

August 1, 2024

Optional Response to the Visiting Team Report (VTR)

University of Notre Dame
School of Architecture

Bachelor of Architecture
Track: 5-year program, 165 credit hours

Master of Architecture
Track: 2-year program, 54 credit hours
Track: 3-year program, 93 credit hours

Summary of Visit

The National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) conducted a Continuing Accreditation Visit at the University of Notre Dame from April 14 – 17, 2024. The visiting team reviewed documentation and evidence for three accredited degree programs – a 5-year Bachelor of Architecture, a 2-year Master of Architecture, and a 3- year Master of Architecture. Dr. Maurizio Sabini led the team as the chair, and was joined by Dr. Hui Cai, John Senhauser, Christine Snetter, and Michael Boongaling.

The visiting team was well-organized, professional, and genuinely interested in learning as much as they could during their visit to our campus. They respectfully engaged with students, faculty, and staff, and were diligent in their efforts to verify our compliance with the NAAB 2020 Conditions for Accreditation.

The NAAB delivered the final edited version of their Visiting Team Report, including corrections of Errors of Fact, on June 24, 2024, nearly two months following the conclusion of their visit. In general, the report is complimentary of our programs, and found that each of our programs met the Conditions for Accreditation in all areas save four:

PC.5 – Research and Innovation
PC.8 – Social Equity and Inclusion
SC.5 – Design Synthesis
SC.6 – Building Integration

We have reviewed their report, and especially those comments germane to the criteria marked as “Not Met”. We would like to offer additional context and information to two of these conditions (PC.5 and PC.8) in the hope that the Board of Directors will overrule the findings of the visiting team for these conditions. We do acknowledge our shortcomings in the other two conditions, and have included comments regarding our own assessment of these criteria, especially as it applies to the work of our students. The school has already initiated steps towards correcting these areas of deficiency in anticipation of Board of Directors meeting scheduled for this October, and constantly strives to provide the very best education for all the students enrolled in our professional degree programs.

Compliance with 2020 Conditions of Accreditation / Conditions Not Met

PC.5 Research and Innovation—*How the program prepares students to engage and participate in architectural research to test and evaluate innovations in the field.*

In the Introduction to the 2020 Guidelines to the Accreditation Process (dated March 2021), the NAAB defined their goals and desires for the new conditions adopted in 2020. Significantly, the guidelines established the NAAB's intent to allow accredited programs to define their own approach to designing and achieving the required program and student criteria, so long as the program has a formal evaluation process and a process for assessing student achievement.

The core of the pedagogy for the Notre Dame School of Architecture, at both the undergraduate and graduate level, is the conviction that there is an alternative to contemporary approaches to innovation in architectural practice and education. At our School, we do not indiscriminately embrace any new materials, assemblies, compositional elements, or new approaches to how we live as communities *as they are being developed*. Instead, we believe that answers to the most pressing problems in today's built environment can be found in the understanding and application of regional building traditions which constitute an experience-based, inherited knowledge grounded in hundreds if not thousands of years of trial and error. Our pedagogy is founded on the accumulation, investigation, and transformation of this experience-based knowledge encapsulated within the inseparable concepts of imitation and invention. We fully recognize that this approach differs from the work of other institutions and practices, and we offer it as an alternative to practices that we deem damaging to nature, the city, and architecture.

Traditions accumulate slowly and change incrementally. They do not advance through radical breakthroughs but by the deliberate passing along the wisdom of what design ideas work in a particular place as a result of both climate and culture. Traditions must be learned and are revealed through the careful study of buildings and urban settlements. Our pedagogy focuses on providing students with the necessary skills to study and understand the significant buildings and places from history, so that they can discover their best ideas and methods for themselves and creatively apply them to new buildings and places. Our approach to research seeks to accumulate knowledge through written and drawing analysis, and then assess its relevance to solving contemporary problems. This work cannot be done in isolation or without the knowledge of architectural history and theory. The invention and the innovation that emerges from it is then the creative process of transforming these valuable learned principles and ideas into new buildings and places.

