

AICP STUDY GUIDE

Episode 1: To AICP or Not to AICP

And welcome to the, I guess, inaugural episode of the VERY UNofficial AICP Study Guide Podcast.

I'm Jonathan Miller - thanks so much for joining - and today we are going to cover some initial bases, and make sure that pursuing an AICP certification is something you might even want to pursue; because there really isn't much of a point in going farther down that road if it turns out AICP certification isn't something you want to do. So, let's start by looking at what some of the benefits might be for certification.

According to the APA's website, there are several benefits to obtaining an AICP certification; such as:

- Demonstrating your expertise;
- Getting an edge in the job market;
- Showing your commitment to Ethics;
- Growing your career;
- Elevating your skills and knowledge;
- Leading the profession; and
- Boosting your professional stature

As for me, I chose to pursue the certification in the hopes that adding those precious four letters after my name would communicate to other planners a commitment to the profession, really as a whole. I also thought that as my career develops, having a certification is a road I would probably have to cross at some point anyways, so why not do it as soon as I could. But what about people who chose not to pursue certification. Why did they decide not to?

Well Andrew Moore, Planning and Zoning Administrator for the City of Canal Winchester, gave us his opinion.

(01:34)

Jonathan: So, what were your reasons for not pursuing an AICP certification?

Andrew: So, I think my main reason for not pursuing the AICP is; I do not have any intention on working out of the State of Ohio, or the central Ohio region. In my opinion the AICP certification is very beneficial if you're looking to do this type of profession in an unfamiliar environment where need that credibility. You know, the network of people in the central Ohio region, and the tri-state region, is small enough where someone knows somebody that you know.

Where the AICP could be more beneficial, you know, say if I was to move to California and I wanted to have that checkbox in the resume pool for someone to actually interview me in that instance.

Jonathan: Okay, so you're saying the AICP certification is somewhat a testament to your technical skills, but if you're sort of staying local, you can just - through word of mouth and people that you know, personal connections - just be able to circumvent that sort of, that aspect of it.

Andrew: Yeah, and I think it's also helpful that, you know, my undergraduate degree is in planning, my

Master's degree is in planning, both are at Ohio State University where that's a well-known school, people have more understanding of the type of schooling and training I have in that background. I think the AICP would be helpful for somebody in the central Ohio region, if they grew up here, if say they were - they got their M.B.A. - a different type of degree that didn't necessarily have that type of ethics component rolled into the curriculum.

Jonathan: So do you feel like you've been at a disadvantage at all by not having the AICP certification?

Andrew: No, I personally don't feel any disadvantage. You know, when I was in the Master's program, I had a really good internship with the City for two years. Right out of school, as soon as I graduated, I got a really good Planning Administrator position. I've been in this position for five years - just had my five-year anniversary here a couple weeks ago. I don't think that the AICP would have helped me, or hindered me, from getting this job or another. I think the lack of time experience would have been more of a hindrance. So like I said, I think the way I'm viewing the certification program now would be is if I was to step out of the central Ohio region - or even potentially going to the private sector. Because you need credibility to sell yourself, and sell what you're doing to somebody, because they're actually buying you as a product.

(04:44)

Jonathan: So, the APA lists several different reasons for pursuing certification. So, if you go to the APA website, they will list a bunch of reasons on the AICP tab, such as demonstrating your experience, getting an edge in the job market, showing a commitment to ethics, growing your career, yadda, yadda, yadda; and you've touched on some of these. Do you think you've missed out on any of those by not obtaining the certification?

Andrew: No, I think the career path I'm on right now, and what I have chosen has done those items on its own, right. With the schooling that I have, it does the same effect as the AICP exam. The only difference is, you know, I don't have the AICP letters at the end of my name, which - like I said - I think would be helpful for somebody that doesn't have the ability to do the networking locally. You get that credibility outside of that local network, you know, when people are trying to know a little more about you.

Jonathan: So, you think those could potentially be realized without having to go through the AICP certification?

Andrew: Yes, I do. Say in the future, if I had an employment opportunity, and that was something the employer wanted me to get on their behalf in the first year of employment; I would be comfortable achieving that, at that time.

Jonathan: Alright, so you would still be open to revisiting the idea of getting the AICP certification sometime in the future?

Andrew: Yeah, absolutely

(06:34)

Jonathan: Okay, so what would you say to someone, with the time commitment out there, like a fresh grad out of a Master's right - so they've been out there, what is it, two years, so that they're eligible to take the exam - and they're on the fence about whether they want to pursue the AICP certification or not. Do you have any kind of advice you would want to tell them?

