



Architectural Education & Accreditation

ACSA Report for the Accreditation Review Conference

Association of Collegiate
Schools of Architecture

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Where We Were

Less than five years have passed since the last efforts to revise the minimum standards for schools preparing future architects. The architecture profession is in a different place than it was in July 2008, but the need to respond to changing external conditions remains.

In 2008 ACSA offered four ideas to frame the changes affecting the profession.

- Change Is Global in Scale
- Knowledge Is Expanding
- University Demands Are Increasing
- Design Is in Demand ¹

These guiding principles remain fundamental to ACSA's perspective going into the 2013 Accreditation Review Conference (ARC). Since the deployment of the 2009 Conditions for Accreditation, less than half of the accredited and candidacy programs received visits, and no clear understanding exists about the effects of the Conditions on schools, students, and the profession. Yet, five years of continuing discussions, within the ACSA membership and among the collateral organizations, have indicated that continued refinements to the Conditions for Accreditation will help advance the discipline of architecture and strengthen the broader profession receiving future graduates.

Simply put, ACSA recommends reducing the number of standards and Student Performance Criteria (SPC) while raising levels of expectation for program engagement with the realities of professional practice. Architecture degree programs must take best advantage of opportunities for program advancement that will come with changing environments and constrained resources. There are opportunities for evolution and improvement that will benefit the profession as a whole, and, with refinement, the Conditions for Accreditation can facilitate these even more effectively. At the same time, schools should be expected to provide students with a responsive and reflective learning environment that engages with the ever changing and diverse activities happening in the firms, businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies that will employ graduates.

The Background

Changes in the Schools and in the Profession Since 2008

The academy and the profession have experienced major challenges since the last ARC. Public and private university endowments have eroded as state support for higher education has been drastically cut. Public universities are focusing more than ever on reducing students' time to graduation, including limiting undergraduate degrees to 120 credit hours. By comparison, a B.Arch is a minimum of 150 hours and many schools exceed this.

Tuition increases have far outstripped inflation for public and private universities.^② Student debt remains a key concern, particularly for architecture students who face between one and four additional years of education for a professional degree, on top of an average of more than seven years from graduation to licensure.^③

Whether out of creative passion or sheer necessity, architecture schools in the last five years have become more entrepreneurial, seeking new and closer partnerships with the profession, government, and nonprofits as a way to leverage funding and enhance student experiences. The number of architecture programs continues to grow, even as the number of students apparently shrinks.^④ Programs across the country are looking to streamline the path to graduation and to licensure by seeking new curricular models and modes of course delivery.^⑤ This interest is being repeated in peer professions. In response to similar pressures, rising graduate debt and a difficult job market, law school accreditors are considering a proposal to allow students to take the bar exam after two years.^⑥

The global economic recession that began in 2008 has transformed the AEC industry, particularly in ways that prevent long-term investment in developing new talent. As the number of jobs within architecture has contracted, so too has the number of opportunities for emerging professionals and recent graduates. Simultaneously, the profession has seen the growth of large global firms offering a range of services beyond building design as well as smaller boutique firms with highly specialized practices.^⑦ Traditional relationships between owners, architects, consultants, and builders are being reconfigured through new and changing project delivery methods. Among the results of these changes is the risk that the profession will see a lost generation of architects who exit the profession and do not return. Recent reports from the AIA's chief economist and from *Architectural Record* have pointed to a bounce back in demand for architectural services in 2013 and beyond as well as a shortage of trained architects.^⑧

Employment levels in architecture firms have always tracked closely with the boom-and-bust cycles of the construction industry. Lately, it has meant that firm principals hiring new staff expect higher levels of performance from relatively inexperienced designers. They demand emerging professionals with the immediate knowledge and skills necessary to enter the workplace. At the same time, incentives for investing long-term in training have been eclipsed by short-term goals; profit margins have gotten slimmer; and project delivery models have shifted. In short, expectations for what recent architecture graduates should be able to accomplish in the workplace have never been higher.

