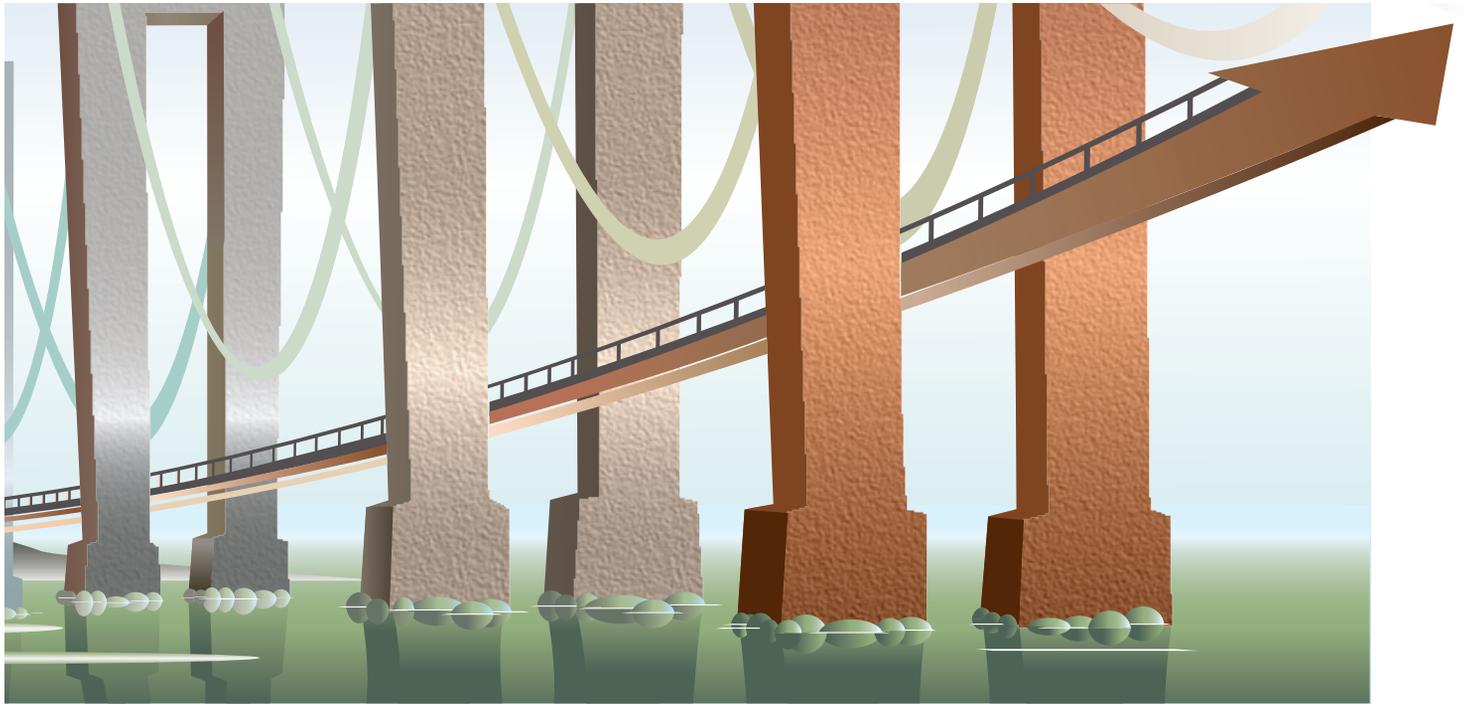


# BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME



## IRWA LAUNCHES A COMPREHENSIVE CAREER PATH

### An Interview with IRWA Chief of Education, Valerie Fries Wade, MM

Healthy organizations must review their certification and designation programs regularly to make certain that they align with changing industry and member needs.

Since its creation in the late 1960's, IRWA's professional development program has reflected a commitment to professional growth and development in the right of way field. However, over time, the needs and perceptions of an evolving industry led the Association to take stock. The time had come to conceptualize an intricate new career path for today's right of way professionals.

#### THE EVOLUTION

In 2005, IRWA held its first Education Summit. Comprised of various right of way stakeholders, the interactive forum was designed to explore the realities and challenges facing the right of way profession. The primary goal was to establish a new education roadmap, one that would ensure the Association's future growth.

