

Architectural Education & Accreditation
ACSA Report for the Accreditation Review Conference

CHANGE IS THE CONTEXT within which the architecture profession approaches this opportunity to revise standards for the education of future architects. The need for change, or more specifically for guidance and grounding amidst change, is not itself new. What is new is how the profession articulates the forces driving change today and more importantly what strategies and methods we use to advance the discipline of architecture through professional education.

This report is the result of 18 months of discussion within ACSA about architectural education and accreditation. It identifies four key conditions driving change within architectural education, and links these conditions to several challenges and opportunities that architecture programs face on their own and in relation to accreditation. The report concludes with six recommendations for evolution of the NAAB Conditions for Accreditation. Two appendices accompany the report, one with specific proposed changes to the Conditions and the other with background material developed to produce this report.

ACSA asks for comment on the issues and recommendations presented here through Friday, March 28, 2008, the date of ACSA's Annual Business Meeting in Houston, Texas.



Part 1

The Context Today

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.

In this expanded scope, architecture programs face high expectations from multiple stakeholders, but they also face rich opportunities to develop within the context of their own missions and institutions. As presented in the next sections, ACSA welcomes the call for evolution in architectural education and practice. In planning for and implementing change, ACSA affirms the fundamental sentiments expressed in the Boyer/Mitgang Report*:

- 1 that architectural education programs should be guided by diverse missions informed by an understanding of architecture as a profession that serves society;
- 2 that professional programs should be evaluated through “standards without standardization”;
- 3 that students should learn in a supportive climate.

Accreditation has an important role in this, both in assuring minimum standards and in promoting program development.

* Ernest L. Boyer and Lee D. Mitgang, *Building Community: A New Future for Architecture Education and Practice* (Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1996). See especially pp. 26–28.

Professional Education and Core Values

Architecture programs find themselves in a context of complex and rapid evolution. ACSA members believe that institutional stability and a commitment to program renewal and development are essential to their success in this environment. They further believe that accreditation and program development can play complementary roles, although the obligations that arise from both activities are not the same.

ACSA programs strive to achieve a vision they develop for themselves, and at each school this vision involves a curriculum and learning environment that far exceeds minimum professional standards. This commitment to a vision of architectural education that is broader than technical proficiency is rooted in the nature of the academy and in the values and ethics of the architecture profession itself.

ACSA is advocating for accreditation conditions and procedures that encourage programs to be more responsive to external changes, to be more supportive of faculty development, and to be less prescriptive of the means and methods by which conditions and criteria are met.

To achieve this goal, ACSA has articulated the following core values that underlie architectural education within the contemporary context.* These values provide an underpinning for educational program missions and curricula, but they can also form a template through which to evaluate programs. The ACSA Board of Directors is confident these values can be affirmed throughout the profession and specifically in the context of accreditation, as discussed in the first recommendation below.

ACSA faculty conceive professional education in architecture more broadly than technical proficiency.

CORE VALUES

Graduates of professional architecture programs should be able to:

- ① Design architectural projects with creativity and technical mastery.
- ② Lead interdisciplinary design projects ethically and collaboratively.
- ③ Be active stewards of the environment.
- ④ Think and act critically.

Moreover, students of professional architecture programs should have the opportunity to:

- ⑤ Work in a nurturing, engaging, and safe environment.

* Boyer and Mitgang (p. 21) refer to a similar set of goals for architectural education from the 1967 *A Study of Education for Environmental Design: The "Princeton Report"* (Washington, DC: American Institute of Architects, 1967):

[F]irst, helping students develop the competence to work within the realities of actual practice; second, preparing graduates to be adaptable enough to grasp, and work within, "the continuing changes in the social, economic, scientific and technological setting of our society"; and finally, preparing students to develop their own analytical framework in which to envision a better society and built environment, "beyond present day constraints."

Minimum Standards and Innovation

Given the context of rapid change and schools' commitments to program development, what role should the accreditation process play in recognizing and encouraging innovation and experimentation in architectural education programs? This topic is particularly important given calls in recent years for programs to adjust to the rapidly evolving nature of architectural practice. Moreover, architecture programs operate within an increasingly competitive environment—contending for resources within the university and vying among themselves for the most promising students.