Discussions at the 2013 ARC will acknowledge the dynamic and constrained environments facing both practice and education. Increasingly, schools will need the freedom and flexibility to negotiate the opportunities and challenges associated with these conditions within their specific institutional settings and professional affiliations. As we undertake this important task, ACSA is guided by the following statement from the 2009 Conditions. *Avoid rigid standards of curriculum content as a basis for accreditation in order to prevent standardization of programs and support well-planned experimentation.*

Tuition Growth for 4 Public Universities (2000-2011)

University of California, Berkeley	(144%)
University of Minnesota	(105%)
University of Florida	(93%)
Penn State University	(82%)

Source: Chronicle of Higher Education

Tuition Growth for 4 Private Universities (2000-2011)

Southern California Institute of Architecture	(47%)
Savannah College of Art & Design	(43%)
Syracuse University	(39%)
Washington University in St. Louis	(30%)

Source: Chronicle of Higher Education

NAAB: Enrollment in professional degree programs has dropped 8% in four years, from 2008 to 2012.

Assessment of the 2009 Conditions

The 2008 ARC yielded a revised and reorganized set of Conditions that increased accountability of ACSA schools in areas such as the learning environment, faculty credentials, and financial and other statistical information. These revisions have generally been well received by schools, particularly the revisions to the Student Performance Criteria, which reflect NAAB's commitment to an outcomes-based approach that avoids standardization of curricula and homogeneity among programs. Moreover, NAAB has invested heavily in the last five years in improving the training of visiting teams and in assessing its own processes and outcomes. ACSA considers the 2013 ARC to be an opportunity to build on these improvements.

The changes contained in the 2009 Conditions for Accreditation reflect the increasing demands for accountability found both in higher education and in architectural practices. The ACSA is concerned that the burdens placed on schools to document quality in programs do not always lead to clear benefits to students, to the profession, and to the public. Moreover, it is expected that in 2013 there will be calls to add professional content to the curriculum in response to perceived deficiencies in education.

The ACSA would like to assert in no uncertain terms that architecture curricula are full. Additional expectations for technical training of graduates cannot be added without an equal or greater reduction in other requirements or an increase in flexibility in program review and in delivery of content.

Changes to the Current NAAB Conditions and Procedures

Refocusing Accreditation: Principles for Change

To serve our membership, ACSA advocates the evolution of a highly focused and lean model of accreditation based on the following perspectives.

- Accreditation Conditions should support programs' efforts to define their own orientation to the changes happening continuously in professional practice.
- Accreditation should be more efficient, less time intensive, and less costly to schools.
- Conditions and Student Performance Criteria should emphasize a holistic, outcomes-based accreditation review process.
- The NAAB process should serve to support schools as they seek to maintain or increase the resources necessary to advance the quality of their programs.

1. Clear Standards, Efficient Procedures

The Procedures for Accreditation should be carefully examined to maximize efficiency of process. Redundancies within the Conditions and overlap with regional accreditation processes should be removed. Accreditation should be more efficient, less time intensive, and less costly to schools. In this light, ACSA is supportive of the NAAB Board's recent proposal to increase the duration of accreditation terms to eight years. The ACSA would like to invite the ARC participants to consider additional changes to the Procedures that would streamline the visit, without reducing input from all constituents. Conditions and criteria should be edited to allow greater curricular flexibility, while the outcomes basis for NAAB's accreditation process should be strengthened, relying on well-trained teams to use their judgment in program reviews.

