

A large, stylized, distressed graphic of the word "ACCREDITED" in a banner, set against a circular background with stars. The banner is white with a rough, textured edge and is tilted diagonally across the frame. The word "ACCREDITED" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The circular background is white with a distressed, stamped appearance and contains several five-pointed stars of varying sizes. The entire graphic is set against a solid blue background.

**ACCREDITED**



# MAKING THE GRADE:

## WHAT GOES INTO THE ACCREDITATION OF ARCHITECTURAL PROGRAMS?

On a Sunday morning in March last year, Dave Hoffman, FAIA, sipped coffee, took a deep breath, and looked closely at the structure and performance of an architectural school at which he is visiting—but not in the usual way. While he is an architect, the papers before him weren't architectural drawings and his mission was not to design or restore a building on campus. It was to participate in an accrediting process to verify that the architectural program there substantially meets the standards as defined by the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB).

Hoffman, a Kansas-based architect, was one of four visitors on the Texas Tech University campus that day who took on the roles of academic investigators. In five days, the visiting team would observe, discuss, and consider thousands of details about the school's program so as to determine whether or not to recommend a term of accreditation by the NAAB. Based in Washington, DC, the NAAB is the only agency authorized to accredit architectural programs in the United States.

The scene involving architectural professionals like Hoffman is repeated every two to six years at each of the institutions offering a professional degree program in architecture. Under the management of the NAAB, the visiting teams are made up of volunteers nominated by the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB), the American Institute of Architects (AIA), the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA), and the American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS). Hoffman was nominated by NCARB.

This united effort is for good reason. "Each of the four collaterals that participate in the NAAB brings an essential perspec-

tive," said 2011 NAAB President Cornelius "Kin" DuBois, FAIA, NCARB, LEED AP, who came from NCARB's ranks to serve NAAB. "One of the most compelling aspects of NCARB's active involvement is the focus on education as the first step of a process that ultimately leads (after internship and examination) to licensure."

On his recent visit, Hoffman represented NCARB by concentrating on regulatory and professional practice aspects of the school program's curriculum. "We each bring specific applicable skills to the team," the senior vice president with the firm of Law/Kingdon, Inc. of Wichita, KS, said of his colleagues.

There are 119 institutions offering 151 NAAB-accredited programs; currently more than 25,000 students are enrolled. They are part of the profession's next generation and are beginning the process of education, internship, and examination on the path toward their eventual licensure. Getting a degree from a NAAB-accredited program satisfies one of three prerequisites for licensure in most jurisdictions, the other two being completion of both the Intern Development Program (IDP) and the Architect Registration Examination® (ARE®).

### DOWN TO THE DETAILS

From the visiting team room for the on-campus exploration, Hoffman and his colleagues poured over documentation that compared the school's self-assessment with detailed academic standards set by the NAAB with the help of NCARB with the support of the collateral organizations. Charts, student work, notebooks, reports, and computers filled the room that came back to life each time the team returned from another of the several meetings with the faculty, students, and college administrators.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF TYPICAL SITE VISIT

### SATURDAY

Afternoon

- Team arrival and orientation
- Team members have already reviewed school's Architecture Program Report (ARP)

### SUNDAY

Morning

- Review documentation
- Assemble issues and questions
- Begin review of student work and other records

Afternoon

- Tour facilities and meet with faculty

### MONDAY

Morning

- Meet with program head, chief academic officers, and school administrators

Afternoon

- Observe studios and meet with students

### TUESDAY

Morning

- Review student work and course notebooks
- Observe lectures and seminars
- Eat lunch with student representatives

Afternoon

- Meet with faculty
- Complete review of exhibits and records
- Enter accreditation deliberations
- Draft Visiting Team Report

### WEDNESDAY

Morning

- Exit meetings with the school administrators, chief academic officers, faculty, and students



NAAB VISIT TO THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA. COURTESY OF NAAB.

Every visit is preceded by the submission of an Architecture Program Report (APR). This serves as the self-study and guides the team's work on site.

The APR is, largely, a narrative document that is comprehensive and self-analytical. It is expected to succinctly describe how a program meets each of the conditions for accreditation. Areas and levels of excellence will vary among accredited degree programs as will approaches to meeting the conditions and reporting requirements. Programs must present complete and accurate information to demonstrate compliance with each of the NAAB Conditions.

Visits begin on Saturday evening and conclude on Wednesday at noon [see sidebar]. Key aspects of a visit include reviewing student work; touring the architecture school facilities and the campus; meeting with staff, program heads, college officials, and students; observing studios, lectures, and seminars; reviewing of records; and drafting of the Visiting Team Report (VTR).

The VTR serves multiple purposes. It is essential to the NAAB in making its accreditation decision. It conveys the visiting team's assessment of whether the program meets the Conditions for Accreditation, as measured by evidence of student learning, the overall capacity of the program to fulfill its obligations to ensure student achievement, and the overall learning environment. It also estab-

lishes the degree to which the program is functioning in the manner described in the APR. Finally, the team recommends a term of accreditation to the NAAB Board. This recommendation is confidential and non-binding.