THE ROLE OF ACCREDITATION IN A CLIMATE OF CHANGE

The ACSA fully endorses the need for innovation within architectural education and practice. The vitality of the profession and its tradition of design thinking and practice demand this. Innovation is a key component of the work being done at ACSA schools, comprising, among other efforts, new modes of course delivery, multidisciplinary education, and novel programs that emphasize values such as social justice and environmental sustainability.

However, the organization also asserts that accreditors should have only a limited role in mandating significant changes in program curricula in response to contemporary trends. The role of accreditation in evaluating and recognizing innovation should be similarly limited.

Accreditation ensures that graduates meet minimum standards of preparation for a professional career in architecture. These minimum standards have been developed within NAAB for more than 60 years, periods during which the profession has seen both unprecedented change and strong veins of tradition. The accreditation process—committed as it is to the laborious, methodical, and objective evaluation of minimal levels of conformity in educational content and outcome—cannot be expected to stay ahead of rapid changes that unfold quickly, unpredictably, and diversely.

Instead of accreditation being the impetus for program innovation and change, the competitive environment of architectural education itself has been, and should continue to be, the key motivator. In fact, overly prescriptive accreditation criteria can limit the latitude for innovation within the many different ACSA programs.

SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES

Changes in global context, in professional context, and in educational context all demand adjustment in architecture as in other professions. Indeed, the ACSA urges greater collaborative leadership regarding innovation by all the collateral organizations, across the full span of architects' careers. ACSA members are proud to be responsible for students' formative years, yet collectively we recognize that these constitute but for the first 12% of most architects' professional lives. In today's context of rapid change, innovation must also be tracked, assessed, and shaped collaboratively across the remaining 88% of our colleagues' careers. Change must be managed strategically and, most importantly, collectively.

NEW METRICS AND FLEXIBILITY

ACSA's professional member programs are accountable to both NAAB and regional or other specialized accreditation standards. In recent years, universities have increasingly had to develop metrics by which to assess quality in their programs. Within this challenging context of increasing accountability, professional programs need the flexibility for experimentation, innovation, and change.

ACSA recommends caution in using accreditation standards to respond to rapid change, whether that change resides in education, professional practice, or society. Yet, ACSA also recognizes that the accreditation review process, and in particular the site visit, leads to review of programs' multiple strengths, innovations, and leadership roles. ACSA schools tout these strengths to prospective students and other constituencies. Thus, as outlined below, ACSA recommends that visiting teams verify the program's efforts to innovate—particularly those efforts that respond to the competitive marketplace—but not to evaluate or compare them beyond minimum standards.

