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May 24, 2024

Evan Douglis
Dean
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
School of Architecture
110 8th Street
Troy, New York 12180

Sent via email to douglis@rpi.edu

Dear Dean Douglis:

The 2023 Annual Report for the M.Arch. program at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute was reviewed during the April 26-27, 2024, meeting of the Board of Directors of the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB).

Based on the review of the Annual Report, the NAAB directors voted to accept the Annual Report and require a Special Report to address the following areas:

Condition 5.4: Human Resources and Human Resource Development
The program indicates that the position of B.Arch. Student Service Advisor was temporarily vacant, and the workload was reassigned to faculty. Without a more detailed explanation, it would appear that increased faculty workloads may affect the program's ability to meet Condition 5.4.

Condition 5.6: Physical Resources
Based on the description provided, an increased enrollment of 18% is causing overcrowding in studio and instructional space. This change may have impacted the ability of the program to meet Condition 5.6.

Condition 6.4: Public Access to Accreditation Reports and Related Documents
The program must provide a link via the program's website of the most recent decision letter from NAAB.

The program must provide a link via the program's website of the final edition of the most recent Visiting Team Report, including attachments and addenda.

The program must provide a link via the program's website of the program's optional response to the Visiting Team Report (if applicable).
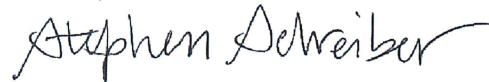
107 S. West St, Suite 707
Alexandria, VA 22314

T: 202.783.2007
naab.org

The program must provide a narrative and supporting evidence to demonstrate compliance with these Conditions. The Special Report is due no later than **June 30, 2024.**

Please feel free to contact us with any questions at accreditation@naab.org.

Sincerely,

Stephen Schreiber, FAIA, NCARB, DPACSA
President

Special Report

Special Report : Special Report : Special Report

Status

Open ▾

Annual Report Year

2023 ▾

Program Name

◯ B. Arch.

◉ M. Arch.

◯ D. Arch.

Board Recommendation for Special Report

Condition 5.4: Human Resources and Human Resource Development The program indicates that the position of B.Arch. Student Service Advisor was temporarily vacant, and the workload was reassigned to faculty. Without a more detailed explanation, it would appear that increased faculty workloads may affect the program's ability to meet Condition 5.4. Condition 5.6: Physical Resources Based on the description provided, an increased enrollment of 18% is causing overcrowding in studio and instructional space. This change may have impacted the ability of the program to meet Condition 5.6. Condition 6.4: Public Access to Accreditation Reports and Related Documents The program must provide a link via the program's website of the most recent decision letter from NAAB. The program must provide a link via the program's website of the final edition of the most recent Visiting Team Report, including attachments and addenda. The program must provide a link via the program's website of the program's optional response to the Visiting Team Report (if applicable).

Please provide your evidence below

Program Response: Narrative

5.4 Human Resources and Human Resource Development The program must demonstrate that it has appropriate and adequately funded human resources to support student learning and achievement. Human resources include full- and part-time instructional faculty, administrative leadership, and technical, administrative, and other support staff... This is the response provided in the annual report : STAFF: The School of Architecture, B. Arch Student Service Advisor (SSA) position was vacant in 2023 from April-November. The M. Arch SSA position was vacant for the academic year. SSA

