When I was asked to offer my suggestions to the RCI membership about how I think RCI can best interact with young people and steer them toward careers in the building envelope, my first inclination was to guess. I thought that I must have some pretty good ideas after collaborating on five student design and two student research competitions with the RCI Mid-Atlantic Chapter, encouraging my own students to attend the annual conventions over the last several years, and mentoring other students while at the conventions. Then I realized that the better thing to do would be to just ask the students and recent graduates to tell me what they thought. So, I quickly fired off an email to them, asking them to answer the question, “What can RCI do to encourage students and young professionals to consider careers in the building envelope?” I soon got the following answers from two recent convention attendees:

As an architecture student, I fully plan to enter the workforce as an architect. However, I am aware that many of the pragmatic and economic issues of the field often cause practitioners to become frustrated with the real-world environment as opposed to what they’d been led to expect as students. I also know that there are... architects that have used RCI to steer their career paths into the building envelope field. I think RCI could use these instances as marketing opportunities for students; architects could sit down with students and discuss the reasons for their change and why they are happy with that choice.

I believe that RCI is already doing a great job getting students interested in the importance of building envelopes with the RCI conventions. Personally, I learned a lot from the trade show and lectures during the experience. I enjoyed looking most at the section drawings of trade show products and how they strengthen the building envelope through waterproofing or prevent air penetration, etc. That was important to me because it shows architecture students that most walls aren’t simply extrusions of solid material; rather that they are made up of layers and components.

Based on these comments, I think it will help for RCI to get the word out to architecture and engineering students that one can be both a licensed professional and a registered consultant. In other words, help students understand that the two roles are not mutually exclusive, and that becoming a specialist in the building envelope is a fascinating career path that falls within their chosen professions. RCI member presence at career fairs and lunch-and-learn programs are two ways this communication might be encouraged. It’s also clear that sending students to the conventions has great value. This note from Brandi Wagenhoffer, an attendee at the Houston convention in 2018, says it all:

Folks, I think I just heard a mic drop. Elizabeth Grant is an associate professor at the School of Architecture + Design at Virginia Tech. She is a registered architect, a member of RCI, and the associate director of the Center for High Performance Environments. Grant has published in Architectural Science Review, RCI Interface, the Journal of Architectural Engineering, and the Journal of Green Building. Her interests include environmentally sensitive design, the building envelope, and building systems integration.