The 2024 Visiting Team Report notes that none of the three accredited degree programs met this criterion because the team, "...did not find evidence of how the program prepares students to engage and participate in architectural research and to test and evaluate innovations in the field." (p.13) Their report goes on to document their singular focus on building technology courses as contributing, as well as their dismissal of History and Theory courses as unrelated to the professional purpose of an accredited degree program. (p.13)

Their bias in regards to a satisfactory approach to research and innovation was also revealed in their comments regarding the knowledge and innovation portion of Part II – Shared Values of the Discipline and Profession. While the team did find that the programs met this criterion, they added as an aside that the program has thus far failed to sufficiently execute the portion related to innovation. (p.9)

The visiting team unfairly and incorrectly interpreted the work of the students as based on, “aesthetic priorities or assumptions about integrity.” (p.12) This interpretation fails to take into account the research and analysis of historic precedent as being critically informative of form and material composition. What appeared to be ‘aesthetic choices’ to the visiting team is actually the distillation and transformation of precedent buildings whose inherent merit is derived from careful research plus written and graphic analysis. The work of our students is not based in just meeting particular contemporary metrics or through quantitative analysis of their work, but rather through a deep understanding of traditional building design and construction assembly techniques that lead to essential architectural levels of durability, density, sustainability, etc. A 100 or 500-year-old building is durable and sustainable not because a contemporary testing methodology tells us so, but because having come to be prior to petroleum era, it continues to serve our needs and provide great value today. Our methodology for research and innovation is too infrequently employed today in practice and academia, and its merit is difficult to comprehend through a contemporary lens. We consider it central to the education our students receive in our school and its effects cannot be divorced from a clear understanding and appreciation of our program.

It is worth repeating that the NAAB 2020 Conditions for Accreditation permit each degree program to define its own approach to designing and achieving the required criteria. In this case, the Notre Dame School of Architecture has defined its approach to PC.5 - Research and Innovation as intrinsically tied to history and theory. Therefore, the school prepares its students to engage and participate in research and innovation in the field in the ways that it sees as necessary and true in following this unique pedagogical direction. The visiting team unfairly dismissed all of the history and theory courses we identified as contributing to this criterion, and failed to find innovation in our work simply because they a priori dismissed our methodology. What we describe as invention was viewed by the team as ‘aesthetic choices’. The promise of the NAAB 2020 conditions was the freedom for each school to decide on its own how to shape its curriculum and methodology. In this particular circumstance, the visiting team unfairly applied its own standard to our programs.

We are deliberately different from other schools and professionals in this criterion, and we deserve the option to define research and innovation in a manner that delivers the enormous benefits of the education that we provide to our students. Given the well-documented job placement rates of our students and the ARE pass rates of our graduates, it is clear to us that they leave Notre Dame well-prepared to engage and participate in innovations in the field.

PC.8 Social Equity and Inclusion—*How the program furthers and deepens students’ understanding of diverse cultural and social contexts and helps them translate that understanding into built environments that equitably support and include people of different backgrounds, resources, and abilities.*

The school has worked tirelessly since our previous accreditation in 2016 to address issues of social equity and inclusion. The visiting team acknowledged these efforts, and indicated that the school and the university at large, “...have made efforts and continues to work towards the unified goal of social equity.” (p.4)

However, the visiting team was not satisfied with the school’s approach to assessing this criterion, indicating that the ambiguous assessment methods identified did not allow the school to, “...critically analyze how it can improve beyond the assigned studio project while also limiting further pedagogical growth.” (p.14)

The school has identified three curricular areas that are vital to demonstrating the components of this criterion: the design studio sequence, the history / theory sequence, and the extensive Rome studies requirement for all students. The school presented sufficient curricular evidence of how we further and deepen our students' understanding of cultural and social contexts, but evidently came up short in providing evidence of our assessment and improvement process.

In support of the evidence already submitted in the APR for this criterion, we would like to include an additional assessment method currently employed by our faculty and administrators each semester to gain feedback from students towards instruction in social equity and inclusion. Each semester, students have the ability to complete an anonymous "Course-Instructor Feedback" (CIF) form. Students complete these surveys at the end of the semester (but prior to final exams), which are disaggregated and shared with faculty after they submit final grades for the semester. The form contains a series of questions that allows students to rank the faculty member's ability in instruction and the content of the course. The individual faculty as well as the dean have access to these reports.

In support of PC-8, faculty receive relevant feedback for social equity and inclusion content in their studio or history course through the following survey questions:

- 3. (rate the) Helpfulness of required assignments in facilitating my learning
- 8. (rate the) Instructor's effort to help me develop mastery of course material
- 9. (rate the) Instructor's stimulation of my interest in the subject matter

Each semester, faculty receive feedback from the students, and aim for 85% of the students to rate their instructor as "very good" or "excellent" on the composite summary of the survey questions, including those above. Faculty instructors who receive a rating lower than 85% then take steps to make adjustments to their courses based on the specific feedback from the questions listed above. Faculty with very low CIF scores meet with the dean to discuss the results and to create a course of action going forward.