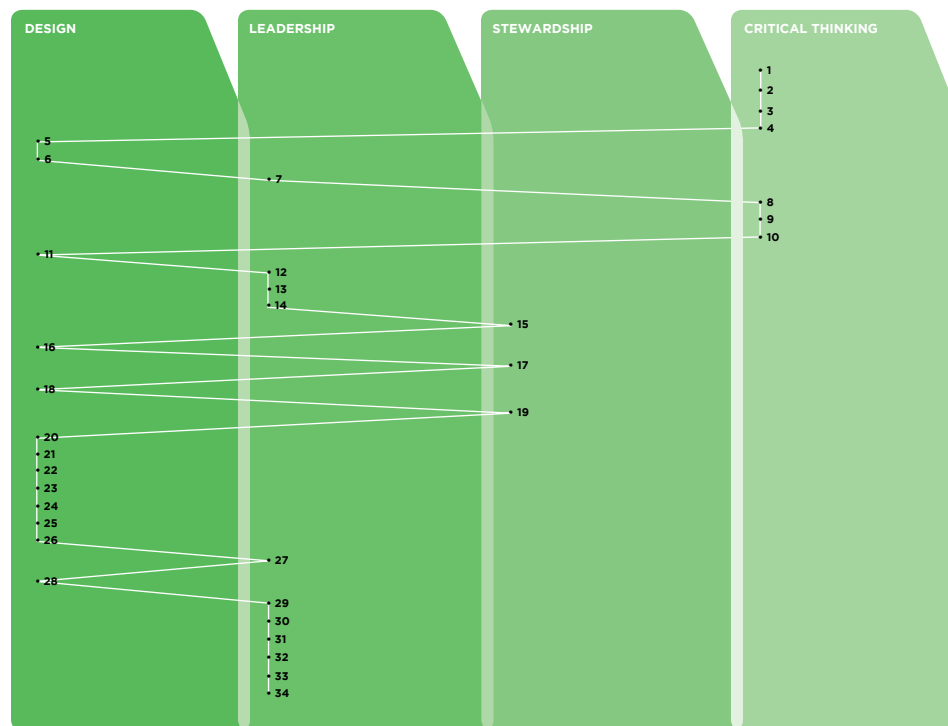
ACSA Recommendations

Architectural accrediting standards identify and define minimum standards in the context of a rapidly changing professional landscape. Professional architectural education programs strive to meet NAAB standards, while at the same time they respond to their own complex institutional contexts, where many demands for institutional citizenship bear little relation to the demands of ultimate professional licensure for students. To continue to advance architectural education in a way that addresses the needs of the profession and that of the universities within which our programs exist, ACSA recommends the following.

1 Categorize Student Performance Criteria Based Upon Core Values

Make the current Student Performance Criteria more legible and less a checklist for use by visiting teams, by making the implicit structure of criteria explicit and hierarchical with the core values. This will allow for greater discussion in programs of the interconnected set of expectations put on graduates of architecture programs. It will further articulate the close connection between education and practice that underpins NAAB requirements.

SPC Across Core Values



DESIGN ARCHITECTURAL PROJECTS WITH CREATIVITY AND TECHNICAL MASTERY

- 5. Formal Ordering Systems
- 6. Fundamental Design Skills
- 11. Use of Precedents
- 16. Program Preparation
- 18. Structural Systems
- 20. Life Safety
- 21. Building Envelope Systems
- 22. Building Service Systems
- 23. Building Systems Integration
- 24. Building Materials and Assemblies
- 25. Construction Cost Control
- 26. Technical Documentation
- 28. Comprehensive Design

LEAD INTERDISCIPLINARY DESIGN PROJECTS ETHICALLY AND COLLABORATIVELY

- 7. Collaborative Skills
- 12. Human Behavior
- 13. Human Diversity
- 14. Accessibility
- 27. Client Role in Architecture
- 29. Architect's Administrative Roles
- 30. Architectural Practice
- 31. Professional Development
- 32. Leadership
- 33. Legal Responsibilities
- 34. Ethics and Professional Judgment

BE ACTIVE STEWARDS OF THE ENVIRONMENT

- 15. Sustainable Design
- 17. Site Conditions
- 19. Environmental Systems

THINK AND ACT CRITICALLY

- 1. Speaking and Writing Skills
- 2. Critical Thinking Skills
- 3. Graphics Skills
- 4. Research Skills
- 8. Western Traditions (combined with 9)
- 9. Non-Western Traditions (combined with 8)
- 10. National and Regional Traditions

② Strengthen and Differentiate Societal and Environmental Values

This recommendation affirms more strongly the profession's ethical commitments, particularly to the health, safety, and welfare of the public. To achieve this, revise and increase levels of expectation in Student Performance Criteria (see Part 2), and revise the "NAAB Perspectives" to include separate perspectives on the relationship between the profession and society, and the profession and the natural environment. The NAAB perspectives were previously designed to reflect each of the collateral organizations' interests. However, in recent years the collaterals have worked to develop shared values that can be articulated through shared perspectives.

③ Strengthen Individual Faculty and Program Development in a Climate of Rapid Change

This recommendation reflects the profession's shared commitment to lifelong learning and universities' typical requirement that faculty develop in the areas of teaching, research, and service. Architecture programs should show evident support for the development of faculty in their roles as practitioners or as more traditional academic researchers. This can be evaluated in particular through the NAAB Conditions addressing the academic context (3.1.1) and human resource development (3.6).

