



July 25, 2022

National Architectural Accrediting Board  
107 S. West St., Suite 707  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
Via email: [accreditation@NAAB.ORG](mailto:accreditation@NAAB.ORG)

Dear Board Members,

We appreciate NAAB's invitation to submit an optional response for the members of the Board to review and would like to take this opportunity to provide additional context for the conditions that the visiting team indicated as not met/not demonstrated following their April 18<sup>th</sup> through 20<sup>th</sup> 2022, visit as documented in the final version of the VTR.

## **Final VTR, page 12**

*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.*

*[X] Not Met*

*Team Assessment: Evidence of student achievement at the level of ability for Building Integration was found in student work, however, the evidence was inconsistent. In reviewing ARH 810: Masters of Architecture Thesis Project, measurable outcomes of building performance were not demonstrated in the student work. Additionally, the program states in their assessment that "more technical depth is needed. Measuring building performance can only be speculative in a thesis proposal; the thesis project proposes a design condition that the student envisions will be an improvement over existing conditions."*

## **Academy of Art University's Response**

Regarding SC.6 Building Integration, the VTR states, "In reviewing ARH 810: Masters of Architecture Thesis Project, measurable outcomes of building performance were not demonstrated in the student work." We would like to point out that our evidence for Building Integration was also located in the student work of ARH 619 Integrated Design Studio and its companion class ARH 605 Graduate Design Technology: Environmental Controls, which are not mentioned in the VTR. (Extensive documentation of this evidence was available to the team and is still available in the files we provided to NAAB.) With these courses and additional graduate requirements, we modeled the delivery and content of SC.6 after the Building Integration in our B.Arch program, which received a commendation in the last B.Arch NAAB team report.

Additionally, the M.Arch Thesis is a comprehensive building project that differs in nature from ARH 619 Integrated Design Studio and its companion class ARH 605 Graduate Design Technology: Environmental Controls. With the thesis, the M.Arch program has three classes with integrated content compared to the then team-commended SC in the undergraduate program, which only has two such classes (equivalent to ARH 619 and ARH 605). ARH 619 and ARH 605 have a similar thoroughness as the commended B.Arch



classes, and we also expanded the content of these classes (e.g. measurable outcomes among other things) to adjust to the new 2020 conditions and to raise their content to a graduate level. We are therefore surprised about the "Not Met" assessment and would appreciate more feedback and guidance on how to meet this condition.

The assessment for SC.6 Building Integration concludes with the following: "Additionally, the program states in their assessment that 'more technical depth is needed. Measuring building performance can only be speculative in a thesis proposal; the thesis project proposes a design condition that the student envisions will be an improvement over existing conditions...'" This quote is a truncated passage from one of our faculty course review surveys for ARH 810 (see: Google Drive -> NAAB 2022 -> Documentation -> 3.2. Student Criteria -> SC.6 Building Integration -> ARH-810\_Master of Architecture Thesis.pdf -> Page 40 "ARH-810 Self-Assessment Summary" -> "SC.6 - 27/50 and 37/50). The full quote is, "Note: More technical depth is needed. Measuring building performance can only be speculative in a thesis proposal; the thesis project proposes a design condition that the student envisions will be an improvement over existing conditions - the thesis jury then assesses the relative success of the design." The end of the quote indicates that it is the task of the thesis jury to determine whether or not "measurable outcomes of building performance are in fact met or not"; if not, the thesis would not meet that particular criteria. This is a direct quote from our faculty, one voice in the department, and it is self-assessing feedback intended to be a recommendation about where improvement could be made. This feedback does not indicate that the category was not met. Looking to NAAB for feedback on how to improve our program, we are surprised that this passage from our own documentation was used as support for the condition not being met and ask NAAB for further guidance.