During the Education Summit, it was learned that, over time, perceptions about IRWA's designation and certifications

had changed. The SR/WA Designation was designed to be IRWA's premier designation, the highest level of educational achievement in the profession. The certification program, which offers specialties in various right of way disciplines, was originally created as a stepping stone to the SR/WA Designation. However, evidence was showing that many of our certified members do not continue on the path to the designation.

It was becoming clear that two different career paths might be needed – a generalist path and a specialty path. At the end of the summit, a series of strategies were developed to help the Association achieve its long-term goals. Specific initiatives were established which focused on enhancing IRWA's existing course content, implementing standardized adult-learning methods, adding new courses, creating strategic branding initiatives, developing new alliances and evaluating the certification/designation programs to help meet the evolving needs facing right of way professionals, both present and future.

A vital question was posed: "If you were to build a professional development program today from scratch, what would it look like?"

## A TASK FORCE EMERGES

A newly-formed task force on designations and certifications was assembled in 2007 to review current and future needs for the SR/WA Designation and IRWA certification programs. The main goal was to increase overall professionalism in the industry and enhance recognition of the IRWA member's knowledge and unique experience within the profession.

The task force, chaired by Alan Wurtz, SR/WA, included Ben Ward, Ed Opstein, SR/WA, R/W-NAC, R/W-RAC, Kenneth Davis, SR/WA, David Griffith, SR/WA, R/W-NAC, R/W-RAC, Eric Finn, Renee Marruffo, SR/WA, R/W-NAC, Dennis Stork and Valerie Fries Wade.

The specific goals of the task force were defined as follows:

- Increase professionalism and education within the profession with one-third of membership certified and/or designated within five years.
- Assess the perception of the designation among employers, IRWA members and other stakeholders.
- Redefine the purpose of the SR/WA Designation and more clearly position it within the right of way profession.
- Recommend the number of courses, types of exams and/or experience that should be required for the SR/WA.
- Recommend what changes, if any, should be considered to assure the relevancy of the SR/WA Designation program.
- Review how the designation/certifications are represented within the right of way disciplines.
- Assess whether an additional designation or other certifications are appropriate.
- Make general recommendations as to the recertification process for the current and any future designations and certifications.

## THE NEW PATH

In response to the two different career paths required for such a diverse group of professionals, IRWA has created a generalist path that is distinctly separate from the certification in a particular discipline. The new five-year career path will enable right of way professionals to advance

through four levels of qualification, leading ultimately to the SR/WA Designation. Right of way professionals who are not discipline specific can now become certified at varying stages of their career.

To get the inside scoop on the changing landscape of the Association's Credentialing Program, we sat down with Valerie Fries Wade, IRWA's Chief of Education.

### What prompted the need for a new structure?

There is a great deal of diversity among right of way professionals, and the path to professional development was perceived as too rigid. Newer generations coming into the workforce were voicing their need for a more accelerated program and a faster way to receive credentials. Members asked for flexibility and more options. Some recommended we include more rigorous educational requirements and differentiate between beginning, intermediate and advanced courses with an organized path.

### How is the program different?

There is a hierarchy of credentials, and each has increasing degrees of education, experience and coursework. The hierarchy includes four levels:

- 1) Right of Way Agent (RWA)
- 2) Associate Right of Way Professional (ARWP)
- 3) Right of Way Professional (RWP)
- 4) Senior Right of Way Professional (SR/WA)

### What are you calling this new career path?

IRWA's Professional Development Program (also known as the Credentialing Program), is now IRWA's Right of Way Professional Career Path. We believe this will help reinforce right of way as a professional career.

### How will this help our current members?

We expect it will raise the value of our designation, both internally and externally. Many members who have taken courses may already qualify for a certification, as they are no longer required to wait a full five years to receive recognition.

### Will the certification specialties change?

While we plan to reevaluate the certifications, there will be no changes at this time. IRWA certifications will still be offered in Appraisal, Asset/Property Management, Environmental,

Negotiation/Acquisition, Relocation Assistance and the Uniform Act.

### **How would someone use all these acronyms?**

In the generalist path, only the highest level of certification or designation will be used. For example, once the Associate Right of Way Professional (ARWP) certification is achieved, then the Right of Way Agent (RWA) acronym will no longer be used. Once the Right of Way Professional (RWP) certification is achieved, Associate Right of Way Professional (ARWP) is not used.

Those with specialist certifications will still use their respective acronyms in addition to their generalist certification. For example, if John Doe has earned the Associate Right of Way Professional Certification in addition to the Right of Way Specialist Certification for relocation, he would list his credentials as John Doe, ARWP, R/W-RAC.