"We would start at 7 a.m. and finish with dinner, usually about 8 p.m.—very full days," Hoffman said. "Every accreditation visit takes a lot of energy. You have to remain sharp to take in all of the information. Clear and efficient verbal communication is critical. And you are constantly analyzing, evaluating, and making conclusions and then defending those conclusions during the team discussions."

Thirty days after the visit ends, the team chair sends a final draft of the VTR to the NAAB staff. At its next meeting, after reading the VTR and the program's optional response to it, the NAAB will approve a term of accreditation. Depending on the type of visit and the program's status, these terms may range from a two-year term of initial candidacy to a six-year term of continuing accreditation.

### WHY ACCREDITATION MATTERS

This concentrated focus on academic standards is important to students who are pursuing B.Arch., M.Arch., or D.Arch. degrees. Thanks to the ongoing review of architectural programs by the NAAB, students in the programs receive the education that prepares them to enter and serve the profession.

Likewise, schools and universities seek accreditation to signify academic quality and ongoing commitment to improvement. Each year, the NAAB conducts 20 to 25 visits for a full range of accreditation actions from initial candidacy to continuing accreditation.

Accreditation is of special importance to NCARB. As the standard bearer for the regulation of architecture and the custodian of architects' Records, NCARB supports the 54 U.S. jurisdictions. Seventy percent of those jurisdictions (or 38 of the 54) require that candidates seeking initial licensure hold degrees specifically from NAAB-accredited programs. [See [www.ncarb.org/Studying-Architecture/](http://www.ncarb.org/Studying-Architecture/) for more information.]

### A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

The ongoing effort to review programs offered by 119 institutions demands continuous support from the four collateral architectural organizations.

The NAAB was founded by NCARB, AIA, and ACSA in 1940, and since then has been supported financially by those organizations. All three contribute about \$400,000 each year to support the NAAB's mission. The profession's student organization—AIAS—voluntarily contributes a more modest amount. NCARB's contribution is related to its view that the NAAB's diligent work is a more efficient approach to accrediting degree programs instead of the likely alternative: each jurisdiction conducting its own independent evaluation to accredit programs in its jurisdiction.

Together, the four organizations also nominate volunteers to serve on the NAAB Board and to fulfill the NAAB's most visible role—the visiting teams. Each year, the NCARB president names about 20 individuals—most of whom are Member Board Members or NCARB regional directors and officers—to work with the NAAB. After completing required online and face-to-face training, they become active and may be assigned to visiting teams. Those in the team member pool remain active for four years.

"Some of our most experienced and most thoughtful visiting team members come out of NCARB," said NAAB Execu-

tive Director Andrea S. Rutledge, CAE. Appointees for visiting teams are placed in a pool of names along with similar volunteers from the collateral organizations. NAAB uses the pool of names to create four-person teams with each of the four organizations represented. When nominating teams for visits, the NAAB must juggle prospective team members' availability for each five-day trip while also achieving team diversity for geography, gender, race, ethnicity, and experience and while considering known real or potential conflicts of interest. Because of these strict criteria for team formation, some from the pool of appointees may serve on three or four teams during their four-year terms while others may just serve once.

In addition to the nearly 60 individuals in the team member pool, three NCARB leaders serve on the NAAB Board of Directors: DuBois of Denver, CO; Douglas K. Engebretson, FAIA, Springfield, MA; and Gordon E. Mills, FAIA, Dubuque, IA. Engebretson and Mills were appointed to the NAAB Board following their service as NCARB President. Current NAAB Board President DuBois is formerly a member of the Board of Directors who represented the Council's Western Conference (Region 6).

### ON THE MOVE

The NAAB and the collateral organizations have gone about the work of accreditation since 1940. For more than 70 years, the NAAB has continued to improve its processes and standards while also managing an increasing number of visits. It is an organization constantly working toward continuous improvement in all aspects of its work.

For Hoffman and his team, completing the evaluation of the architectural program has meant hard work, expert consideration, attention to detail, and even personal and professional sacrifice. Yet the team's packing up and leaving campus on Wednesday signals not the end, but the beginning of the final phase of the accreditation process. In a larger sense, Hoffman knows that the actions on behalf of the NAAB in that five-day span support the profession well into the future. **DC**

## NAAB BY THE NUMBERS

Number of institutions with accredited programs: 119

Total number of programs accredited: 151

Visiting teams formed each year: 20 to 30

Range of applicants for candidacy (new degree programs) processed each year: 1 to 3

Range of programs visited for continuing accreditation each year: 20 to 25

States requiring a degree from a NAAB-accredited program: 38

Size of NAAB's pool of potential team members for visits: 400

Average number of volunteers serving each year: 125

Number of new NCARB representatives named to NAAB each year: 20

Number of students in NAAB-accredited programs: 25,707 (2008-09)

States with the most accredited programs: CA and NY (10 each)

States with no NAAB-accredited programs: 7 (AK, DE, ME, NH, SD, WV, and WY)

Size of NAAB's staff: 7

Year NAAB founded: 1940