Architectural Education and Accreditation
Draft ACSA Report on the 2013 Accreditation Review Conference

Less than five years have passed since the last efforts to revise the minimum standards for schools preparing future architects. Less than half of accredited and candidacy schools have been visited in that time, and no clear understanding exists about how the most recent set of revisions to the NAAB Conditions for Accreditation have affected schools and the profession.

While the architecture profession is in a dramatically different place than it was in July 2008, the key issue remains the same: change. As the ACSA wrote in its response to the 2008 ARC, "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."

At the time the ACSA offered four conditions affecting change:

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

These conditions remain fundamental to the ACSA's perspective going into the 2013 ARC. The following report provides background and recommendations for refining the existing Conditions for Accreditation. Simply put, the 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 conditions 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, architectural practice is changing rapidly, and schools should be expected to provide a learning environment with a broad and contemporary engagement with activities going on in the wide variety of firms, businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies that will employ graduates.

BACKGROUND
Changes in the Schools and in the Profession Since 2008
The academy and the profession have experienced major challenges since the last ARC. 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. The contraction of jobs within the profession has disproportionally affected employment 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.[1] 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 *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.[2]

Moreover, with employment in architecture firms tracking closely with the boom-and-bust cycles of the construction industry, firms hiring new staff face the pressure of having staff that are immediately profitable. They demand emerging professionals with the immediate knowledge necessary to enter the workplace, and the incentives for investing long-term in training have eroded as competition has grown, profit margins have gotten slimmer, and project delivery models have shifted. In short, expectations for what graduates should be able to do have never been higher.

The pressures affecting architecture schools within the university context have also gotten stronger since 2008. University endowments have eroded and state support for higher education has been drastically cut. Public universities are focusing more than ever on reducing students' time to graduation, including limiting credit hours for undergraduate degrees to 120 hours. By comparison, a B.Arch is a minimum of 150 hours, and many schools exceed this.

Tuition increases have far outstripped inflation for both public and private institutions. 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 7 years of internship before earning a license.[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 nonprofit groups as a way to leverage funding and enhance student experiences.

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.*

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

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[1] See Royal Institute of British Architects, 2011, *The Future for Architects*. Available at http://www.buildingfutures.org.uk/.
[2] Kermit Baker, "The Construction Outlook: Implications for Architecture Firms, " presentation at AIA National Convention, May 17, 2012. William Hanley, "Suvey Predicts Architecture Shortage by 2014," *Architecture Record*, October 2012, 32.
[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.

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 practice. 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 the architecture curriculum is 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, the ACSA advocates the evolution of a highly focused and lean model of accreditation based on the following perspectives,

1. Accreditation Conditions should support programs' efforts to define their own orientation to the changes happening continuously in professional practice.

2. Accreditation should be more efficient, less time intensive, and less costly to schools.

3. Conditions and Student Performance Criteria must emphasize a holistic, outcomes-based accreditation review process.

4. 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. Rigorous Minimum Standards, Efficient Procedures
The Procedures for Accreditation should be carefully examined to maximize efficiency of process. Redundancies within the Conditions and with regional accreditation processes should be removed. Accreditation should be more efficient, less time intensive, and less costly to schools. In this light, the 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

- ☐ Organize the Conditions for Accreditation so that the Student Performance Criteria comprise two thirds of the school preparation and team review.
- ☐ Make the "five perspectives" Condition aspirational and a framework guiding accreditation overall, and remove them 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 Conditions does not improve student outcomes as a whole.
- ☐ 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.
- ☐ 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.
- ☐ Omit electives from the material reviewed by the Visiting Team.

Recommendations—Procedures

- ☐ Cut 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.
- ☐ 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 more relevant, as are other demographic and other considerations. Other models might include:

  1 educator, 1 practitioner, 1 student;
  2 educators, 1 practitioner, and 1 student;
  2 educators, 2 practitioners, and 1 student (for all programs)

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 based on 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.

Recommendations

- ▪ Combine criteria related to communication skills (A1, A3, A4) into one criterion that spans each.
- ▪ Combine fundamental design-oriented criteria (A2, A6, A7, A8, A11) into one criterion that spans each.

- Revise the Comprehensive Design SPC to remove the list of sub-criteria, or consider putting the sub-criteria in a single SPC.
- Give clearer guidelines to teams about how to review Comprehensive Design, so that this important SPC is not reviewed all in one project.
- 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. We hope that with additional dialogue with the collaterals, they can be further revised and streamlined to require programs to engage directly with the realities of practice while also allowing programs the flexibility to produce these outcomes.

Recommendations
- Programs should demonstrate that students understand multiple ways that architects practice.
- Students should graduate with an understanding of the business of architecture, including entrepreneurship, accounting, and finance.
- Remove SPC C.2. Human Behavior from realm C and combine with Realm A SPCs.
- Combine C.1 and C.6 into a single SPC requiring students to demonstrate an *understanding* of the various modes of leadership and collaboration.
- Reports from schools visited under the 2009 Conditions show that teams interpret C.1 Collaboration in uneven ways. Requiring students to demonstrate the ability "to work in collaboration with others and in multi- disciplinary teams to successfully complete design projects" is a laudable goal for education. However, in practice, not all schools are able to coordinate with other disciplines to fit collaboration into studio courses. We believe better ways of satisfying the need for collaboration must be found, taking examples from other disciplines, including business or affiliated design 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.

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

FEEDBACK
Please send your comments on this report or other recommendations for changes to the NAAB Conditions and Procedures to arc@acsa-arch.org by December 3, 2012.

More information on ACSA preparations for the Accreditation Review Conference are available http://www.acsa-arch.org/resources/naab-accreditation-review/.