Recommendations—Conditions

- ①** Organize the Conditions for Accreditation so that the Student Performance Criteria comprise two thirds of the school preparation and team review.
- ②** Make the “five perspectives” Condition (I.1.3) aspirational and a framework guiding accreditation overall, and remove the written response as a Condition for Accreditation. Currently, schools believe this part of the APR does not add to the review process. Programs carry out their missions with all aspects of these perspectives in mind, and to have to address how the program relates to these perspectives does not improve student outcomes as a whole.
- ③** Faculty matrices, course descriptions, and faculty CVs are redundant and require significant time for preparation. Faculty credentials should be the responsibility of the university and not a team who visits on an irregular basis. Moreover, faculty credentials (such as whether a person is a licensed architect) do not guarantee quality education. Instead, the quality of the education is best judged in student outcomes.
- ④** Make materials related to the following Conditions reviewable in advance online so that teams can arrive with specific concerns identified:
 - I.2.1, Human Resources & Human Resource Development;
 - I.2.2, Administrative Structure & Governance;
 - I.3.2. Annual Reports;
 - Section 4 – Policy Review.
- ⑤** Omit electives from the material reviewed by Visiting Team.

Recommendations—Procedures

- ①** Cut the duration of visits by one day by making digital course notebooks available to the teams prior to the visit, in addition to materials cited in the bullet above. Programs also have external evaluations that are as extensive as a NAAB visit but require less time on site.
- ②** Explore new models for the composition of visiting teams. The balance of educators to practitioners on visiting teams does not match peer professions, including landscape architecture, interior design, engineering, and planning, as well as other architectural validation processes, such as RIBA. Visiting teams do not have to reflect the composition of the NAAB board of directors. Team members do not represent the views of the collateral that nominated them. Experience as an educator, student, or practitioner is most relevant, as are demographic and other considerations. Other models can be developed.
 - Landscape architecture visiting teams: 1 educator, 1 program administrator, 1 practitioner
 - Interior design visiting teams: each team has 3 members, at least one educator and one practitioner
 - Planning visiting teams: 2 educators and 1 practitioner
 - Law visiting teams (typical): 2-3 faculty members, 1 program administrator, 1 librarian, 1 practitioner
 - Royal Institute of British Architects validation board (typical): 2 educators, 2 practitioners, in varying roles, plus 1 professional from a related or relevant discipline, 1 student, 1 regional representative normally nominated by the school, and a RIBA staff member or RIBA nomination serving as secretary

2. Holistic, Outcomes-Oriented Review

NAAB is a recognized global leader in architectural accreditation because of its outcomes-oriented review process and because of the extensive training visiting team members undertake. Schools benefit from accreditation most when a team of educators, practitioners, and students conduct a holistic review of the program. These reviews determine the program's compliance with a set of minimum standards, but they should not be reducible to a checklist review of specific issues. Reviewing the Student Performance Criteria to combine specific criteria and remove lists will strengthen the holistic review of the program. Architecture education programs have diverse missions that lead them to emphasize aspects of the discipline and profession. A holistic review of a program would involve the team understanding the mission of the program and the ways the program's curriculum both meets all of the minimum standards and exceeds them or emphasizes certain aspects.

Recommendations

- ①** Combine criteria related to communication skills (A1, A3, A4) into one criterion that spans each.
- ②** Combine fundamental design-oriented criteria (A2, A6, A7, A8, A11) into one criterion that spans each.
- ③** Revise the Comprehensive Design SPC to remove the list of sub-criteria. Consider overarching text that can be used to assess the program as a whole, rather than a single course.
For example:

B.6 Comprehensive Design: Ability to produce a comprehensive architectural project that demonstrates each student's capacity to make design decisions across scales while integrating structural systems, environmental systems, accessibility, site design and life safety systems
- ④** Give clearer guidelines to teams about how to review Comprehensive Design, so that this important SPC is not reviewed all in one project.
- ⑤** Keep the focus of visits on meetings, interviews, and team discussions. Reduce the financial resources sections of the Conditions and other data that are not widely used by teams.

3. Orientation to Professional Practice

With rapid changes in architectural practice at a range of scales, architecture schools have both the obligation and the opportunity to evolve their curricula to prepare students for a variety of career opportunities. In fact, the diversity of opportunities nearly matches the diversity of architecture school missions.

