

American University of Sharjah

Interim Progress Report for 2015

Date submitted to the NAAB: Nov. 25, 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF 2013 NAAB VISIT

CONDITIONS NOT MET

2013 VTR
None

STUDENT PERFORMANCE CRITERIA NOT MET

2013 VTR
A. 4 Technical Documentation
B .2 Accessibility
B. 5 Life Safety
B.6 Comprehensive Design

CAUSES OF CONCERN

2013 VTR
Faculty turnover and recruiting
Faculty diversity

Interim Progress Report
American University of Sharjah
School of Architecture and Design
B. Arch. [159 credits]
Last APR submission: September 7, 2012
Year of the previous visit: 2013

Please update contact information as necessary since the last APR was submitted.

Chief administrator for the academic unit in which the program is located: Interim Dean Varkki Pallathucheril

Provost: Interim Provost Kevin Mitchell

President of the institution: Bjorn Kjerfve

Individual submitting the Interim Progress Report: Michael Hughes

Name of individual(s) to whom questions should be directed: Michael Hughes

Current term of accreditation: 8 year term

a. Progress in Addressing Not-Met Conditions and Student Performance Criteria

A.4 Technical Documentation

2013 Visiting Team Assessment: Although the visiting team found laudable evidence of technical documentation in the areas of drawings and models, no evidence of written outline specifications prepared by students was available despite being listed in the course descriptions for ARC 402 *Design Studio VI* and ARC 463 *Professional Practice*.

American University of Sharjah, 2015 Response:

Following receipt of the 2010 NAAB Visiting Team Report, (VTR), the Department of Architecture initiated a series of self-assessment procedures to identify opportunities for improving the curriculum. Through discussion in Department faculty meetings, the end-of-semester “faculty design review” and the Curriculum and Assessment Committee, the Department faculty noted that technical documentation was not introduced in the early levels of the core disciplinary sequence. The faculty agreed that an introduction to technical issues, including technical documentation, was important in advance of the fourth-year ARC 463 *Professional Practice* and ARC 402 *Design Studio VI* courses. As a result faculty approved the addition of a new required course, ARC 382 *Architectural Detailing*, to the BArch curriculum. ARC 382 now introduces technical documentation, including specifications, at the third-year level.

The revised curriculum was approved for the 2012-2013 *AUS Undergraduate Catalog*. As a result ARC 382 was required for all BArch students entering in fall 2012, and this cohort took the course in spring 2015.

Following the 2013 NAAB VTR the course outcomes for ARC 382 *Architectural Detailing* were further revised to include specifications as follows:

Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the architectural detail, construction documents, specifications and design intent.

The Department of Architecture Curriculum and Assessment Committee has also reviewed, and revised as necessary, the course outcomes and course descriptions in ARC 463 and ARC 402 to ensure accuracy and consistency. The related course syllabi are included in the Appendix Section 1.

B.2 Accessibility

2013 Visiting Team Assessment: Student work from ARC 301 *Architectural Design Studio III*, ARC 401 *Architectural Design Studio V*, and ARC 272 *Site Planning* fail to show student ability at the requisite level.

American University of Sharjah, 2015 Response:

Over the past two years the Department of Architecture reviewed and revised the introduction and application of accessibility across the curriculum. Led by the Curriculum and Assessment Committee, this review revealed a need for additional content delivered earlier in the disciplinary core. As a result, course outcomes were revised in five required classes (ARC 271, ARC 281, ARC 301, ARC 463 and ARC 402) to include content related to universal design and accessibility.

The first introduction of accessibility now occurs at the beginning of the disciplinary core in ARC 271 *Introduction to Landscape* and ARC 281 *Architectural Principles*. Students then apply accessibility in ARC

301 Design Studio III. The revised ARC 301 final project requirements explicitly address accessible design, specifying an accessible building, as well as a demonstrated accessible clear path of travel from an accessible parking space to the building entry. In addition, the ARC 301 studio professors provide a lecture on accessibility. An in-depth review of universal design codes, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) occurs in ARC 463 Professional Practice. Finally, students must apply universal design standards in the comprehensive studio, ARC 402 Design Studio VIII.

