

January 22, 2024

Re: Optional Response to the VTR – Continuing Candidacy

Dear NAAB Board of Directors,

On behalf of the Utah Valley University (UVU) Architecture Program, I want to express our sincere gratitude for the time and effort invested by NAAB and the visiting team during the recent accreditation visit. We appreciate the valuable feedback provided in the Visiting Team Report (VTR) and the opportunity to respond.

We are encouraged by the positive aspects highlighted in the VTR and the acknowledgment of our program's progress since the previous review. A significant reduction from 24 to 8 cited criteria reflects the hard work and dedication of our faculty, staff, and students. The UVU Architecture Program is committed to continual improvement through the accreditation process, which has been invaluable in shaping the trajectory of our program.

As we reviewed the VTR, we have identified specific points that we would like to address in our response and demonstrate compliance with the following NAAB standards:

1. Values (Environmental Stewardship and Professional Responsibility, Knowledge and Innovation)
2. PC3 - Ecological Knowledge and Responsibility
3. PC5 - Research and Innovation
4. SC2 - Professional Practice
5. SC5 and SC6 - Design Synthesis and Building Integration
6. 5.8 - Information Resources

We believe our program aligns with these criteria and appreciate the opportunity to provide supporting evidence. Our reservations with the VTR stem from concerns about the interpretation of criteria, unexpected changes in the review process, and potential biases affecting the assessment. As an overarching concern, it should be acknowledged that UVU provided additional material to demonstrate compliance with these criteria which was not reviewed by the visiting team due to what we felt were unjustified reductions to the NAAB PC & SC Curriculum Matrix requested by the team. During pre-visit meetings and emails shortly before the visit, the visiting team requested significant reductions to the matrix by UVU, which decreased the amount of course material and student work that was reviewed by the team (see attached document "2023 UVU PCSC Matrix revised and previous" showing the courses marked on the initial matrix and those remaining – highlighted in yellow - after requested reductions by the visiting team). The team specifically requested a reduction to "2 or 3 key courses" (see attached email exchange from September 2023) for all criteria on the matrix. This prescriptive request was unexpected, as no specified number of courses is mentioned in NAAB documents, and previous visiting teams had counseled us to increase rather than reduce the number of courses in our PC & SC Matrix. The timing of the requested changes created inconsistencies between the reduced matrix and the APR, which referenced the matrix in many places. This inopportune change in the review process along with narrow interpretations of NAAB criteria are the primary issues addressed here in our response.

1. Values
  - a. Environmental Stewardship and Professional Responsibility – The VTR acknowledges classes where this value is taught (ARC 3220, 4120, 4220, and 4540) and several specific

principles that are emphasized in the program, including durability, adaptive reuse, biophilic design, and the distinctive merits of traditional buildings. The VTR also acknowledges the Industry Advisory Board rating which met our program benchmark for this value. However, as reasons for assessing this value as “in progress,” the VTR cites deficiencies in environmental design “innovations” and instructional material on professional codes of ethics. RESPONSE: Although we acknowledge that innovation may have positive environmental benefits, it is not mentioned in the definition of this value and a fixation on new materials and trends may in fact accelerate obsolescence and contribute to practices in architecture that create ephemeral buildings with a negative impact on the natural world. Sustainability by definition is the longevity of buildings over time. While we do value and teach innovations in technology, we also teach environmental stewardship through time-tested enduring traditional methods and materials. Regarding professional responsibility, as shown on the PC/SC matrix, this value is a primary focus of ARC4540 Architecture Professional Practice. Professional responsibility is taught through readings, assignments, class discussions, and exams in this class. In addition to these overt instances of specific, detailed class instruction and work in this area, the subjects of architectural ethics, responsibilities to their community, and the standard of care scaffolds the instruction throughout the entire course as well as many other courses not specifically marked on the matrix. Additional information on professional ethics is found in the response to SC2 below. All considered, we feel the evidence supports this value being met rather than “in progress.”