④ Cultivate Program Innovation and Continuous Improvement

This can be done by reviewing and verifying programmatic innovation through the site visit process. Like every sector of global society, architecture programs realize the importance of increased emphasis on and leadership in sustainability, emerging technologies, and global business practices, among other developing trends. Most schools make serious efforts to meet accrediting conditions, but, cognizant of global change, many do much more. Such a verification process would confirm claims made by schools using objective methods such as interviews with students, faculty, university partners, or professional practices; review of student or faculty work; or visits to campus- or community-based facilities. Potentially, in time, a catalog of such verified innovative programs could be shared and might point toward important disciplinary directions. Such an objective process would be intended to independently verify examples of programmatic innovation, not to evaluate them or compare them to each other.

⑤ Strategically Evolve the Existing Conditions with Assessment Models

This recommendation extends beyond the current Accreditation Review Conference. It reflects three strong positions found within the ACSA membership through surveys and discussions.

- ACSA programs believe that, in this accreditation review cycle, the current NAAB Conditions require evolution, not revolution. They can provide a focus around which programs can evolve and improve to adapt to the shifting realities facing graduates, interns, and practitioners today. Moreover, rapid changes in accreditation standards would not match the prospects for radical curriculum change within universities, where professional curricula are intertwined with other university education requirements.
- NAAB-mandated changes must be accompanied by well-developed methods for visiting teams and schools alike to assess whether such changes increase the quality of educational content and student outcomes.
- The accreditation process itself must undergo an assessment process to determine its effectiveness in evaluating quality in curricula and in student outcomes, and to determine whether previous changes in the Conditions have led to sought-after improvements in the architecture profession and the built environment.

This recommendation thus affirms the need for schools to develop their curricula through a critical review process, and it underscores the need for the profession as a whole to do a better job critically assessing quality throughout the continuum of education, internship, and professional practice.

⑥ Establish the Commitment to Lifelong Learning

Many of today's most vexing problems did not exist as recently as the previous NAAB Validation Conference in 2003, so changing accrediting standards to respond to them would have been literally impossible. Moreover, relying on accreditation to effect change leaves firms waiting for graduates to develop through internship. A broader effort is needed to support colleagues working at all levels in the profession. Working together, the five collateral organizations provide the best means to discuss and develop resources of knowledge and best practices to share with students, interns, associates, and partners in firms globally.

Part 2

Comments and Recommendations on Existing NAAB Conditions

The following are specific suggestions directed to the NAAB Conditions, based on the work of ACSA's volunteer topic groups and further discussion by the board of directors. They may be considered as proposed changes to the Conditions or discussion points for evolution of the Conditions and Student Performance Criteria.

3.1.1—Architectural Education and the Academic Context

This perspective should address architecture as a discipline with an academic and institutional context, offering programs the opportunity to address the broader perspective in which students are led to understand the profession. Additionally, this perspective should evolve to encourage programs to demonstrate that it benefits from and contributes to the *discipline* of architecture through a variety of academic forms.

3.1.3—Architectural Education and Registration

This perspective should address the Intern Development Program (IDP) specifically and should specify that schools shall coordinate—at a time prior to or upon entering the “professional years” of a program (e.g., third year of a five-year B.Arch)—a specific required event, seminar, class, or special session at which students can begin to enroll in IDP. Furthermore, this condition should include language specifying the need for an IDP Education Coordinator who is trained in the issues of IDP and active in supporting students who have questions about IDP and internship.

3.1.4—Architectural Education and the Profession

This perspective should further address the architect's responsibility to environmental sustainability within the context of practice and client and regulatory demands.

3.1.5—Architectural Education and Society

From this perspective should come a sixth perspective, Architectural Education and Environmental Stewardship. As noted in the main section of the paper, the perspectives were originally developed to reflect the collateral organizations' own interests in educational outcomes. However, the collaterals also jointly agree that a new commitment to addressing the impact of the built environment on the environment is essential to the future of the profession and the planet. Therefore, the following text is suggested.