The new course outcomes are as follows:

ARC 271 Introduction to Landscape:

Identify and describe the universal design conventions applied to accessible circulation in site design

ARC 281 Architectural Principles:

Describe how the principles of universal design can be applied to the design of the built environment

ARC 301 Design Studio III:

Integrate accessibility guidelines and practices into design outcomes.

ARC 402 Design Studio VIII (Comprehensive Studio):

Apply universal design standards to site and building design to accommodate inhabitants of varying physical ability

ARC 463 Professional Practice:

Understand the architect's responsibility to the public and the client as determined by registration law, building codes and regulations, **accessibility laws** and professional service contracts.

The related course syllabi are included in the Appendix Section 1.

B.5 Life Safety

2013 Visiting Team Assessment: The visiting team found that AUS architecture students are exposed to life-safety systems in ARC 451 *Environmental Controls Systems*; however, the studio work for ARC 402 *Architectural Design Studio VI* failed to demonstrate the basic principles of life-safety at the ability level.

American University of Sharjah, 2015 Response:

Faculty teaching ARC 402 Design Studio VI have implemented a number of new procedures to address the deficiencies stated in the 2013 NAAB VTR.

First, new lectures were prepared and presented as part of the comprehensive design studio. These lectures focus on life safety, with particular emphasis placed on conditions of egress including door swings, dead end corridors, stairs and elevators, and corridor widths as prescribed in the International Building Code (IBC) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In addition, the course now includes guest lectures focused on fire-rated building assemblies and systems delivered by material suppliers.

Second, the Department has made an effort to ensure that faculty assigned to ARC 402 are all licensed architects with substantial professional practice experience related to life safety compliance and integration.

Third, faculty have initiated a new, coordinated grading procedure in which all students in all three sections of ARC 402 are evaluated by all of the three ARC 402 instructors. This coordination provides for

additional oversight and endeavors to ensure that faculty can collectively monitor, assess and correct short-comings in student performance.

B.6 Comprehensive Design

2013 Visiting Team Assessment: The student work reviewed by the visiting team was insufficient to demonstrate that all students in the accredited program gained the ability to produce the requisite comprehensive design. Some of the individual student projects examined displayed meaningful deficiencies in life safety design, structural systems, accessibility, and site design.

American University of Sharjah, 2015 Response:

In 2011 the Department began a holistic self-assessment to identify opportunities for improving the curriculum. As noted in the response to A.4 above, Department faculty meetings, the end-of-semester faculty design review and the Curriculum and Assessment Committee along with faculty retreats provided the venues for the Department's self-assessment. The resulting curricular revisions were approved for the *2012-2013 AUS Undergraduate Course Catalog*. However, due to the timing of approval and implementation, the new curriculum did not impact the student work reviewed by the 2013 Visiting Team.

During this self-assessment process faculty with experience teaching in the comprehensive design studio, ARC 402 Design Studio VI, foregrounded concerns related to the amount of content being introduced for the first time during comprehensive design studio and the co-requisite ARC 434 Materials and Methods: Finish course. For example, faculty noted that technical documentation was being introduced for the first time in ARC 402. As a result students were being asked to both learn and apply new content in the same semester. This translated to a heavy burden on the faculty, which then reduced the time available for in-depth review and revision.

Faculty suggested that the introduction of content should be introduced earlier and addressed more frequently in the curricular sequence. This change would provide students with the relevant knowledge in advance that would then be applied in the comprehensive design studio.

In response, the curriculum and course outcomes were revised to ensure that students are introduced to material earlier and more often. ARC 434 was renamed ARC 331 Materials and Methods II and moved to the third year to coincide with other required courses that introduce building construction, technical documentation and structural systems. Revised course outcomes (as exemplified in the response to B.2 Accessibility above) and new required courses (as exemplified in the response to A.4 Technical Documentation above) were introduced in an effort to provide students with an incremental engagement with the required principles leading to demonstrated ability in comprehensive design.