- b. Knowledge and Innovation – The VTR acknowledges classes where this value is taught (ARC 3220, 4120, 4220 and 4530) and recognizes research as an important part of the curriculum. The report also recognizes that the assessment benchmark set by our program was met in the annual Industry Advisory Board survey. However, the reason given for marking this value as “in progress” was a desire for more innovation in building technology. RESPONSE: Although rooted in timeless traditional design principles, our curriculum is committed to knowledge and innovation, and architectural research at UVU spans various realms beyond traditional building materials and technology. The curriculum explores intersections with disciplines such as environmental psychology, anthropology, behavioral science, sociology, and neuroscience. Students engage in independent project-based research, submitting original work to conferences and exploring innovations discussed in architectural theory courses. The fifth-year Capstone Project Research course empowers students to pursue their own interests in applied research, bridging theory and practice in the architectural design process. The VTR, by focusing solely on building technology (which is not specifically mentioned in the 2020 conditions as part of this criteria), seems to undervalue the multifaceted nature of innovation within the field as taught at UVU. All considered, we feel there is sufficient evidence that this value is met rather than “in progress.”
2. PC3 - Ecological Knowledge and Responsibility – The VTR recognizes that this criterion is taught in several courses (ARC 3220, 4120, and 4220) and points out the specific strengths of traditional buildings – durability, longevity, adaptive reuse, and carbon neutral design – that are emphasized in the curriculum. However, the VTR concludes that there is a lack of commitment to instill “innovations” in advanced building performance. RESPONSE: Similar to the concerns raised above with the value of “environmental stewardship,” the singular focus on innovation by the VTR ignores the more holistic approach that the program takes towards this criterion. In the 2020 conditions, the definition of PC.3 does not mention innovation. While innovation is

important in design, an unbalanced preoccupation with novelty can potentially undermine a long-term understanding of the dynamic between built and natural environments. Sustainable practices require a deep understanding of ecological systems and a commitment to enduring principles, which may be overshadowed by a focus on innovations that have unknown and even potentially negative future impacts on the natural environment. The enduring principles identified in the VTR – durability, longevity, adaptive reuse, and carbon neutral design – are each important “advanced building performance” principles that contribute to ecological awareness and appreciation for resilience in architectural education. On balance, we feel there is evidence that this value is met rather than “not yet met.”

3. PC5 – Research and Innovation – The VTR acknowledges several courses that focus on this criterion and offer students opportunities for research as part of their learning experience. It also recognizes that ongoing improvements are being made and the program assessment benchmarks were met. However, the VTR singles out insufficient innovations in “building construction methods” as a reason for evaluating this criterion as “not yet met.” RESPONSE: UVU Architecture offers a balanced integration of theory, practice, and cross-disciplinary research. The program prepares students to engage in research at various levels, encouraging them to test innovations against enduring principles and evidence from practice. In courses like Architectural Theory and Culture and Behavior in Architecture, students conduct independent research projects and present findings at conferences. Examples of student research that has been presented at conferences can be found at:  
<https://www.uvu.edu/aed/architecture/architecture-news/posts/2023-ucur-research.html>  
<https://www.uvu.edu/aed/architecture/architecture-news/posts/2022-ietc-conference.html>  
<https://www.uvu.edu/aed/architecture/architecture-news/posts/2022-ucur-conference.html>  
<https://www.uvu.edu/aed/architecture/architecture-news/posts/2021-ucur-conference.html>  
Capstone Project Research course in the fifth year allows students to pursue personalized architectural research. The focus extends beyond building construction methods, fostering a broad understanding of architecture in areas such as environmental psychology, anthropology, behavioral science, sociology, and neuroscience. Considering the program benchmarks that have been achieved and the evidence provided, we feel that this value is met rather than “not yet met.”
4. SC2 – Professional Practice – The VTR recognizes that this criterion is taught in two courses, ARC 3130 Codes and Construction Law and ARC 4540 Professional Practice, and that the program assessment measure was met. However, the visiting team said they could not find evidence that the program covered codes of ethics and professional conduct. RESPONSE: During the visit, the visiting team asked for evidence of how codes of ethics are taught in ARC 4540, and UVU provided examples from class readings and assignments. As mentioned above for the value “Environmental Stewardship and Professional Responsibility,” ethics and professional responsibility scaffolds the instruction throughout the entire course as well as many other courses not marked on the matrix. In interviews between the team and the program coordinator, the team acknowledged that professional ethics was being taught, but asked for the syllabus and assignments to specifically refer to the AIA Code of Ethics and NCARB Model Rules of Conduct. This specificity had not been mentioned by previous visiting teams, and because it is an important distinction, we are implementing changes to respond. In addition to the broad way that ethics has always been reinforced throughout the program and in ARC 4540, the program has added material that also covers the NCARB Rules of Conduct and AIA Code of Ethics in the more granular way requested in the visit (please see attached “ARC 4540 Updated Course Documents”). Material has been added to the Syllabus and to course reading 3.3 (now

renamed Profession—Regulations, Code of Conduct) to accomplish this. Additionally, a new assignment, 3.3 Profession—Code of Conduct, has been introduced to reinforce student understanding of professional ethical duties. Items and text added to the course, as reflected in these revised and new documents, are highlighted in yellow. These improvements should align the course more fully with SC2 Professional Practice.

