

MIT Architecture

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Cassandra Pair
Director, Accreditation
National Architectural Accrediting Board
1101 Connecticut Ave, NW, Suite 410
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Cassandra:

We received the Draft Visiting Team Report and take this opportunity to address matters of fact. First, we would like to thank the Visiting Team for dedicating its time and effort at MIT. We note that they did so under the beta test model of a one-day shorter and one-person fewer visit.

The report overall is very strong and we appreciate the attention that it gave to the materials assembled in the VT room, exhibitions of faculty and student work, and intensive schedule of meetings. The MIT Department of Architecture is very proud of the overall pattern of judgment that the VT drew from this evidence, viz.:

- 30 of 32 criteria *met* (94%)
- 5 of 6 previous concerns now *met* (83%)
- And particularly, 7 of 32 criteria *met with distinction* (22%)

The factual corrections that we offer below involve one of two concerns that were raised and two criteria that were deemed not met.

1. Concern raised in Section 3, I.2.1 Human Resources (page 1, repeated on p. 5 and 10): "...the team did not see any African Americans in the department during the visit, a group that represents over 14% of the U.S. population." In fact, a self-identified first-year African-American M.Arch student had dinner with the VT on March 2, 2015; another is a readmitted student in an option studio that was in session during the visit. An African-American faculty member was present and working in the department during the visit. Detailed data were presented on the numbers of under-represented minority and women students and faculty in the department. Otherwise, MIT shares the VT's concern about recruiting minorities, and African-Americans in particular, in the department and the profession.

2. Criterion B.4 Site Design (p. 19): The VT saw evidence that urban site challenges and vegetation were addressed, but states that "evidence was not found to support a student's ability to respond to soil, topography, and related watershed (drainage) issues." In fact, soil and site geological conditions issues were fully addressed in the studio project on New Bedford, MA (Core 3: Comprehensive Design). The site is a 150-year-old landfill pier where students extensively studied a variety of timber pile and rock fill conditions shaped by the site's geology over the past 100 years. In addition, they were aware of the variable water flow, watershed, and tidal conditions that affected the site and its operation. These were considered and incorporated

into a research exercise at the start of the studio; and graphic information on geological conditions and water flow through the site were incorporated into students' final drawings. While the pier site is relatively flat, student projects reinvented the topography of the site through the medium of new architecture and associated landscape design proposals. The VT also notes that criterion B.3 Sustainability is met with distinction. We believe that this criterion was substantially if not fully met, while accepting that additional emphasis can be given to it.

3. Criterion B.6. Comprehensive Design (p. 3 and 23). The Department raises several matters of fact and evidence related to the integration of SPC under this criterion. First, we note and appreciate that the VT saw evidence that seven out of the eleven SPC were integrated in the Comprehensive Design studio evidence. However, we note with concern that a member of the VT mentioned that (in that person's experience as a visiting team member) only two in fourteen architecture programs have met this criterion, in response to concerns that we raised during the VT end-of-visit discussion. Even if the ratio is somewhat different, it raises concerns about NAAB's guidance to VTs on this criterion. This said, we offer the following facts and evidence related to the other four SPC mentioned in the VTR:

- B.2 Accessibility – The VT saw evidence and deemed criterion B.2 to be met, citing course 4.461; and it deemed that the related criterion C.7 Legal Responsibilities was *met with distinction*. In the Comprehensive Design studio materials submitted for review, we believe that issues of accessibility were fully met in the plans submitted that were part of the students' final drawings. This followed the issuing of an Accessibility and Life Safety primer to students as an integral part of the program documentation, and an extensive checking, red-lining (for compliance) and revision procedure that studio instructors went through with each student (similar to a code assessment in an office) to ensure full compliance and design integration. The comment was made by the VT that it didn't see separate diagrams illustrating accessibility and life safety criteria (as with a code review in a professional office). We wish to point out that this form of representation is not stipulated in B.6 as being a requirement—and so the evidence of this ability was integrated into the students' final set of design drawings.
- B.4 Site Design – As above, the VT saw evidence of attention to complex urban site challenges and vegetation, as well as related criterion B.3 that was met with distinction. The Comprehensive Design studio selected a challenging urban site that had layers of cultural history, a complex palimpsest of physical conditions, multiple ecological conditions including a remediated harbor, and a variable climate and diverse microclimates. The students researched each aspect of the site and integrated this into their design responses using carbon metrics as a means to approach sustainability. All of this was well documented either in the student work or in the studio's course notebook that was made available for the VT. As a result, we consider our students have developed a sophisticated understanding of site design. In respect to issues of soil, site, geology and topography, we refer you to our comments made in 2. Criterion B.4 Site Design (above).
- B.5 Life Safety – The VT saw evidence of this ability in work submitted in the required course number 4.461. In the Comprehensive Design studio, please see comments for condition B.2 above. We believe that issues of Life Safety were fully addressed in the studio through the final design drawings of the students following the same primer,

checking, and revision procedure for condition B.2. We are confident that each student has an ability to satisfy this condition through his or her work.

- B.8 Environmental Systems – The VT cites evidence that Building Service Systems Integration is met in required courses 4.461 and 4.464. In the Comprehensive Design studio, evidence of this took the form of the development of MEP systems, including HVAC, and their presentation in a report prepared by each student in a post-studio study conducted in the Energy in Building Design course, 4.464. We consider this sequence to be beneficial from a curricular point of view. The reports, made available to the VT, included the selection of active space-conditioning systems to complement the passive approaches to meeting environmental requirements embedded in the designs and the specification of spaces for mechanical and electrical equipment. The three-week period devoted to the preparation of the reports included instruction in HVAC systems, inspection of systems in campus buildings, and three working sessions with a practicing MEP engineer.

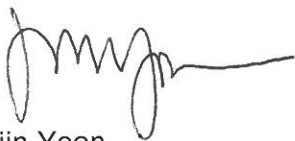
We submit these items as points of fact and evidence. The Draft VTR states its judgments with little detailed reference to the materials reviewed. On the basis of these points of evidence, we believe the Comprehensive Design criterion B.6 should be deemed met.

We raise these items as facts relevant for finalizing the VTR. We also want to underscore the implications they have for our program. The Department spent thousands of hours preparing for the two-and-a-half-day VT visit. A member of the VT mentioned that we need not have spent so much time on the exhibition of faculty work, and that the VT room was the “best I have seen.” We did these things as a matter of pride and are grateful to the VT for recognizing them.

Beyond the VTR, however, it is a matter of fact that the NAAB’s decision regarding the eight-year accreditation period, which we strongly believe MIT Department of Architecture has earned, has major implications for allocation of scarce departmental time and resources, and for our intention to strategically focus on items identified by the VT and in our self-study and vision for architectural education at MIT.

Again, we very much thank the VT and NAAB for the time and professional dedication devoted to reviewing our Master of Architecture program at MIT, particularly with the limited time and personnel of the beta test, and we are grateful for this opportunity to respond to factual aspects of the Draft VTR.

Sincerely yours,



J. Meejin Yoon
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Head, Department of Architecture