The use of CIFs has been ongoing at Notre Dame since 2018 for all courses with more than three students enrolled, and these surveys should have been included on the assessment report table generated for PC.8. Had this assessment method been listed on the table, along with the other methods of assessment listed, the visiting team might have acknowledged the existence of a consistent method of assessment for this criterion, and may have been more inclined to rate our programs as having met this criterion. A revised assessment chart is included with this document, with the additional assessment method highlighted.

SC.5 Design Synthesis—*How the program ensures that students develop the ability to make design decisions within architectural projects while demonstrating synthesis of user requirements, regulatory requirements, site conditions, and accessible design, and consideration of the measurable environmental impacts of their design decisions.*

SC.6 Building Integration—*How the program ensures that students develop the ability to make design decisions within architectural projects while demonstrating integration of building envelope systems and assemblies, structural systems, environmental control systems, life safety systems, and the measurable outcomes of building performance.*

Both the SC.5 and SC.6 criteria rely on student work as evidence of achievement. The visiting team found in both criteria a lack of consistency from student to student, particularly in those areas that obligate them to integrate the use of measurable impacts and outcomes. The school readily acknowledges a deficiency in this area, and is already working on corrective actions to

address the deficiencies identified by the visiting team. Unlike our objection to PC.5 – Research and Innovation, the visiting team fairly identified a level of incompleteness in some of the student work presented for evaluation. The very best students in our programs rise to meet the obligations of these criteria, and at the same time create uniquely beautiful and enduring design projects, while those with lesser abilities struggle to integrate all of these technical demands into their work.

Our program does value a certain degree of quantitative analysis to help students make design decisions as a way to bolster the school's position on addressing problems in the built environment through the use of historical precedent. However, we also assert that a student's ability to measure is but one of the many tools he or she will need to be successful within our field. Going forward, we will work to include these measurements in a more deliberate and systemic manner to ensure that all of our students gain the ability to create and interpret them for the betterment of their design work.

Conclusion

In all, the Notre Dame School of Architecture is proud of the work we do to educate students in our accredited Bachelor and Masters' degree programs. While our approach to education may be at odds with most institutions in the United States, we feel that our methods are relevant to producing architects of the highest quality. The 2023 Architecture Program Report from December 2023, along with the Visiting Team Report from April of 2024, are evidence of the success of our program and its pedagogy.

The school thanks the NAAB for the opportunity to submit this response to the Visiting Team Report, and we look forward to the upcoming deliberations of the Board of Directors. We ask only for a fair evaluation of our efforts, and look forward to their final accreditation determination.



Criterion: PC.8 Social Equity and Inclusion – How the program furthers and deepens students’ understanding of diverse cultural and social contexts and helps them translate that understanding into built environments that equitably support and include people of different backgrounds, resources, and abilities.

Goal/Student Learning Outcome	Assessment Point <i>Where is this assessed?</i>	Assessment Method(s) <i>How is this assessed?</i>	Target/Benchmark <i>How do you define success?</i>	Result	Planned Improvements <i>What actions did you take/plan to take because of this assessment?</i>	Links to Evidence
Curricular Aspects						
Students will design projects for people of different cultures, backgrounds, resources, and/or abilities.	B-Arch = ARCH 21111 + 21121 ARCH 34112 + 34122 ARCH 41111 + 41121 ARCH 51111 + 51121 M-Arch = ARCH 61111 + 61121 ARCH 71131 + 74152 ARCH 71111 ARCH 81153 + 81162	Studio design project assignments	At least 85% of students receive a “B” or higher on assessment of analysis & synthesis of predesign factors & overall building design solution	Varies by course – see individual course assessment tables	Varies by course – see individual course assessment tables	Syllabus, calendar, assignment briefs, & grading rubric
Students will gain an understanding of diverse cultures and social contexts through studio travel and study abroad opportunities.	B-Arch = ARCH 34112 + 34212 M-Arch = ARCH 74152	Participation in the Rome studies program	100% of students will study in Rome for one or two semesters.	Except for extraordinary circumstances, this criteria is met.	School will continue to make the Rome studies program a curricular priority.	Summary of students studying abroad
	B-Arch = ARCH 41111 + 41121 ARCH 51111	Participation in studio travel	School will provide funding for studio travel for all upper level studios.	Met	N/A	Summary of studio travel, studio syllabus and travel itineraries
Students will gain an awareness of issues related to accessibility	B-Arch = ARCH 41111 M-Arch = ARCH 61111	Accessibility Awareness Day sign-up sheets and feedback forms	100% of students in professional degree programs will attend this event prior to graduation	Assessment to be implemented in AY 23/24.	Develop quick exit survey for participants to gauge understanding and attendance	Copy of sign-up sheets and feedback form, presentation materials

