

Background and History of the National Architectural Accrediting Board

History of Accreditation in Architecture Education

The first step leading to architectural accreditation was taken in Illinois where the first legislation regulating the practice of architecture was enacted in 1897. Following that enactment, in 1898 the Illinois Board of Examiners and Regulators of Architects gave its first examination. By 1902 they had established a rule restricting the examination to graduates of the state's approved 4-year architecture curriculum. In 1903, the board expanded this policy to include graduates from Cornell, Columbia, and Harvard Universities, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the University of Pennsylvania. That action demonstrated the need for national standards of architectural education.

The first attempt to establish national standards came with the founding of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA) in 1912 and its adoption two years later of "standard minima," which schools were required to meet to gain ACSA membership. While these standard minima were in place, ACSA membership was equivalent to accreditation.

In 1932, the ACSA abandoned the standard minima, causing an 8-year hiatus in the profession's national system of professional architecture education – a hiatus brought to an end when the ACSA, The American Institute of Architects (AIA), and National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB) established the NAAB and gave it authority to accredit schools of architecture nationally. The founding agreement of 1940 also announced the intention to create an integrated system of architectural education that would allow schools with varying resources and circumstances to develop according to their particular needs.

In 1972, the membership of the NAAB Board of Directors was expanded to include one student representative nominated by "the Association of Student Chapters/ AIA"¹ and one graduate student nominated by schools accredited by the NAAB. In 1999, this representation was further refined to be two individuals nominated by the American Institute of Architecture Students.

The foundation for the system, or model, for accreditation in architecture education that many know today was first outlined in an inter-collateral report, The Restructuring of the NAAB, which was completed in 1975. In that report, the collateral organizations identified two over-arching goals for the NAAB:

- Advancement of all phases of architectural education, with a view toward the promotion of public welfare.
- Provide guidance, encourage improvement and innovation in the architecture system process, program experience, and product with a view toward serving the public interest and meeting societal needs.

And three objectives for the accreditation process:

- To hold a school accountable to its own stated objectives to the student, the profession, the institution, and the public community.
- To improve educational programs in schools of architecture by continuing a systematic review and assessment of education programs and resources through the self-evaluation process.
- To identify to prospective students, the public community, the profession, educational institutions, governmental agencies and state registration boards and to grant public recognition to those architecture education programs which meet and maintain established qualifications.

¹ The Association of Students Chapters/AIA was later renamed The American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS).

Finally, the report identified 13 policies; of which many remain central to the process.

Among the thirteen, the following four relate to the continuous review and evaluation of the Conditions for Accreditation. The NAAB will:

- Accredite professional degree programs in architecture rather than institutions, colleges, departments, or schools.
- Accredite only the first professional degree program in architecture.
- Avoid rigid standards of curriculum content as a basis for accreditation in order to prevent standardization of programs and support well-planned experimentation.
- Establish and maintain procedures for reviewing and evaluating programs and informing schools of their accreditation status and for appeals by schools.

Today, the NAAB's accreditation system for professional degree programs within schools requires a self-assessment by the accredited degree program, an evaluation of that assessment by the NAAB, and a site visit by an NAAB team that concludes with a recommendation to the NAAB as to the term of accreditation. The decision regarding the term of accreditation is then made by the NAAB Directors.

The Members of the NAAB

The members of the NAAB bring varied insight and concerns to the accreditation process and provide a broad and inclusive view of architecture. In addition to two non-architects, one with a background in academia and the other a generalist who together represent the public interest, the members include representatives from the four organizations that serve the profession of architecture:

- The American Institute of Architects (AIA). Since 1857, the AIA has represented the professional interests of America's architects. AIA numbers more than 83,000 licensed architects, emerging professionals, and allied partners who, in design, express their commitment to excellence and livability in our nation's buildings and communities.
- The American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS). Founded in 1956, the AIAS serves architecture and design students throughout North America by promoting and complementing architectural education and by representing the concerns of students to the profession and the public.
- The Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA). The mission of ACSA, founded in 1912, is to advance architectural education through support of member schools, their faculties, and their students.
- The National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB). Founded in 1919, the NCARB today provides assistance in protecting the public's health, safety, and welfare to 55 boards regulating architecture in the 50 states, 4 territories, and District of Columbia.