Architectural Education and Environmental Stewardship

The program must demonstrate that it equips students with an informed understanding of ecological and environmental problems in the built environment and develops their capacity to address these problems with environmentally-responsive architecture and urban design decisions. In the APR, the accredited degree program may cover such issues as how students gain an understanding of environmentally sustainable architecture, including the complex interactions of built and natural environments; the emphasis given to generating knowledge that can mitigate social and environmental problems; how students gain an understanding of the ethical implications of decisions involving the built environment; and how a climate of global awareness is nurtured.

3.8—Physical Resources

This condition should include text about conservation of resources (including energy, water, and materials) and concern for the quality of the interior environment (including indoor air quality, day lighting, and comfort), in addition to building-code and Americans With Disabilities Act compliance.

Student Performance Criteria (SPC)

Following Recommendation 1 above, the SPC should be organized under four of the five core values for architectural education, with the fifth covered by most of the first 10 Conditions. Below are additional suggested changes to certain SPC.

SPC 2

Critical Thinking Skills should distinguish how architectural education nurtures critical thinking in ways unique to the academic discipline.

SPC 4

Research Skills should include additional text at the end.

4. Research Skills

Ability to gather, assess, record, and apply relevant information in architectural coursework in order to address the environmental, economic, and social impacts of buildings and sites.

SPC 6

Fundamental Design Skills should evolve to include the use of ecological principles or knowledge in the design of buildings, interiors, and sites.

SPC 7

Collaborative Skills should evolve to address the ability of students to both recognize the value of interdisciplinary collaboration and to work collaboratively with students in multidisciplinary design teams.

SPC 8 and 9

Western Traditions and Non-Western Traditions should be combined into one criterion to evolve beyond the Western/non-Western dyad. The new criterion should require understanding of parallel and divergent canons and traditions of architecture, landscape, and urban design globally (including indigenous and vernacular examples). Students should understand the development of these traditions due to multiple factors, such as ecological, technological, socioeconomic, and sociocultural.

SPC 12

Human Behavior should be reworded to read, "Understanding of the theories and methods of inquiry that seek to clarify the relationship between human behavior, the built environment, and the natural environment."

12. Human Behavior

Understanding of the theories and methods of inquiry that seek to clarify the relationship between human behavior, the built environment, and the natural physical environment.

SPC 13

Human Diversity should include "communities" in this way:

13. Human Diversity

Understanding of diverse needs, values, behavioral norms, physical ability and social and spatial patterns that characterize different cultures, communities, and individuals and the implication of this diversity for the societal roles and responsibilities of architects."

SPC 15

Sustainable Design. (1) This criterion should include "measurable outcomes" such as: performance, health of users, impacts on neighbors, impacts on future generations, etc. (2) This criterion should expand into two criteria: the first focusing on conceptual principles, and the second addressing a more detailed understanding of sustainability such as, "Understanding of the principles of sustainable design, including: embodied energy, energy efficiency, indoor air quality, bioclimatic design, solar geometry, passive heating and cooling, day-lighting, carbon-neutral design, and building performance assessment."

SPC 19

Environmental Systems should evolve beyond mechanical systems selection to include the ability to select, configure, and deploy appropriate environmental control systems in response to specific climate, site, and occupancy criteria, as well as the ability to evaluate these systems in the context of sustainable design criteria.

SPC 21

Building Envelope Systems should connect the existing charge of understanding principles and applications to relevant issues of building performance, aesthetics, durability, energy, and material resources.

SPC 22

Building Service Systems should connect the existing charge of understanding principles and applications to relevant issues of building performance, aesthetics, durability, energy, and material resources.

SPC 23

Building System Integration should evolve to include active and passive environmental control systems in a cohesive building design project, where design intent, criteria, and projected performance are clearly enunciated.

SPC 25

Construction Cost Control should include “and Project Value” in the title, and evolved language in the text.

25. Construction Cost Control and Project Value

Understanding of the fundamentals of building acquisition costs, operational costs, externalized costs, life-cycle cost, and construction estimating with an emphasis on life-cycle cost accounting.

SPC 26

Technical Documentation should significantly evolve from demonstration of “Construction Documents” and “Specifications” to the ability to select materials, systems, and components appropriate to the building.

SPC 27

Client Role in Architecture should focus not only on the architect listening to the needs of a client, but also providing leadership and education to their clients, particularly with reference to sustainable design principles.