Andrew: I guess the advice I would give somebody would be to take a look at where they're at in their career at that moment, where they want to be - if they want to be pursuing opportunities in different cities, in different states, to expand their background and do private consulting - the types of career paths that involve a lot more scrutiny and a lot more uncertainty in how you're going to move forward - I think definitely the AICP exam is a major benefit.

I think that the majority of the hurdle behind someone wanting to take it, is just the time commitment, the idea that you have something else you have to do after the fact. There's the idea that you have to stay up-to-date on classes to keep your certification - to kind of get the additional training hours.

You know, those are the things that I'm doing now because I want to. Those are the things that, you know, my employer expects me to do at some level. So, I'm already doing those types of opportunities on my own.

(08:27)

So, Andrew brings up some really good points. When I was in my last semester, I was offered an internship here locally. It was a fantastic opportunity, but some personal, extenuating circumstances ended up taking me to Virginia where I was essentially an unknown. I didn't know anybody, I didn't have any connections; just my references from Ohio.

Now as a fresh grad I wasn't eligible to take the AICP exam at that point, but it does illustrate Andrew's point that as you work through the academic side of things, sure you're learning the material - and expertly I assume - but you're also unknowingly making local connections.

If for some reason you end up changing locations, you'll need to start over with making new connections and proving yourself in a new area, and an AICP certification can certainly help in that regard by telling others who don't know you that well that you do, at least on some level, know what you're talking about.

The certification, as Andrew had mentioned as well, does require continuing education. You need to have 32 credits, which are calculated as "contact hours" every 2 years, with 1 and a half of those related to law, and another 1 and a half directly related to ethics.

Those are relatively easy to come by, but if you aren't as disciplined as Andrew is on doing the continuing education thing on your own, maybe that requirement will help you stay on top of it.

What we didn't get to touch on though, was the financial aspects of certification. For those who are thinking about certification because you want a salary boost, you're in luck. An APA salary study in 2018 found that - on average at least - planners with AICP credentials make about \$17,000 more per year.

Of course, the caveat to that is anyone with an AICP credential is - at a minimum - 2 years into their careers already if they have a Master's from an accredited institution. Once they adjusted those numbers for experience, AICP planners still earned a higher salary, but not by a smaller margin.

(10:38)

Jonathan: Just as a , sort of a, closing thought here - Is there any advice you want to give any young planning professionals out there? Not related to AICP, well, it doesn't have to be. It can be if you want it to be: Just in general, entering the planning work force?

Andrew: Sure, so I think the biggest thing that someone who is entering the work force needs to take advantage of is internship opportunities. Take advantage of shadowing somebody. There are a lot of times that I've seen where someone thinks they're interested in planning, and they don't seem to like the reality of what you do day-to-day.

We've had a few interns since I've been here that, quite frankly, I don't think enjoyed what we did on a day-to-day basis, and they like school more. They decided they wanted to be professors, or they decided they wanted to move into the private sector. So I think before you dive in and commit to the time and effort it takes to land a job anywhere, you want to have a better understanding of what you're going to be doing.

Jonathan: Absolutely. I wish someone would have told me that right when I got done with school because you definitely get into a situation where you can get, for lack of a better word, pigeonholed into a specific role, right. So, right out of school, I started doing transportation

planning, and it's really hard after you do that to get out of transportation planning, and so doing a little bit of research and shadowing someone - I think - would be very beneficial for someone just getting out there.

Andrew: Yeah, and I think it's important to do during school. That's one of the things I thought OSU did great at; you were required to have internship hours. You're required - to graduate - to shadow somebody.

Jonathan: Well, thank you.

Andrew: Yeah, absolutely.

Jonathan: Thank you very much for doing this and taking the time out.

Andrew: Yeah, thank you.

(13:00)

All in all, it seems like AICP certification is a good move for those looking at the private sector of planning, or if you're looking at - or anticipating at some point - making a move. Worst case scenario, you didn't need it, but you got it and earn a few more bucks, learn a little bit, maybe become a better planner.

One thing is for sure though; it certainly can't make you a worse planner, or really harm your career in any way, shape, or form.

Well, thanks again for joining us! All of the links for the references we talked about here can be found in the show notes. If you have any questions that you want to follow-up on about my experience with AICP Certification, feel free to reach out to me at theveryunofficialAICPguide@gmail.com. Otherwise you can always reach out to local APA chapter and I'm sure they'd be happy to help you out.

Don't forget to subscribe so you can follow along with future episodes to help prepare for the exam, and even if you end up choosing not to do the exam, I promise you'll still end up being a more well-rounded planner if you follow us along.

Till next time...

Links:

Reasons for AICP Certification:
<https://planning.org/aicp/why/>

APA 2018 Salary Survey:
<https://www.planning.org/salary/summary/>