5. SC5 and SC6 – Design Synthesis and Building Integration – The VTR praises the design synthesis and building integration abilities demonstrated by students in some areas, but cites concerns in other areas as found in student work that was reviewed. The team focused its review for this criterion on ARC4610 Capstone Studio. RESPONSE: In addition to the reductions to the PC/SC matrix requested by the team as noted above, the visiting team focused the review on only one of the classes for which student evidence was provided, as conceded in the VTR. ARC4610 Capstone Studio is intended within the curriculum to be only one of three studios where students demonstrate their ability to synthesize and integrate the many technical sub-criteria of SC5 and SC6. ARC4110 Studio 5 and ARC4210 Studio 6 each emphasize certain sub-criteria, with ARC4610 as a final touchstone to evaluate student ability. The technical classes ARC 4120 Active Environmental Systems and ARC 4220 Building Envelope and Science occur in tandem with these studios (5 and 6), and student work cumulatively in all these courses is assessed to determine comprehension and ability in these areas. Whether based on a misunderstanding of the curriculum or other reasons, only evidence from ARC4610 was chosen to be reviewed by the team. Evidence from other studio and technical courses was disregarded until it was brought up by the program coordinator in the final interview during the visit. At that point, it seemed that the team had already reached a conclusion about the criteria without reviewing the full breadth of student work provided. In addition to the incomplete evidence that was reviewed, the team evaluated the student work based on standards that do not match NAAB guidelines. NAAB guidelines allow programs flexibility in curriculum development and assessment and do not require 100% of students to demonstrate full compliance with a given criteria. In discussions with the visiting team, however, it was stated that if one student missed one of the sub-criteria of SC5 or SC6, the entire criterion would be marked as unmet. A preference was expressed by the team for UVU to change its curriculum to include a studio project with a drastically simplified program (a “one-room building”) that would be the only course evaluated under SC5 and SC6. This was described as more typical by other architecture schools to make compliance and review of NAAB conditions easier. While UVU acknowledges the convenience that a project like this would create for the accreditation process, it seems like an oversimplified device that would not match the realities of the profession or prepare students for the complexities of professional practice. This is ultimately a judgment call, and UVU will consider such a project for future curriculum changes, but the current curriculum and student work evidence, along with feedback from industry advisory board professionals, students, and faculty, has suggested to us that a more holistic approach with several studios of more complex projects is an equally if not more effective approach. For these reasons, we believe that SC5 and SC6 should be evaluated as met rather than “not met” as described by the visiting team.
6. 5.8 – Information resources – The VTR acknowledges the progress made in this area from the previous visit, including the resources currently available to students through the architecture collection and those at the Fulton Library on campus. However, the VTR concludes that the holdings “are not yet appropriate to support a professional architectural education program.” RESPONSE: During the previous 2021 visit, the visiting team praised the size and breadth of the collection but marked this criterion as “in progress” only due to the lack of accessibility of the architecture collection at that time. This 5,000+ volume collection was fully accessible during the

2023 visit, and we expected the criteria to be marked as met based on feedback from the previous visit. The 2020 conditions focus on equitable access and information services, which the 2023 VTR acknowledges are now met with our full collection. The VTR does not specify the number of volumes needed to meet this criterion, only that the current holdings are “not yet appropriate.” We sought clarification on how many volumes and journals would be required to meet this criterion but did not receive a clear response. During a January 18, 2024 NAAB Post-visit Focus Group meeting, this point was raised by the program, and NAAB representatives responded that the lack of consistency and clarity in the VTR was “not helpful.” Considering the services and resources currently provided to students through the Fulton Library and the collection housed at the architecture program, we believe there is evidence that this criterion is met.

Note: Item 5.4 Human Resources was also marked as “in progress.” As the VTR states: “Because of the faculty numbers, rank levels, composition, and scholarly output, the team found the human resources not yet appropriate for an accredited program.” RESPONSE: Although UVU Architecture has made significant progress since the previous visit in this area, university-wide budget constraints and the workload of creating a new program have made achieving this criterion challenging. The program is seeking additional faculty and funding from the university in order to allow for more time for scholarly output and career advancement. We will continue to strive for progress in this area.

Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to address these concerns and the ongoing improvement of our program. The positive aspects emphasized in the VTR and the recognition of our program's advancements since the last review are encouraging. Seeing a 2/3 decrease in criteria of concern is particularly reassuring and stands as a testament to the diligent efforts and commitment exhibited by our faculty, staff, and students. As described above, while we will continue to strive for improvement, we feel there is evidence that many of these 8 criteria are currently met according to the 2020 conditions and the assessment benchmarks set by the program. We remain committed to meeting and exceeding the standards set by NAAB, look forward to the final decision, and appreciate your continued support in shaping the future of architectural education at UVU.

Sincerely,

Paul Monson  
UVU Architecture Program Coordinator



PAUL MONSON, AIA, ICAA

UTAH VALLEY UNIVERSITY

*Program Coordinator - Architecture*

*Architecture & Engineering Design*

[paul.monson@uvu.edu](mailto:paul.monson@uvu.edu)

(801) 556-4363 Mobile