

Draft ACSA Position on ARC 2013, February 2012

Accreditation in a Context of Change

Avoid rigid standards of curriculum content as a basis for accreditation in order to prevent standardization of programs and support well-planned experimentation.

—NAAB 2009 Conditions

The academy and the profession have experienced major challenges since the last Accreditation Review Conference (ARC) held in July 2008. The global economic recession that began in 2008 has had a significant effect on the AEC industry. The contraction of jobs within the profession has disproportionately affected the employment opportunities for emerging professionals and recent graduates. University endowments have eroded and state support for higher education has been drastically cut. Simultaneously the profession has seen the increasing influence of large global firms offering a range of services beyond building design. Traditional relationships between owners, architects, consultants, and builders are being reconfigured through alternative project delivery methods. The 2013 ARC must acknowledge the dynamic and constrained environments that both practice and education are facing. Increasingly, schools will need the freedom and flexibility to negotiate the opportunities and challenges associated with these conditions within their specific institutional setting and professional affiliations. In preparation for the 2013 ARC, NAAB will engage the collateral organizations of the ACSA AIA, AIAS and NCARB, in discussions to evolve and improve the accreditation requirements and process.

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

- Accreditation should be more efficient, less time intensive, and less costly to schools. Redundancies within the Conditions and redundancies with regional accreditation processes should be removed. The Procedures for Accreditation should be carefully reexamined to maximize efficiency of process for the schools, the teams and the NAAB.
- Conditions and criteria should allow greater curricular flexibility, while the review process should ensure a holistic evaluation that relies on programs to demonstrate they meet conditions within their institutional context.
- Accreditation is not in itself a driver of or obstacle to innovation in education. As minimum standards that reflect inputs from a broad set of constituencies, accreditation conditions are trailing indicators. Accreditation standards should, instead, require programs to demonstrate an orientation to the changes happening continuously in professional practice.
- 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.

Changes to NAAB Conditions & Procedures for Discussion

- Reduce the number of Conditions, which over-determine curricula and force visiting teams into a checkbox mentality.
- Reduce the number of SPC, building from the 2009 SPC changes that introduced realms. Within realms, the expectations for understanding and ability levels should be interpreted holistically.
- Omit most of the criteria from realm A (Critical Thinking and Representation) which are covered by regional accreditation ..
- Limit data in the financial resources sections of the Conditions to issues that are relevant to the team's work.
- Eliminate sub-criteria and other items that can be interpreted as checklists

- Cut duration of visits by one day by making digital course notebooks available to the teams prior to the visit. This would reduce costs and encourage greater participation and preparation prior to the visit.
- Reduce the size of teams, and balance professionals and educators on the accreditation teams.
- Ensure that all visiting team members have recent exposure to or participation in a NAAB degree program and the context of the school under review. .
- Promote the “templating” of the APR, to direct faculty to fill-in required information; to both focus and limit content.
- Change the APR deadline to later in September or October 1 (September 7, 2012 is next deadline) .

Process Moving Towards the 2013 ARC:

Each collateral organization will submit formal position statements; ACSA’s position is being developed and supported through interviews and surveys with the following groups.

- Program Heads of 2011 visits (complete)
- Recent Team Chairs both ACSA and other (complete)
- ACSA Team Members
- Recent NAAB Board Members

The following planned research and comparative analysis will be useful to the ACSA position statement.

- ACSA Cost analysis of Accreditation – request from schools to document direct and indirect costs (yearly reports and the accreditation visit year)
- Canadian Accreditation Conditions & Procedures
- Landscape Architecture Conditions & Procedures
- Planning Accreditation
- Interior Design Accreditation
- Regional Accreditation Requirements
- Engineering Accreditation Requirements

Timeline

May 2011	First draft of ACSA’s position on ARC 2013
Fall 2011	Interviews with school visited in spring 2011
November 2011	Roundtable discussion at Administrators Conference in Los Angeles
December 2011	Interviews with spring 2011 team chairs
March 2012	Discussions at ACSA Annual Meeting
April–June 2012	Research on other professional accreditation processes regarding business processes, general education etc.
August 2012	ACSA Board reviews new draft of positions
November 2012	Final draft of ACSA position paper and materials discussed at Administrators Conference
January 2013	Deadline for submission of background papers for Accreditation Review Conference
July 2013	Accreditation Review Conference