

Institution: **The Pennsylvania State University**
Academic Unit: **Department of Architecture**
Administrator: Scott Wing, Interim Department Head
Last Accreditation Visit: Spring 2008

Response to Visiting Team Report “Section 1.4 Conditions Not Met”

There were no “conditions not met”

Response to Visiting Team Report Conditions “Section 1.5 Causes for Concern”

There were four student performance criteria in the Visiting Team Report dated March 5, 2008 listed as “causes of concern”:

Critical Thinking Skills

(Condition 13.2; Corresponds to 2009 Conditions A2, Design Thinking Skills)

Research Skills

(Condition 13.4; Corresponds to 2009 Conditions A5, Investigative Skills)

Site Conditions

(Condition 13.17; Corresponds to 2009 Conditions B4, Site Design)

Comprehensive Design

(Condition 13.28; Corresponds to 2009 Conditions B6, Comprehensive Design)

A. Critical Thinking Skills

Visiting Team Report:

The team finds this criterion to be met, though there is room for improvement. A clear studio rigor that reinforces critically inquisitive design work is supplemented by a series of history and theory courses that are most well represented by Arch 311w. This mandatory fourth-year advanced theory course provides a comprehensive overview of seminal texts and demands critical responses of those works verbally and in written (sic) from the students. The team strongly recommends aligning a more integrated theoretical curriculum with both the history and design curriculum.

Actions:

1. Arch 311W, formerly positioned in fourth-year, was moved to third-year to better integrate with design studio courses. By locating the theory class one year earlier in the curriculum, we anticipate it will provide additional integration potential with design work. The course timing allows for three consecutive years of the required history and theory course sequence. Three new faculty members teaching architectural theory and history also teach in the design studio sequence.
2. Professor Jin Baek was hired in a tenure-track position in fall 2008. Professor Baek, a practicing architect with a PhD in Architectural Theory, has reorganized Arch 311W to better align third-year design studio with the required theory course.

3. Professor Denise Costanzo was hired in a full-time multi-year fixed term position in fall 2009. Professor Costanzo, PhD in Architectural History, is assigned to teach the introductory architectural theory course Arch 210. She has reorganized this course and is in the process of developing a new introductory architecture theory course (Arch 211) dedicated for B.Arch second-year architecture students. We believe this new course will enable the program to meet the directive of the 2008 visiting team to align theory offerings with history and design courses. The Curriculum Committee plans on proposing this new course for faculty approval in spring 2010.
4. Professor James Cooper was hired in a tenure-track faculty position in fall 2008. Professor Cooper, PhD in Architectural History, has enhanced the Arch 221 Visual Communications course to emphasize the use of architectural precedent (in addition to hand-drawing skills) to support design studio in first year.
5. The Curriculum Committee has recommended the primary evidence for 2009 Student Performance Criteria for A2 Design Thinking Skills to be located in Arch 311W and Arch 491/2 (and Arch 211 if curricular change is approved).

B. Research Skills

Visiting Team Report:

Minimally met. The history-theory curriculum exposes students to appropriate skills and exercises for research and the writing intensive components are administered admirably. The research components / books are a continual sub-text to many of the design studios throughout the curriculum. While there are exceptional examples of research documentation, many research documents recording design projects tend to rely heavily on simple notated graphic documentation and diagramming even at the thesis studio level. The thesis sequence would benefit with the inclusion of a research methodology module and a developed research component that supports theoretical aspirations.

Actions:

1. A new course in introductory architectural theory dedicated for B.Arch majors in second-year is in the planning stage and will likely be proposed for faculty approval in spring 2010. The course will include a module on developing research skills.
2. Three newly hired faculty members, Professor Jin Baek, Professor James Cooper and Professor Denise Costanzo have each received their PhD's in architectural theory or architectural history. The addition of the new faculty greatly expand our ability to introduce research skills in stand alone theory and drawing courses as well as reinforce research in studio design courses (each of the aforementioned faculty teach in the first three years of the architectural design studio sequence).

3. The inclusion of a more formalized research methodology module in fifth-year thesis is under discussion by fifth-year faculty.
4. The Curriculum Committee has recommended the primary evidence for 2009 Student Performance Criteria for A5 Investigative Skills to be located in Arch 311W and Arch 491/2 (and Arch 211 if curricular change is approved).

C. Site Conditions

Visiting Team Report:

This is minimally met; the team has concern about the integration of site within the observed projects on display. An understanding of site manipulation and its implications on architectural drawings was not strongly evident in work samples. The team would recommend considering collaboration with the Landscape Architecture department.