Following the 2013 NAAB VTR the Department conducted another self-assessment focused on the comprehensive design studio. This process revealed concerns about the faculty time commitments demanded by ARC 402. Department faculty unanimously recognized that the time required to administer, review and critique sixteen students per section in ARC 402 was significantly more than required in the other design studios. Some of the additional time was due to the need to introduce material such as technical documentation (addressed through the curricular revisions noted previously), but much of the time was devoted to reviewing and grading the numerous assignments aimed at confirming comprehensive ability in site design, accessibility, life safety and structural systems.

Faculty agreed that the level of detailed feedback required for these items was onerous. In response the Department is moving forward with a plan to introduce a team-based approach to teach ARC 402. Starting in spring 2016 students will work in teams of two. This format provides two positive outcomes: 1) faculty will now review eight projects rather than sixteen individual projects thereby allowing more time for in-depth review and feedback; and 2) the team format acknowledges the collaborative nature of contemporary practice while augmenting existing curricular opportunities in this area. The teams would be structured and assessed to ensure that each student on a team will be able to demonstrate ability in the requisite student performance criteria.

In addition the Department determined that faculty with specific skills in practice would be beneficial in the comprehensive design studio. As a result faculty assignments to teach ARC 402 privilege licensed architects with applicable professional practice experience in comprehensive design projects.

The Department also noted a need for additional, new faculty devoted to the technical and professional areas. In response the Department successfully recruited and hired a new faculty member, Asst. Professor Marcus Farr, with experience in professional practice and comprehensive design. Prof. Farr will lead the ARC 463 Professional Practice course and teach ARC 402 Design Studio. As a continuing faculty member Prof. Farr will provide long-term stability and leadership in these courses.

To add a further degree of stability Assoc. Prof. William Sarnecky has been assigned to coordinate ARC 402 once again. Prof. Sarnecky was responsible for developing and coordinating the comprehensive design studio from 2007 to 2010 received a 'Well Met' rating in the 2010 NAAB VTR. We are confident that Prof. Sarnecky's experience and renewed leadership combined with the curricular revisions approved by the faculty will effectively address the shortcomings noted in comprehensive design.

b. Plans for/Progress in Addressing Causes of Concern

- **Faculty turnover and recruiting**

2013 Visiting Team Comments: The team believes that the rate of faculty turnover cited in the previous VTR remains a concern and has perhaps intensified. This has a serious ripple effect within the program, given the need for key required courses to be reinvented on short notice by inexperienced faculty. Departmental leadership is encouraged to play the central role in recruiting faculty who can contribute to core needs of a clearly structured and integrated curriculum.

American University of Sharjah, 2015 Response:

The Department is fully cognizant of the important link between program continuity and faculty recruitment and retention. The Department is also conscious of challenges unique to our context. While all academic institutions encounter recruitment challenges, the American University of Sharjah faces particular challenges above and beyond those encountered by academic institutions in the US and Europe due to its location and the fact that most faculty members will be living and working as expatriates.

For example, the majority of qualified candidates for faculty positions at CAAD have neither lived in nor visited the Middle East previously. As a result potential candidates often harbor misconceptions that range from questions about acceptable everyday behavior to perceived challenges associated with gender. Mid-career colleagues are often concerned about educational possibilities for children and, being unfamiliar with the primary and secondary educational systems in the United Arab Emirates, may experience some hesitation in moving to the Middle East. Department faculty attending conferences in

the US often encounter questions from potential candidates related to regional security, religious tolerance and/or social norms. At the same time Western news organizations and media reports tend to refer to the Middle East broadly with limited examination of the nuances between specific countries.

The Head of Department and Dean devote significant time and energy to dispelling these preconceptions through the development and maintenance of a diverse network of professional contacts, ongoing dialogue and conference attendance. The HOD travels to the ACSA Administrative Conference and the ACSA National Conference in order to meet new people, identify potential new faculty and share information about the Department, university and region.

Department faculty members also work collectively to engage colleagues from other universities in an effort to provide information and answer questions. Faculty members proactively identify potential candidates and nurture interest through dialogue at conferences in an effort to overcome hesitation based on a lack of information. As ensuring a gender balance is important for the University and the Department women on our faculty make an effort to contact potential female faculty to create an avenue for open dialogue regarding life in Sharjah.