ACSA offered the following values in the 2008 Accreditation Review Conference.

Graduates of professional architecture programs should be able to:

- Design architectural projects with creativity and technical mastery.
- Lead interdisciplinary design projects ethically and collaboratively.
- Be active stewards of the environment.
- Think and act critically.

Revisions to the 2009 Student Performance Criteria went a long way in reflecting these core values. Discussions with ACSA member schools for the 2013 ARC affirmed the central place of design thinking and contemporary building practices to architectural education, covered in realms A and B of the SPC. Issues covered in realm C attracted more nuanced attention. Skills in collaboration, working with clients, and leadership remain essential to twenty-first century practice, but are differentially addressed at schools and, based on interviews with schools visited under the 2009 Condition, unevenly measured in team visits.

We hope that with additional dialogue, the SPCs can be further revised to require programs to engage directly with the realities of practice and streamlined to allow programs the flexibility to produce these outcomes.

Recommendations

1 Programs should demonstrate that students understand multiple ways that architects practice.

2 Students should graduate with a basic understanding of the business of architecture, including entrepreneurship, project management, and finance.

3 Remove SPC C.2. Human Behavior from realm C and combine with Realm A SPCs.

4 Combine C.1 and C.6 into a single SPC requiring students to demonstrate an understanding of the various modes of leadership and collaboration.

5 Clarify SPC C.1: Collaboration. Reports from schools visited under the 2009 Conditions show that teams interpret C.1 Collaboration in different ways. Requiring students to demonstrate the ability “to work in collaboration with others and in multidisciplinary teams to successfully complete design projects” is a laudable goal. However, not all schools are able to coordinate with other disciplines to fit collaboration into studio courses. We agree all students should have experience working with people in other disciplines. However, guidelines addressing this SPC should be further developed, perhaps taking examples from other disciplines.

4. Accreditation and Program Development

The NAAB approaches quality assurance in non-adversarial ways. By relying on programs to demonstrate how they fulfill their unique missions, the NAAB allows schools to develop their strengths while openly acknowledging and addressing areas of weakness. The NAAB's role in ensuring program access to resources should not be underestimated. With this in mind, additional review of the Conditions can help position programs for future development.

Recommendation

- ①** Update I.2.3 Physical Resources and I.2.4 Financial Resources in light of more international/study abroad programs and online/virtual learning.

Notes

¹ Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, 2012, *Architectural Education and Accreditation: ACSA Report for the Accreditation Review Conference* (Washington, DC: Author), 3. Available online at <http://www.acsa-arch.org/resources/naab-accreditation-review/2009-naab-accreditation-review>. From the 2008 ARC Report:

Change Is Global in Scale. Architecture programs must respond to a host of rapidly changing global circumstances that affect how graduates understand professional obligations and opportunities. The deterioration of the natural environment, the complexity of economic and social systems, and the fluidity of architectural practice—which is becoming increasingly sensitive to international forces and dependent on specialized knowledge—are among the leading issues that give focus to the global opportunities and challenges facing architecture graduates.

Knowledge Is Expanding. More than ever, architectural practice takes place within a network of interrelated disciplines. As this network expands, the knowledge needed to practice is becoming simultaneously broader, more specialized, and more diverse in scope. This emerging context translates into a complex, but no less compelling, portrait of an architecture graduate: a creative, responsive, and technically proficient designer, an acute synthesizer of knowledge, and a deft leader and collaborator within a multidisciplinary team.

University Demands Are Increasing. Over the past two decades, universities have largely remade themselves in response to shrinking public funding and increased public and stakeholder scrutiny. They seek resources from a variety of funding sources, including tuition, grants, and private gifts, and are held accountable for their decisions in quantitative terms. Architecture programs are thus doubly challenged to articulate the value of design education to multiple audiences (university leaders, students, funders, and the broader public) and to do so using measures that have not been central to the culture of the discipline.