Responsibilities: advising, RPI ARCH-AWAY oversight, career fair, data record keeping, mental well-being, and course scheduling were assigned to the faculty and Chair in the interim. The reduction in staff, along with the increased responsibility of the assessment process oversight and data collection has added to faculty workload. The School of Architecture's latest response aims to provide context and demonstrate the continual improvements made to our staff. In the fall of 2023, we hired two new SSAs. These additions have enabled the administrative faculty, who shouldered additional responsibilities during the transition, to return to a sustainable and efficient workload. The explanation that follows identifies the specific challenges faced by the department since Covid. As shown in the staff timeline, the School of Architecture began experiencing shortages at the onset of Covid in 2020, resulting in an overall decline in staff numbers from spring 2020 to fall 2022. This decline was partly due to significant retirements, including Lecia O'Dell, the Senior Student Services Administrator with over 35 years of service, and Pam Zepf, the Dean's Executive Assistant with over 20 years of service. Additionally, Susan Palmer (M.Arch SSA) and Carly Brackett (B.Arch SSA), who was promoted to the position of business administrator in the School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HAAS), departed during this period. Concurrently, the department faced the emergence of two new areas requiring administrative and advising oversight: The All-Institute ARCH program and the NAAB 2020 Conditions requirement for self-assessment. Advising for the RPI All-Institute ARCH Program By 2019, navigating the curriculum became increasingly complex due to the demands imposed by the all-institute mandated ARCH program. Despite its name, the ARCH program is not an initiative Rensselaer School of Architecture, NAAB Special Report, June 2024 2 of the School of Architecture but is a Rensselaer-wide requirement for all undergraduate students. It comprises two main components: firstly, a mandatory Summer ARCH semester on campus after the 2nd year, and secondly, a required AWAY Semester during either the fall or spring term of the 4th year. During this semester, students are not enrolled and are expected to complete an Individualized Learning Experience (ILE) internship, ILE civic engagement, or ILE research experience. The absence of an RPI SoA HUB manager to advise students on the ARCH program and the ILE internship AWAY experience meant that advising responsibilities fell to faculty members (highlighted in blue on the timeline). As indicated in the staffing timeline, the introduction of the ARCH program coincided with the departures of Senior Student Services Administrators O'Dell and Palmer. In the absence of an SSA, course scheduling and room assignments were managed by the undergraduate chair from fall 2020 to fall 2023. In 2022, the School of Architecture operated without any administrative staff, leading faculty members to assume additional administrative roles while the school searched for two new Student Services Administrators. Furthermore, the incoming freshman classes of 2022 and 2023 experienced a 15-18% increase compared to previous years, heightening the demands for advising and classroom space (see section 5.6 for details). From 2020 to 2023, ARCH advising responsibilities were managed by Professors Erel (ARCH advising), Leitao (ARCH AWAY ILE Internships), and Carter (ILE Internships). Following the summer of 2022, with the support of the institute's new President, Dr. Marty Schmidt, and Vice Provost Keith Moo-Young, the School of Architecture's Study Abroad programs and summer off-campus internships were formally recognized as meeting the institute's ARCH requirements, thereby alleviating significant pressure on the program. As a result, B.Arch students were no longer obligated to remain on campus for coursework during the summer after their sophomore year. Beginning in fall 2024, B.Arch students will fulfill the ARCH AWAY requirement by working as interns in architecture offices or related fields during the summer(s). This adjustment reduces the required consecutive semesters without a summer break from 5 to 2, thereby promoting the overall health and well-being of our students. Ending the AWAY requirement in the 4th year also enabled the School of Architecture to achieve its long-term goal: consolidating the Comprehensive Design studio sequence (CD1 and CD2) into a twosemester sequence in the fourth year of the B.Arch curriculum (refer to the curricular timeline). These changes have strengthened the Comprehensive Design studio sequence, streamlined the advising process, and enhanced the overall curriculum. NAAB Data Specialist After 2020, the self-assessment process necessitated increased oversight and management of student and faculty data collection, particularly at the beginning and end of each term. Initially managed by the undergraduate chair from 2020 to 2023, this responsibility transitioned in 2023 to the Project Management Teams (PMTs) led by the Senior Student Services Administrators for both the B.Arch and M.Arch programs. Continual Improvement With the invaluable support of Kathy McNamara, Manager of Employment Operations in Human Resources (HR) at Rensselaer, the School of Architecture (SoA) has remained committed to hiring dedicated staff to meet the evolving needs of our students and faculty. However, the search for qualified candidates for the Student Services Administrator positions responsible for student advising, course scheduling, and data management has proven challenging. Between 2020 and 2023, the demands of the RPI All-Institute ARCH program and the 2020 Conditions for Accreditation necessitated a redefinition of these roles within the department. After an extensive six-month search in 2023, the SoA successfully hired two SSAs: Anna Ford (B.Arch) and Jamie Obst (M.Arch). They have proven invaluable as advisors to our students and faculty, demonstrating exceptional interpersonal skills and robust information and data management capabilities. Their contributions have notably enhanced the SoA's self-assessment processes. Since fall 2022, the SoA has also welcomed four new administrative staff members and an additional shop supervisor. By fall 2023, the total number of administrative staff returned to pre-COVID levels, reinforcing our capacity to support the SoA's operations effectively. 5.6 Physical Resources The program must describe its physical resources and demonstrate how they safely and