Students will gain a broad overview of architectural history representing a diverse array of cultural traditions.	B-Arch = ARCH 10211 ARCH 20211 + 20221 ARCH 34312 + 34322 M-Arch = ARCH 60211 + 60221 ARCH 70211	In-class discussions and presentations of reading material	At least 85% of the students will regularly participate in in-class discussions	Varies by course – see individual course assessment tables	Varies by course – see individual course assessment tables	Syllabus, calendar, & lecture materials
	B-Arch = ARCH 10211 ARCH 20211 + 20221 ARCH 34312 + 34322 M-Arch = ARCH 60311	Exam questions related to histories and theories of non-western architecture & urbanism	At least 85% of the students will receive a “B” or higher on each examination	(above)	(above)	Syllabus, calendar, lecture materials, & exam questions
	B-Arch = ARCH 10211 ARCH 20221 ARCH 34312 + 34322 M-Arch = ARCH 70211 + 74212	Written assignments: essays, reading responses, reports, and term papers	At least 85% of the students will receive a “B” or higher on each written assignment	(above)	(above)	Syllabus, calendar, lecture materials, & assignment prompts
Class / studio helps develop mastery of course material and stimulates student interest in the subject. Course assignments promote student learning in areas of social equity and inclusion.	B-Arch = ARCH 21111 + 21121 ARCH 34112 + 34122 ARCH 41111 + 41121 ARCH 51111 + 51121 M-Arch = ARCH 61111 + 61121 ARCH 71131 + 74152 ARCH 71111 ARCH 81153 + 81162	Course Instructor Feedback forms completed at the end of each semester	At least 85% of the students will rate the course and instructor “very good” or “excellent” on the composite summary	Varies by course – see individual course assessment tables	Faculty will access teaching resources through the Kaneb Center to improve the learning environment for students.	Course syllabus, copy of CIF survey questions, studio culture policy document, copy of building rules policy document, copy of community expectations policy document, copy of EDI policy document
	B-Arch = ARCH 10211 ARCH 20211 + 20221 ARCH 34312 + 34322 M-Arch = ARCH 60211 + 60221 ARCH 70211					

Extra-Curricular Aspects						
Students will be exposed to the work of architects in diverse social and cultural contexts	Guest lecture series	Sign-in sheets + in-studio discussions	At least 85% of students attend the lecture series, evidenced by sign-in & participation in post lecture discussions	Not yet met, but numbers increasing	Host a lunch with students and guest lecturer to increase interest and attendance	AY 22 / 23 lecture series event calendar, student sign-in sheets
Students will gain exposure to diverse constituents and learn leadership skills.	School or university club events	Participation in volunteer service to the community	Offer opportunities for students to volunteer through school and / or university orgs.	Anecdotal data suggest that this is met, but participation data not captured in AY 22/23	Develop method for capturing participation data from students who engage in volunteer service	N/A
Students will work with a team of professionals to design solutions for complex community-based design problems.	School of Architecture Housing and Community Regeneration Initiative	Participation as a supporting team member for a community-based design charrette.	Offer opportunities for students to participate in the Dean's charrettes with professionals	(2) charrettes in AY22/23 = met	Continue to support	Summary list of Dean's Charrettes
School will introduce new curricular initiatives that address social justice issues.	ARCH 40711 ARCH 43201	Creation of courses that satisfy the university attribute for community engagement	Support new courses & existing courses to gain the "ZCSC" community engagement attribute	FA22 = 5 courses SP23 = 5 courses	Encourage more of the design studio faculty to consider aligning content with community engagement	
Extra-Curricular Aspects						
School will work to increase diversity of student body.	High School Summer Career Discovery program	School will provide support to increase opportunity for a diverse pool of high school students to participate	School hosts a 2-week summer Career Discovery camp	Met summer 22 + 23	Continue to support	Summary description of career discovery camp
School will work to increase diversity of student body.	TRIO Talent Search program	School will participate in college access program for area youths.	Engage in university-wide program for are youths	Met AY 22/23	Continue to support	Summary description of TRIO Talent Search program