### **What if I already have an SR/WA Designation?**

The SR/WA will continue to represent the highest level of recognition; however the name will change slightly. We are placing emphasis on “professional” in place of “member.” The SR/WA acronym will now represent Senior Right of Way Professional (instead of Senior Member International Right of Way Association). To increase the rigor of the program, an additional 48 units must be earned through the tenure of the program.

### **If I have experience, are there courses I can challenge?**

Yes, any beginning course can be challenged, as long as you are a registered candidate in any program within the new career path. This means you can take the exam without attending a course to earn qualifying education units. This is another expansion from the previous program which only allowed challenging of the core courses.

### **What about credit for non-IRWA courses?**

Qualifying education units can be earned by attending courses outside of IRWA. A list of approved courses will be developed and posted on the IRWA website. Currently, IRWA approves up to 16 hours of qualifying education earned by attending education through an IRWA partner, as long as specific criteria is met. These units can be applied toward elective course requirements only.

### **Will I be required to take core courses?**

Previously, the SR/WA credentialing program required specific courses to be taken within four disciplines, referred to as core courses. The only certification that will require a specific course requirement is the Right of Way Agent Certification (RWA),

which requires the successful completion or challenging of Course 100.

For the other certifications and designation, the educational requirements are based on a combination of beginning, intermediate and advanced coursework. Specific courses are no longer required. Instead, candidates can obtain their units from all seven right of way disciplines. A maximum number of units can be earned within each discipline to meet the course requirement, at each level, to ensure diversity.

### **What about elective units?**

To ensure more flexibility, while maintaining a multi-disciplined approach to education, electives will not have the same restrictions. Candidates can take as many as they like within any of the disciplines.

### **Are there any minimum formal education requirements for the certifications?**

For certification, the minimum is a two-year Associate’s Degree. Candidates can also substitute two years of experience or 128 IRWA approved qualifying course credits (in addition to the amount needed for certification) for the two year degree.

### **What are the SR/WA requirements?**

The minimum education requirement is a four year Bachelor’s Degree (or university equivalent). Candidates may substitute this degree with four years of experience or 256 IRWA approved qualifying course credits (in addition to what is required for the certification). These substitutions can no longer be combined and are granted on an either/or basis. Either experience or coursework is substituted, and partial credit for college courses will not be allowed, unless the course is on the IRWA approved course list.

### **What kind of experience can be applied?**

While the list of qualifying experience categories varies by level, there is an expanded list that now includes administration, appraisal, asset/property management, engineering, environmental, law, negotiations/acquisition, relocation assistance, surveying and title examination.

### **What is the difference between qualifying and continuing education units?**

Qualifying education units are classified as beginning, intermediate or advanced. These units can be earned at any point in a career, but can only be counted toward a designation by classification. Continuing education units are those that can apply toward recertification only.

### How do you classify beginning, intermediate and advanced?

a) Beginning courses can be used for qualifying education at the Right of Way Agent, Associate Right of Way Professional and Right of Way Professional levels, as well as recertification at any level (but not to qualify for the Senior Right of Way Professional designation).

b) Intermediate courses can only be used for qualifying education at the Associate Right of Way Professional, Right of Way Professional and Senior Right of Way Professional levels, as well as recertification at any level (but not to qualify for the Right of Way Agent designation).

c) Advanced courses can only be used for qualifying education at the Right of Way Professional and Senior Right of Way Professional levels, as well as recertification at any level (but not to qualify for the Right of Way Agent designation).

### Is an ethics course still required?

To meet the ethics requirement for any certification or designation, candidates must have attended an IRWA Ethics course (either Course 103 or Course 104) within the past five years. Some non-IRWA ethics courses have been approved for recertification.

### Can non-members participate in the certification program or designation?

Yes, now anyone involved in the right of way profession is eligible to participate in the generalist certification program, however, members will enjoy a substantial discount on course registration fees.

### Will this help us attract more people into the designation and certification programs?

Yes! Many governmental entities and agencies are restricted from paying membership dues. In the past, that meant they could not participate in professional development or credentialing programs. In essence, we were excluding a large segment of our potential market.

### Will this new path inspire more members to achieve their designation and certifications?

We believe so. The new path was developed so right of way professionals, whether they are members or not, can earn a series of rewarding milestones throughout their career.

For more information about IRWA's Career Path, visit [www.irwaonline.org](http://www.irwaonline.org)