equitably support the program's pedagogical approach and student and faculty achievement. Physical resources include but are not limited to the following: This is the response provided in the annual report: SPACE: enrollment has increased in the first- and second-year cohort (by approx. 18%). The SoA Greene building has reached capacity for studios and review spaces. Additional review space on campus was secured outside the Greene building and required faculty and staff assistance with the fit out for pinups. 50 % of the campus rooms are shared institute classrooms requiring additional oversight and transport. Given the increase in number of students, campus wide, securing the proper rooms for lectures courses across campus has impacted the faculty's ability to deliver course content at the highest level. The second largest available lecture space (60 students) within the Greene building is managed by the Registrar for institute classes. The school of architecture has minimal access to this room. The School of Architecture's latest response aims to provide context and demonstrate the continual improvements made by acquiring additional space for our staff and students. Each spring, the SoA meticulously crafts a list of priorities alongside its Annual Capital Request, which encompasses resources for students, faculty, shared spaces, fabrication needs, and technology upgrades detailed in section 5.6. In light of an 18% surge in enrollment in both 2022 and 2023, the SoA undertook significant capital improvements. It's noteworthy that the 2024 cohort will decrease by 30% compared to 2023, effectively mitigating the anticipated need for additional space in 2024. 5.6.1 Space to support and encourage studio-based learning. In AY 23-24 the following renovations were made in the Greene Building: " Greene 204 was renovated and now hosts 2 new Faculty offices. A seminar / conference room was added as a shared resource that doubles as a review space and classroom. " Greene 303 A third faculty office was created from an open area. " Greene 302 an existing faculty office was recently renovated, creating more space for Greene 303 by relocating the entrance. " HVAC was added to Greene 304, 303, 302, 204, 204A, 204B, 202, 203. " Note 1: that faculty offices are also used for advising in the SoA. " Note 2: In fall 2023, a shortage of review spaces during midterms and finals in the School of Architecture's Greene building prompted the department to formally request reassignment of Greene 120, currently an all-institute classroom, exclusively to the SoA. Securing Greene 120 would provide essential pin-up space and a lecture hall for architecture courses currently dispersed across campus. Despite the SoA's efforts, the request for room 120 was unsuccessful due to a campus-wide shortage of classroom space in 2023. As an alternative, the institute allocated two additional review spaces in the J Building, equipped specifically for reviews across campus. These rooms have ensured uninterrupted instructional time at the term's end, mitigating the shortage of pin-up and review spaces. " J Building - 2404: This institute room is dedicated solely to the SoA. All storage materials and the raised floor were removed to create a single-level floor. The department designed and built 6 mobile partitions for pin-ups, and a shuttle service to the J Building is provided. " J Building - 3402: This institute room is shared with other all-institute courses. It is reconfigured for each review session and now includes new mobile partitions for pin-ups, which can be stored on one side of the room. There are no renovations officially scheduled yet for AY24-25. However, we anticipate the following renovations/upgrades during AY24-25 that were recently approved for funding: 1. Power upgrade in the studios: " Ceiling mounted cord reels mounted in studios. Number of reels should equal the number of desks per studio while allowing for the flexible arrangement of desks. " Minimize risk of fire due to overloaded circuits 2. New 3D printers in the shop: " (4) Raise3D E1 3D printers to support robotics research and first year need " (4) Raise3D Pro3 Enclosed and filtered professional 3D printers " (1) 3DS CJP 660 Pro 3. Equipment upgrades are underway in the acoustics labs and SoA computer lab: " The Architectural Acoustics program is increasingly relevant in today's rapidly evolving scientific and technological landscape. Educating the next generation of architectural acousticians in scientific exploration and technological development is paramount. These equipment enhancements will position the Rensselaer Architectural Acoustics Department as a leading research and educational hub, equipped with state-of-the-art acoustics facilities in its laboratories. " Additionally, in the Digital Futures Lab used by all B.Arch students, all 32 workspaces will receive upgraded dual monitors. The lab's projection system, which has caused delays in starting classes, will be upgraded to support HDMI input. 6.4. Public Access to Accreditation Reports and Related Documents As we prepare for our accreditation visit next year (2025), the SoA has been in the process of updating our web page that hosts NAAB-related publicly available information. Updates on this page (Accreditation Information) were implemented on May 09, 2024 and they include all of the information that is requested in the special report letter. The link to the page is: https://www.arch.rpi.edu/accreditation-information/ Specific documents mentioned in your letter are linked from this page on the RPI SoA website under the tab School / Accreditation Information page, their web addresses are below. Most recent decision letter: https://www.arch.rpi.edu/wp-content/uploads/NAAB-Decision-Letter-2016.pdf Most recent VTR: https://www.arch.rpi.edu/wp-content/uploads/Rensselaer-Polytechnic-Institute-VTR_Public.pdf Program's optional response to VTR: https://www.arch.rpi.edu/wp-content/uploads/RPI_soa_NAAB_response.pdf

Program Response: Supporting Documentation

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Board reconciliation comments

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