Design Is in Demand. The public has shown a growing interest in recent years in architecture and design. Yet discussions within the architecture profession indicate strong concern over architects playing a diminishing role in the design and construction of the built environment. This apparent paradox prompts the need for renewed perspective on the purposes of architectural education, particularly the extent to which changes foreseen today will be sufficiently planned to adjust to the realities that graduates will face in 5 years, 10 years, and beyond.

² Chronicle of Higher Education, “Tuition Over Time, 2000-2011” (interactive tool). Available at <http://chronicle.com/article/Interactive-Tool-Tuition-Over/129525/>

Tuition Growth: Public Universities



Growth of tuition from 2000-2011 for four public universities.

■ University of California, Berkeley (144%)

■ University of Minnesota (105%)

■ University of Florida (93%)

■ Penn State University (82%)

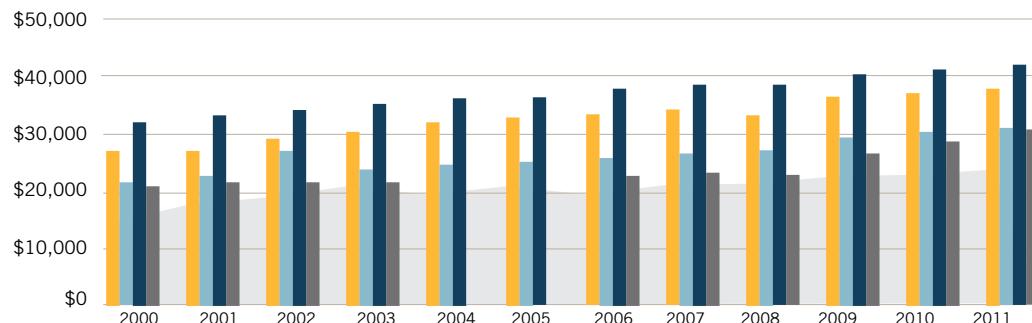
Note. Tuition figures are adjusted for inflation and shown in 2011 dollars.
Source: Chronicle of Higher Education

Tuition Growth: Private Universities

2000-2011

In-state tuition + Fees

Private nonprofit 4-year median



Growth of tuition from 2000-2011 for four private universities.

- Syracuse University (39%)
- Savannah College of Art & Design (43%)
- Washington University in St. Louis (30%)
- Southern California Institute of Architecture (47%)

Note. Tuition figures are adjusted for inflation and shown in 2011 dollars.

Source: Chronicle of Higher Education

³ National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, June 2012, *NCARB by the Numbers* (Washington, DC: Author), 9. The same NCARB report showed only 25% of record holders were under 30 before earning a license.

⁴ According to data published by the National Architectural Accrediting Board, enrollment in professional degree programs has dropped 8% and 3% for preprofessional programs from 2008 to 2012. See the NAAB's annual *Report on Accreditation in Architecture Education*.

⁵ Amanda Kolson Hurley, "Seven Is Enough," *Architect* (January 2013), 118–120, 123. Available online at <http://www.architectmagazine.com/architects/seven-is-enough.aspx>

⁶ Daniel B. Rodriguez and Samuel Estreicher, "Make Law Schools Earn a Third Year," *New York Times* (January 18, 2013), A27. Available online at www.nytimes.com/2013/01/18/opinion/practicing-law-should-not-mean-living-in-bankruptcy.html

⁷ See Royal Institute of British Architects, 2011, *The Future for Architects*. Available at www.buildingfutures.org.uk/.

⁸ Kermit Baker, "The Construction Outlook: Implications for Architecture Firms," presentation at AIA National Convention, May 17, 2012. William Hanley, "Survey Predicts Architecture Shortage by 2014," *Architectural Record*, October 2012, 32.