a designation other than PLA to denote licensure, such as RLA (registered landscape architect) or LLA (licensed landscape architect). The establishment of a universally used designation will benefit all landscape architects through public awareness of landscape architecture and the licensure credential.

All state licensing laws regulate the use of the title “landscape architect.” Only licensed individuals may hold themselves out as landscape architects or practice landscape architecture. Laws typically reserve “landscape architect” and “landscape architecture” for licensees and sometimes include restrictions on other titles, such as “registered landscape architect” or “licensed landscape architect.” The title-protection provisions prohibit any unlicensed individual from in any way holding himself or herself out to practice landscape architecture, which includes abbreviations and other derivations of the term landscape architecture. At the present time, no state law or regulation assigns specific *post nominal* letters that licensed landscape architects must use.

State laws and regulations use different terms to denote professional regulation of landscape architects, with many using licensure, others using registration, and several using both. Some states, like New York, distinguish between the two terms so that licensure refers to the act of earning the qualification, but each year a licensee must be registered with the state. These terms were originally intended to signify different levels of regulation; however, common usage has blurred these definitions for the design professions so that licensure and registration are used interchangeably.

There are currently several *post nominal* letters commonly used voluntarily by landscape architects, including PLA, RLA, and LLA. There are two key factors that led to the choice of PLA as the universal designation: (1) PLA does not conflict with the existing legal terminology (licensure and registration), thereby allowing for universal usage; and (2) PLA is consistent with existing *post nominal* abbreviations for other related disciplines, such as engineering (PE) and land surveying (PLS). PLA does not replace ASLA as a designation,

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but establishes a supplementary designation that is recognized by all to signify licensure (Example: Jane J. Smith, ASLA, PLA).

Customary usage of PLA by licensed landscape architects does not require action from state licensing boards. The PLA designation is intended to signify licensure and it is the responsibility of the licensee who uses the designation to remain in compliance with licensure requirements and only to use PLA in jurisdictions where the licensee has a valid license. State licensing boards can endorse the usage of the PLA designation through regulation or policy. In keeping with existing title restriction provisions, state licensure boards alone have the authority to ensure that only individuals with a valid license hold themselves out as landscape architects, including the use of PLA.

Guide to Usage

Jane J. Smith, ASLA, PLA

Jane J. Smith, FASLA, PLA

Jane J. Smith, PLA (for landscape architects who are not members of ASLA)

Note: This policy is one of an integrated group of policies on licensing issues.

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