## **Final VTR, page 21**

### *5.7 Financial Resources*

*The program must demonstrate that it has the appropriate institutional support and financial resources to support student learning and achievement during the next term of accreditation.*

### *[X] Not Demonstrated*

*Team Assessment: The program did not demonstrate that there is sufficient support for student learning and achievement during the next term of accreditation based on the following findings and observations:*

- 1. The information within the APR did not provide updated projections for student enrollment. The APR projections are for 2020 and 2021. Those projections indicate an increase in enrollment. In discussions with staff and program leadership there was an actual decline in enrollment for that period. No projections for enrollment and revenue were provided for future years.*
- 2. The program is solely dependent on revenues from tuition for the entire university, the APR does not address overall university enrollment projections and revenue impacts on the program.*

## **Academy of Art University's Response**

Regarding 5.7 Financial Resources, we do not recall being asked for updated projections for student enrollment during the visit but are happy to provide them. In the VTR, we reported that there were 181 Master's-level Architecture students in fall 2018 and 173 in fall 2019. We projected 186 and 195 for fall 2020 and fall 2021, respectively. The updated census numbers for fall 2020 and fall 2021 are 186 and 177, indicating that enrollment rose from 2019 to 2020 by 7.5% and then declined from 2020 to 2021 by 4.8%.



Regarding revenue impacts on the program, the VTR correctly indicates that the Architecture program is dependent upon tuition and fees to cover costs. The financial information we provided (2017-2021) during the team's visit shows that the program's net department margin before allocations is very profitable. Academy of Art University applies overhead costs based on several criteria, including enrollment. The Architecture program has the full support of the institution and the owner. Despite negative net department margins, the commitment of both the university and the owner to the program is demonstrated annually as we continue to provide (1) resources to maintain and upgrade equipment and software so students are industry-ready, (2) a wide array of classes and faculty, and (3) industry connections to help students and the program continue to be successful. It is true that the pandemic affected the institution's financials and enrollment, but it did not affect the commitment to deliver a continued successful Architecture program for the next eight years and beyond.

It is also worth noting that the U.S. Department of Education determines an institution's financial responsibility through the calculation of a composite score based upon certain financial ratios as defined in regulations. Institutions receiving a composite score of 1.5 or greater are considered fully financially responsible. The Academy's most recent Financial Responsibility Composite Score is greater than 1.5.

In addition to addressing not met/not demonstrated conditions from the VTR, we would also like to take this opportunity to respond to information in the final version of the VTR that we view as inaccurate and possibly detrimental to our program.

## **Final VTR, page 8, 2—Shared Values of the Discipline and Profession**

(Last paragraph of the Analysis/Review)

*While it is true that the shared values are described in the APR, one consistent metric for evaluating their successful application was reviews of student work by the planned Advisory Board of Distinguished Professionals. The Program Chair cited that the Advisory Board is in the process of formation and should be in place in the fall. Currently their Spring Show includes only the best thesis work, which offers a misleading understanding of the student work.*

We would like to confirm that the Advisory Board had been formed prior to the visit and had its first meeting in December 2021. Minutes of this meeting were provided as part of the supporting documentation presented to the visiting team. The suggestion that the Advisory Board had not been formed before the visit also appears on pages 9 and 10 of the final VTR, leading us to believe that there was a misunderstanding about the timeline for the Advisory Board's formation.

We would like to clarify that our Spring Show is not a representation of overall work from the program; it was not intended to be an opportunity for the visiting team to review both high pass and low pass work from the program. Our Spring Show features the best thesis work, not the best work from each studio. As the space in our Spring Show is limited, the goal of Spring Show at the Academy (and many other art and architecture schools) is to showcase the best student work; therefore, we do not understand why the work displayed at our Spring Show has been characterized as "misleading" in the final VTR.

In addition to the Spring Show, the school of Architecture has a strong tradition of publicly showing all student work during final reviews. All Advisory Board members have been to these events and are familiar with the breadth of our student capabilities, low pass as well as high pass. We are confident that the Advisory Board members would not expect to see that range of student work on display at the Spring Show.



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Thank you for considering our response to the VTR. We hope that NAAB will recognize our request for additional feedback and look forward to receiving the Board's determinations this fall.

Sincerely,

**Anne Connors**

Vice President, Compliance

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