Actions:

1. A series of technical drawing exercises was added to Arch 204, the introductory materials and construction course during the spring 2008 semester. The exercises introduce students to the conventions of describing landscape and architecture constructions. The sites for the small design projects are located on a hillside necessitating the re-grading of the site to allow for hydrological flow, structural retaining of earth through site and building walls, and vehicular and pedestrian access. The demonstration of drawing conventions showing topographical reconfiguration is required. The intention of the drawing exercises is to better prepare students to manipulate sites of a larger scale in third-year design studio projects.
2. Starting in fall 2010, students in Architecture and Landscape Architecture will work collaboratively in small teams to design buildings and landscapes as part of the twice-annual Thorp Competition. The competition requires fourth-year students in each department to team with classmates from the complementary department in a weeklong project. The competition is scheduled to occur at the start of the fall and spring semesters each year. The Thorp Competition will enable our program to utilize the expertise of the landscape architecture program as envisioned by the 2008 NAAB Visiting Team Report.
3. The Curriculum Committee has recommended the primary evidence for 2009 Student Performance Criteria for B4 Site Design to be located in Arch 331 and 332.

D. Comprehensive Design

Visiting Team Report:

Minimally met. The comprehensive design experience has been developed through two parts of the curriculum, specifically, the third-year design studio experience in a controlled format and the thesis project in the fifth year. While there is a concerted effort to deliver the comprehensive project factors (structural and environmental systems, building envelope systems, life-safety provisions, wall sections and building assemblies, and the principles of sustainability) through controlled exercises during the third year there is little evidence that there are similar specific exercises during the fifth year, except through some of the course content. Put another way, the third year concentrates on certain aspects of comprehensive building codes, zoning, site, tax increments, etc. while the various thesis projects, with their diverse interests and goals, failed to collectively illustrate each of the factors outlined as comprehensive criteria. It may prove beneficial to add comprehensive criteria to the fourth year studio or devise a more explicit process of illustrating the comprehensive project factors during the thesis year.

Actions:

1. Faculty teaching comprehensive design at peer institutions have been invited to Penn State to share lessons learned. Tom Leslie from Iowa State, Patricia Kucher from the University of Cincinnati and John Folan from Carnegie-Mellon have visited Penn State over the past six months to discuss their respective curriculum teaching comprehensive design.
2. The Department of Architecture at Penn State hosted a conference in fall 2009 focused on the teaching of sustainability in architecture programs. Leading faculty from across the country attended the symposium to discuss and share curricular strategies for teaching a range of sustainable design practices in architecture programs. The faculty committee CECA (Committee for Environmentally-Conscious Architecture) is developing curricular approaches to meeting some of the student performance criteria (specifically 2009 SPC B3 Sustainability and B8 Environmental Systems) involving Comprehensive Design.
3. Starting in spring 2010, third-year studio will more emphatically emphasize building systems integration and sustainable building practices. Performance-based software evaluation tools (Ecotect or similar) will be employed across the studio level. Engineering faculty teaching environmental systems, lighting and structures will be engaged more directly in the design process.
4. Fifth-year faculty are evaluating processes to enable Arch 480 (Building Systems Integration) to more explicitly illustrate the comprehensive design factors (taught in the spring semester, the course runs concurrently to the second-half of the thesis studio). We believe the specific exercises currently being executed as part of Arch 480 can be

more clearly defined and delineated in the thesis graphic representations and text.

4. The Curriculum Committee has recommended the primary evidence for 2009 Student Performance Criteria for B6 Comprehensive Design to be located in Arch 491/492 (Fifth-year Thesis Studio) and Arch 480 (Building Systems Integration) with supporting evidence in Arch 332, third-year studio.

Notable Program Changes

A recent \$20 million endowment to the School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture at Penn State was announced one year ago. The gift will bring a number of enhancements to the existing departments of architecture and landscape architecture. Five new named professorships and chairs will be created, two new visiting practitioner positions will be added, the existing computing center endowment will be enhanced, and new funding to support collaborative interdisciplinary research and teaching will be made available to both departments. Opportunities afforded by the gift will be made over the next three years as the gift becomes fully endowed. As part of the terms of the gift, a new Director of the School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture has been created. A search is currently underway to fill this new position with expectations that a permanent director will be in place by July 2010 (Professor Brian Orland is currently Interim Director for the 2009-10 academic year). The School Director position and new planned joint department committees will better enable collaborative decision-making between the two departments. It is anticipated the new school structure and financial support will enrich the curricular options for our students at both the accredited undergraduate and post-professional graduate programs. The new governance structure is currently in development by faculty. Department autonomy on Promotion and Tenure processes will be maintained. It is anticipated there will be greater budgetary oversight by the Director of department funding provided through the College of Arts and Architecture. The Director will continue to report to the Dean of the College.