The University contributes to this effort by providing very competitive compensation packages, regular merit increases, and significant research funding. The University is also constantly developing new infrastructure projects to improve faculty life on campus. Faculty have access to a variety of sports and leisure facilities including tennis, basketball, weightlifting and swimming as well as a wide range of exercise classes offered by the AUS Wellness Department, all offered free of charge to faculty and their dependents. In 2012 the new “Epicenter” recreation complex for children and teenagers was unveiled. This facility houses a climbing wall, cooking school, skate board park and club activities such as kickboxing, ballet, music lessons and football.

Plans for a new on-campus school serving faculty children from kindergarten through high school are now under development. AUS provides a day-care facility for children of faculty and staff and the compensation package includes financial support for primary and secondary education. AUS also offers a Tuition Exchange Program through the International Exchange Office for children of faculty and staff who wish to attend university in the US.

At the Departmental level, faculty approved a new mentorship policy and a new Mentoring Committee. The mentorship policy outlines how the Department of Architecture seeks to provide a range of ongoing mentoring opportunities to junior faculty as they progress toward promotion and/or rolling contract.

As articulated in the policy, mentoring in the Department of Architecture is envisaged as a collective effort that will be managed by the Departmental Mentoring Committee appointed by the Head of Department and comprised of faculty who are at the rank of Associate Professor or Professor and who are on a rolling contract. The Head of Department is an ex-officio member. In addition, new faculty are encouraged to establish one-on-one mentoring relationships with longstanding members of the faculty; such kind of mentoring is highly desirable, but outside the scope of the Mentoring Committee.

- **Faculty Diversity**

2013 Visiting Team Comments: The program has an extraordinarily diverse student body with a high percentage of women. The school and the university are encouraged to make the recruitment and retention of women faculty an imperative.

American University of Sharjah, 2015 Response:

The Department explicitly seeks to recruit and hire faculty with a broad range of diverse interests, expertise and backgrounds. The Department has engaged in rigorous efforts to recruit diverse, well-qualified faculty members for available positions, with particular emphasis on increasing the representation of women. Faculty and administrators attend conferences and symposia to identify potential candidates and engage in dialogue about the College and the program.

In response to the 2013 NAAB VTR, the Academic Affairs Committee revisited the Department's Diversity Policy in an effort to identify additional action items aimed at the recruitment and retention of women faculty. The revised Diversity Policy and new action items have been approved by the faculty and include using the Department lecture series as a recruiting tool for potential female candidates.

While distance and travel logistics make it difficult to invite candidates to campus during the interview process, the Department has made a concerted effort to invite potential candidates, especially women candidates, to AUS. The Department has focused all available budget resources on this initiative. Funds designated for guest lectures and guest critics have supported campus visits for short-listed candidates as well as potential future candidates. Lecture and guest critics in a position to expand our network of contacts have also been invited. Department Heads, Deans and Directors of graduate programs at schools in the US and Europe that visit AUS see the quality of the program first hand and can advocate on our behalf with their current and former students interested in pursuing a career in academia.

In spring 2014 two shortlisted, female candidates were invited to AUS for final reviews in May. One of these two candidates was offered a position, but elected to remain at her US institution. Faced with an unexpected need for a fulltime visiting professor in spring 2015 the Department recruited four viable candidates, three men and one woman, and hired the female candidate. This candidate was offered a regular, continuing assistant professor position in May 2015, but elected to accept a position closer to her home in France. Two other women were among the seven candidates interviewed by the Dean in spring 2015. One was offered a position, but elected to accept a Fulbright scholarship. The second candidate did not prove to be a good match in terms of teaching capacity and experience.

The Department will continue to seek opportunities to recruit and retain highly qualified female faculty members, including leveraging resources to invite potential candidates to campus to dispel misconceptions that may impact the decision to consider AUS as a viable alternative to US-based institutions.

c. Changes or Planned Changes in the Program

American University of Sharjah, 2015 Response:

Interim Provost Kevin Mitchell replaced Thomas Hochstettler in June 2014. An international search for a new provost is currently underway. The new Provost is expected to begin their tenure in Summer 2016.