SPC 28

Comprehensive Design should include the practices of sustainability, in addition to principles.

SPC 30

Architectural Practice should include among relevant trends affecting practice the following: energy efficiency, green design, sustainability, regenerative design, design to reduce global warming, and zero energy design.

SPC 31

Professional Development should be renamed, and IDP should be specified in the text as it is now required in nearly every state.

31. IDP and Professional Development

Understanding of the role of internship and the Intern Development Program in obtaining licensure and registration and the mutual rights and responsibilities of interns and employers.

SPC 32

Leadership should include “Collaboration and” in its title to more accurately reflect the role of the architect in the building enterprise. The language of this criterion should expand to include individual, interdisciplinary, and organizational forms of leadership. This criterion should also address urban design.

SPC 34

Ethics and Professional Judgment should broaden to include not only professional concerns but also social, political, environmental, and cultural concerns.

New SPC 35

Community and Social Responsibility should be added as follows.

35. Community and Social Responsibility

Understanding of the architect’s responsibility to work in the public interest and improve the quality of life for local and global neighbors, especially those typically without access to the design community.”

Part 3

The ACSA Process & Background Materials

ACSA Preparation Process and Method

ACSA affirms the cycle of reviewing and advancing architectural education by providing assessment of existing topics of central interest to member schools and recommendations for changes to the existing accreditation Conditions and Procedures. The ACSA Board of Directors established a process and method for providing input to the 2008 NAAB ARC from the perspective of faculty and programs, other supporting members, and the broader constituency of ACSA. To guide the discussion the ACSA board identified five organizing core values:

- ① The context of architectural education
- ② Critical thinking and lifelong learning
- ③ Understanding and stewarding the global environment
- ④ The design and construction of buildings
- ⑤ Practice

These values developed into the text of the five core values that the organization recommends be used to organize the Student Performance Criteria (see Part 1 of this report).

Over 90 faculty members from ACSA member schools participated in 10 topics groups formed beginning in late 2006 by the ACSA board. The topics included:

- Architecture as Discipline
- Community Responsibility and Society
- Global Change
- Integrated Practice and Comprehensive Design
- Interiors
- Internship
- Leadership
- Preservation and Adaptive Reuse
- Sustainability
- Urban Design

Each group communicated via email and conference calls to collect and synthesize their work over the course of approximately one year. They presented their final reports, included below, to the ACSA board in October 2007. The ACSA board, through its Architecture Education Committee, synthesized the findings and recommendations during the November 2007 ACSA board meeting and through subsequent communications.

Throughout the feedback process, reports were disseminated to the membership and further feedback was generated through:

- 2007/2008 Faculty Councilors Meetings (held in October 2007, planned for 2008 Annual Meeting)
- November 2007 Administrators Conference
- ACSA surveys (fall 2007 and ongoing)
- ACSA website blog (acsaccred.blogspot.com; ongoing)
- Regular conference calls among ACSA board and committees (ongoing)
- 2008 Annual Business Meeting (planned)

The organization wishes to thank all those who participated in topic groups, business meetings, and surveys. We continue to encourage your participation in this process.



ACSA also benefited from the efforts of many of its faculty, student, and at-large members in developing this report. The ACSA gratefully acknowledge the work of the following individuals for their contributions to the ACSA topic groups. Topic group chairs are listed first.

Architecture as a Discipline

Kendra Schank Smith, Ryerson University

Community Responsibility & Society

Marilys Nepomechie, Florida International University

Global Change

Kim Tanzer, University of Florida

Integrated Practice/Comprehensive Design

Renee Cheng, University of Minnesota

Interiors

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Internship

Kenneth Schwartz, University of Virginia

Leadership

Graham Livesey, University of Calgary

Preservation and Adaptive Reuse

Ted Landmark, Boston Architectural College

Sustainability

Walter Grondzik, Ball State University

Urban Design

Baird, University of Toronto

Additional topic group participants:

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| Leonard Bachman | Roy Graham | Catherine McNeel |
| Bill Barrett | Brad Grant | Vini Nathan |
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