

Part II: Narrative response to the most recent NAAB visiting team report

Section 1.4 Conditions not met and Section 1.5 Causes of Concern

4: 13.9 Non-Western Traditions and 5: Non-Western Traditions

Both 1.4 and 1.5 speak to a concern over a perceived indifference to non-western traditions. We have met this concern in two ways, primarily: through a revision to our history/theory core curriculum and through our studio sequence.

We are in the process of overhauling our core curriculum, for both the B.Arch. and M.Arch. programs. Working collaboratively through committees and with the faculty as a whole, we are trying to address the perennial problem of how to cover all the “must knows” in such a short period of time, all the while knowing that the “must” list is only getting longer with every year that passes. We have agreed upon a case study approach for our history/theory sequence that will also serve as a resource for the rest of the courses in the school (studio, technology, representation, and advanced history/theory courses). We are assembling a collective library of these resources (a digital resource) that will be available to all instructors.

Included in this collection are non-western examples, although I will note that we subscribe to the current NAAB terminology of *global culture* rather than that of *non-western*. So, for example, we include among our cases the Taj Mahal, with a discussion regarding colonialization; the Mosque of Cordoba with a discussion regarding an eastern reading of Roman architecture as well as a global discussion regarding geometry and organization; and the Forbidden City, with a discussion regarding the way it was read by modern architects as well as a contemporary discussion regarding issues of preservation.

In sum, then, this change in the history/theory sequence inserts global case studies into a larger sequence of case studies that will cross three required semesters of the core. These required courses comprise a core for both the B.Arch. and M.Arch. degrees. Starting next fall, we will have, for the first time, Ph.D. students in art history (it is a new program) who can serve as teaching assistants for a discussion group for the core history/theory courses at the undergraduate level; faculty will run a similar discussion section for the graduate history/theory courses.

We are only beginning our new sequence of history/theory courses this year, and so the changeover to a case studies-based teaching has not been in place long enough to determine the impact upon the students. Nevertheless, I am confident that by incorporating global culture into our core case studies examples, we have sent a clear message to the students that architecture is a global practice with a global history, with the Taj Mahal and the Mosque of Cordoba considered among “western” examples. I will note that the global, “non-western” examples probably comprise no more than 15% of any given course in the four course history/theory core sequence.

Additionally, we have worked to foster a closer relationship between the school and the Rice Design Alliance, our community outreach organization. As part of that relation, we have obtained free access for our students to the RDA lectures, which, this fall, focused on contemporary Chinese practices. While not

all of the RDA lectures are global in focus, I would say that in looking over their excellent programming, a good 30-40% of their annual programming has had such a focus. While these lectures and other programs are not required for our students, they are highly encouraged to attend. Similar opportunities exist through Rice's Baker Institute for Public Policy, Houston's Asia Society, and the world class Latin American collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, which has extensive programming. Again, while not required, we make it a policy to encourage our students to take advantage of Houston's cosmopolitan offerings to extend their horizons globally every chance that they get.

In addition to this changed history/theory curriculum, we have addressed global cultures in our studio sequence. We have shifted the required undergraduate trip from the spring semester of sophomore year, where it was a spring break trip not tied to the curriculum, to spring semester of junior year, when the students are more mature and able to engage a global context in their studio projects. The trip this spring will be to Mexico City and the project in each of the two sections of the junior studio will be a cultural building sited in Mexico City. Additionally, the fourth and final semester of our graduate sequence is similarly engaging a global context. Although it will not be tied to a trip, each of the two sections will site their projects in a "charged" global context. This coming spring the two faculty teaching ARC 504 (the fourth semester of the graduate core) will focus on Istanbul and Brasilia. Neyran Turan, teaching the Istanbul studio, and Farès el-Dada, teaching the Brasilia one, are each especially qualified to engage these particular contexts, which form their respective research specialities.

Our global studios last spring were an enormous success: three studios (two junior studios and one options studio, consisting of B.Arch students in their final semester and M.Arch students in their penultimate semester) went to Mexico City, where Carlos Jimenez led a packed week of architecture, urbanism, and cultural touring. Another options studio went to Shanghai. And the two fourth semester core studios focused on Brasilia and Istanbul respectively. These studios all worked to expand the global culture of the design component of our students' education and I would argue that the entire school benefited from this expansion, through reviews and invited guests (Derek Dellekamp from Mexico City taught one of the options studios and Clover Lee, from Hong Kong and Ling Fan, from Beijing, assisted the Shanghai studio, which additionally had a three day workshop with Tongji University while in Shanghai).

Studio travel is still being firmed up for this coming spring (the fall travel has all been domestic), but potential destinations include China, Morocco, and Spain. We have launched a matching campaign this fall for studio travel funding, which will ensure that such global travel will continue to remain an integral part of our curriculum, despite increasing costs.

4: 13.26 Technical Documentation

We have addressed the question of technical documentation in several ways: first, by shifting our version of the comprehensive studio to the options level, when we think students are more capable of integrating various aspects of building technology; and second, by making the Rice Building Workshop a seminar and studio.

We shifted the comprehensive studio to an obligatory studio in the fall semester of our students's options sequence. For the B.Arch. students, this is the fall semester of their fifth year; for the M.Arch. students, it is the first semester after the core sequence (core lasts two years if you come in without an architecture background; one year if you come to Rice with four semesters of undergraduate studio).

This pool of students, 43 in all, had four studios to choose from, each of which biased a particular aspect of practice: systems, skin, site, and finance. The four studios were integrated to meet as an entire group several times in the semester so as to ensure that the students covered all four topics in depth, even though their particular studio foregrounded one of the four. Furthermore, we brought in façade, mechanical, structural, and cost estimating consultants and, finally, we sent the entire group to New York for four days, where they met a second time with these consultants. Throughout the semester, the students studied drawing sets and produced specs.

Additionally, by shifting the Rice Building Workshop (RBW, our design-build opportunity) to a seminar in the fall and studio in the spring, we have permitted more students to take advantage of this incredible opportunity. The seminar is specifically focused on drawing sets and the studio is a design-build semester. In previous years the RBW was a workshop on top of studio, which prevented the course from going as in depth with the drawing sets as the instructors would have liked.

Finally, to return to the changes in the history/theory curriculum mentioned in the section above, I would like to underscore that part of the documentation that is being produced and studied with these case studies includes drawings and specifications. We would like to ensure that the technical aspects of architecture not be relegated purely to the technology classes, but be integrated throughout the curriculum.

Our Totalization initiative, which is just completing its second run (it defines our options sequence in the fall semester, so four studios are devoted to the comprehensive -- or "totalization," as we call it -- sequence) has been an amazing success. It is an obligatory studio for all of our B.Arch and M.Arch students. This year, we expanded the program to include more visits from the consultants (who came to campus twice each, in addition to hosting the students in their offices in New York in September). We also built a formal once/week lecture into the studio calendar, whereby all four studios met for a lecture at the beginning of studio time on Fridays -- these lectures covered technical topics and documentation.

Regarding documentation specifically, the Totalization studios this term will try out a new idea, which is that they all have to complete a specification sheet, according to a template that is provided to the entire group. As the review is not until after this NAAB deadline, we'll have to wait until next year to find out how the documentation has advanced.