Interim Dean Varkki Pallathucheril replaced Peter Di Sabatino at the beginning of the 2014-2015 academic year. A search for a new dean began in spring 2015 and four shortlisted candidates completed on-campus interviews in October 2015. A new hire is anticipated by January 2016. Head of Department Michael Hughes is currently in his final year of service. An interim HOD will be appointed for academic year 2016-2017 and an international search for a new HOD will commence in fall 2016. The new HOD is expected to begin their tenure in August 2017.

New Faculty 2013-2014:

Assistant Professor Patrick Rhodes was appointed Director of Foundations with a focus on first-year courses. Assistant Professor Juan Roldan contributes, primarily, to the Interior Design program. Assistant Professor George Newlands teaches upper-level studios, Materials and Methods 1 and the Intro to Landscape course. Assistant Professor Cristiano Luchetti specializes in urban design.

New Faculty 2014-15:

Assistant Professor Ammar Kalo was appointed Director of CAAD Labs. Prof. Kalo's teaching is focused on advanced design studio and digital fabrication. Associate Professor Dr. Rafael Pizarro was appointed Program Coordinator for the Master of Urban Planning program. Assistant Professor Dr. John Montague is a historian who teaches architectural history and theory as well as film. Assistant Professor Camilo Cerro contributes to both the architecture and the interior design program with an emphasis on sustainability and detailing.

New Faculty 2015-16:

Assistant Professor Daniel Chavez contributes to the fabrication course stream. Assistant Professor Gregory Spaw contributes to the core design studio sequence as well as digital design and fabrication courses. Assistant Professor Marcus Farr is focused on integrated design, professional practice and sustainability while also providing expertise in digital fabrication.

CVs for all new faculty are available in the Appendix Section 2.

New Opportunities for Collaboration: In 2012 the Department began a significant collaboration with Sharjah based GIBCA Group based on our mutual interests in building, materials and fabrication. GIBCA representatives and craftsmen work closely with Department faculty in design-build studios and research. Joint projects completed to date engaged bronze casting, innovative glass installations, curtain wall technology and digital fabrication.

The Dubai office of the Director of Policies & Programs, Rights of People with Disabilities approached the Department to collaborate on a variety of initiatives related to universal design education, professional training and full-scale demonstration projects. Department faculty participated in a related conference and discussions are underway to establish a professional training program for local agencies. Future projects will focus on model environments designed and fabricated by AUS students.

Opportunities for future collaboration with Bee'ah, the Sharjah environmental management agency charged with providing the Emirate with sustainable solutions in resource management, are under discussion. Discussions with the Maraya Art Center in Sharjah are focused on collaborative design-build opportunities for mobile galleries, installations and facilities for their artist-in-residence program.

Changes in Educational Approach- Curriculum Revision: Faculty in the Dept. of Architecture revised the Bachelor of Architecture (BArch) degree to enhance and focus existing program goals, promote coordination and integration between required studio and lecture coursework, and provide an opportunity for students to participate in collaborative projects. The proposal was submitted in November 2011, approved in spring 2012 and went into effect with the student cohort entering the first-year in September 2012. The cohort that entered in fall 2012 is currently in the fourth year and they will graduate as the first class under the new curriculum in spring 2017.

The revision and realignment refined changes made to the curriculum during 2009-2010, which reduced credit-hour requirements from 172 to 159 for the 5-year BArch degree. The revised curriculum establishes a progressive structure of skills and theory that build on the preceding semester to achieve

an effective education specifically focused on the professional discipline of architecture. Fundamental to this goal is the revision and/or elimination of some existing courses and the addition of some new courses. In addition, proposed realignments facilitate and enhance coordination opportunities between lecture courses and studio courses.

Significant changes included the following:

1) Renewed emphasis on the importance of issues linking building and landscape design by expanding course content beyond the technical aspects typically associated with a narrow focus on site planning. A new course, "Introduction to Landscape" replaced "Site Planning" and this new course is aligned with the ARC 201 "Architecture Studio I" to facilitate the introduction of landscape as a fundamental component of architecture. This integrated approach to architecture is a basic tenet of the Architecture Department at the American University of Sharjah.

2) Refocus the structures curriculum to focus on conceptual understanding, rather than the technical ability to execute structural calculations. Professional liability insurance typically prevents architects from doing calculations and explicitly requires collaboration with a licensed structural engineer. NAAB accreditation criteria reflect this contemporary reality in the recent change from the level of "ability" to the level of "understanding". Similarly, the sole licensing authority in the United States (NCARB, the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards), has altered the registration exam to eliminate calculations in favor of conceptual understanding. In response, the "Structures for Architects" course has been revised and explicitly linked, both in terms of the sequence of study and the course content, to the ARC 302 "Architecture Studio IV".

3) Refocus the environmental technology courses to focus on conceptual understanding and the ability to communicate and collaborate with professionals in the allied disciplines. Fundamental aspects, such as the effect of light, air, weather and orientation on building form and passive and site-specific strategies, will now be introduced earlier in the curriculum through a new class, ARC 281 Architectural Principles.

4) Enhance curricular offerings that focus on issues specific to the discipline of architecture. The proposed curriculum includes three new courses that introduce and develop skills unique to the profession. Collectively, ARC 281 Architectural Principles, ARC 382 Architectural Detailing, and ARC 581 Critical Practice and Contemporary Discourse provide a new sequence that introduces both fundamental issues and skills as well as focused, advanced content previously missing from the curriculum.

5) Expand discipline specific history and theory courses from two to three. This proposal is based on a comparison with fifteen of the most widely respected programs in the U.S. The comparison revealed a range of three to seven required courses in history/theory, with the average being four. The new sequence includes ARC 222 Modern Architecture and Urban Form, ARC 221 Pre-Modern Architecture and Urban Form, and ARC 421 Architectural Theory. These three courses build upon broad knowledge acquired in the DES 121 Introduction to Architecture, Art and Design History and DES 122 Modern Developments in Architecture, Art and Design courses taught in the first year.

The revised course of study is available in Appendix Section 3.

d. Summary of Activities in Response to Changes in the NAAB Conditions

American University of Sharjah, 2015 update:

Under the leadership of the Curriculum and Assessment Committee the Department has begun a self-assessment process related to the new 2014 Conditions for Accreditation. The self-assessment began with an initial review of the new SPC relative to the recent curriculum revision implemented with students entering the program in fall 2012. Faculty participated in this review and provided feedback on the initial drafts. This feedback was incorporated into a final SPC Matrix completed in fall 2015 linking the 2014 SPC to the new curriculum. (see Appendix Section 4)

In the next step of the self-assessment, the Curriculum and Assessment Committee is organizing a series of faculty discussions focused on the five new perspectives. Beginning fall 2015 the faculty will work to identify relevant strengths and weaknesses as well as existing and new opportunities for the program to address the perspectives in the short, medium and long term. The recently approved architecture program strategic plan will provide additional context for the discussions.

e. Appendix (include revised curricula, syllabi, and one-page CVs or bios of new administrators and faculty members; syllabi should reference which NAAB SPC a course addresses)

American University of Sharjah, 2015 update:

Appendix Contents:

Section 1: Revised Syllabi

- 1.1 ARC 221 Pre-Modern Architecture and Urban Form
- 1.2 ARC 222 Modern Architecture and Urban Form
- 1.3 ARC 271 Introduction to Landscape
- 1.4 ARC 281 Architectural Principles
- 1.5 ARC 302 Design Studio IV
- 1.6 ARC 342 Structures for Architects
- 1.7 ARC 382 Architectural Detailing
- 1.8 ARC 402 Design Studio VI
- 1.9 ARC 421 Architectural Theory
- 1.10 ARC 463 Professional Practice
- 1.11 ARC 581 Critical Practice and Contemporary Discourse

Section 2: CVs of New Faculty

- 2.1 Ammar Kalo
- 2.2 Camilo Cerro
- 2.3 Cristiano Luchetti
- 2.4 Daniel Chavez
- 2.5 George Newlands
- 2.6 Gregory Spaw
- 2.7 John Montague
- 2.8 Juan Roldan
- 2.9 Marcus Farr
- 2.10 Maria Mortera
- 2.11 Patrick Rhodes
- 2.12 Rafael Pizarro

Section 3: Revised Curriculum Effective 2012-2013

Section 4: SPC Matrix- Revised for 2014 Conditions for Accreditation