

July 25, 2023

NAAB Board of Directors
National Architectural Accrediting Board
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Subject: Response to the final VTR 2023

Esteemed Members of the NAAB Board of Directors,

The School of Architecture & Design at the Lebanese American University (LAU) would like to thank you and the NAAB administration for your support throughout this process, in our efforts to seek NAAB Continuing Accreditation under the 2020 Conditions. We would also like to thank the visiting team chaired by Ms. Celeste Novak for their professional review of all the work presented, and their positive feedback.

The Bachelor of Architecture program at LAU has received its Initial Accreditation in May 2020 under the 2014 NAAB Conditions. The transition to the 2020 Conditions was conducted under difficult conditions (Covid pandemic, economic crisis, etc.) yet was successfully carried out due to the great efforts of the school administration, faculty, and staff. The process started as soon as we received the initial accreditation, by comparing the 2014 and 2020 conditions, understanding the philosophy and approach of the new conditions, attending several workshops, updating the assessment plan, creating a new curricular matrix, identifying benchmarks, then collecting and aggregating data. All this led to "a clear and complete Architecture Program Report, a well-organized team room with numerous examples of evidence as well as focused schedule for the virtual visit" as mentioned in the visit summary of the VTR.

Our response to the VTR will address the only condition marked as not met (SC.5 – Design Synthesis), highlighting our plan to tackle this issue. We will also update the Board on the revised assessment timeline.

SC.5: Design Synthesis

How the program ensures that students develop the ability to make design decisions within architectural projects while demonstrating synthesis of user requirements, regulatory requirements, site conditions, and accessible design, and consideration of the measurable environmental impacts of their design decisions.

2023 Team Analysis: For SC.5 Design Synthesis, LAU initially directed the team to ARCH 481 Construction Documents, ARCH 531 Design Studio VII, and ARCH 632 Final project. LAU provided six examples of randomly selected student work that spanned the three courses. After Zoom discussions, LAU also directed the team to ARCH 422 Climate & Energy, ARCH 424 Building Services, ARCH 511 Advanced Building Systems, and ARCH 581 Professional Practice I. In a live class visit, LAU showed the team student works from ARCH 431 Design Studio V and ARCH 422 Climate & Energy.

LAU established 3 sub-criteria for SC.5:

- SC.5.1: Ability to make design decisions
- SC.5.2: Synthesis of requirements and conditions: user requirements, regulatory requirements, site conditions, and accessible design.
- SC.5.3: Integration of environmental systems

LAU assigned sub-criteria to ARCH 481, 531, and ARCH 632, and assigned SLOs to each sub-criteria for each course. For example, ARCH 531 has sub-criterion SC5.2 and

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has created SLO1 Identify design strategies addressing the complexity of the project and SLO2 Develop structural systems through architectural details. When an SLO has key performance indicators (KPI) associated with it, then it is assessed through faculty evaluation of student works. For example, ARCH 531 SLO2 has two KPIs: KPI1 Ability to make design decisions within a complex project; and KPI2 Assess different structural systems for the design project. When a SLO does not have KPIs associated with it, then assessment is done through student course evaluations or faculty self-assessment of course. For example, ARCH 531 SLO3 Develop environmental systems through architectural details is assessed through student course evaluations and faculty and coordinator assessments of the course.

SArD Response: The purpose of using the students' evaluation as well as faculty self-assessment and coordinators feedback is to diversify the sources of assessment/evidences, taking into consideration the input of all parties for an objective assessment. This strategy is followed in the evaluation of all PCs and SCs, and is not meant to make up for the absence of clear KPIs.

The assessment committee addressed the issue of not having clear KPIs reflecting the 2020 Conditions in the recommendations related to SC.5 through the following points:

- Key Performance Indicators are to be linked to Student Learning Outcomes where applicable.
- Design Studio VII: SLO3 to be addressed through specific KPIs.
- Design Studio VII: the KPIs to cover the regulatory requirements, accessibility design, and the measurable environmental impact on the design.

The recommendations were made towards the end of 2022, and the implementation will take place in the Fall 2023 term concerning the Design VII (ARCH 531) course.

LAU has established benchmarks for each sub-criterion. For student course evaluations, the benchmark is to have rating of 3 or higher (out of 4). For individual KPIs, the class average is to be a B- or better as based on the grading rubric. As per their assessment schedule (see chart in section 5.2), SC.5 was assessed by the time of the visit.

LAU's CAC assessed SC.5 and provided an assessment report SC5 Analysis and Recommendations.pdf that was found in the team room. The assessment report summarized their assessment for ARCH 481, ARCH 531, and ARCH 632. The report notes that all set benchmarks have been met and the CAC made recommendations. Their recommendations include setting up student evaluations so that there are separate questions for each course's SLO(s), linking the KPIs to the SLOs, and developing KPIs for SLO3. The recommendations made particular note of making sure that the KPIs in ARCH 531 should "cover the regulatory requirements, accessibility design, and the measurable environmental impact on the design." The steps after the CAC's report include discussions in departmental meetings and then implementation by the department chairperson.

The recommendations in the report follow what the visiting teams have noted about LAU's assessment structure for SC.5. The visiting team has noted that sub-criterion SC5.3 Integration of environmental systems does not align with NAAB's language for SC.5, in particular the portion that states the "consideration of the measurable environmental impacts of their design decisions". In addition, the assessment plan includes SLOs that do not align with SC.5. For example, ARCH 531's SLO2 Develop structural systems through architectural details is not relevant to SC.5. In discussion with CAC and the program Chair, the assessment of SC.5 was completed under the previous NAAB conditions and had not been updated to reflect the 2020 conditions. This is consistent with provided course syllabi found in the team room that reference previous NAAB Student Performance Criteria (SPC).

SArD Response: While revising the curricular matrix according to the 2020 Conditions, the CAC interpreted SC.5 and SC.6 as the equivalent/substitute to Realm C in the 2014 conditions (*Integrated Architectural Solutions: Graduates from NAAB-accredited programs must be able to demonstrate that they have the ability to synthesize a wide range of variables into an integrated design solution*).

Realm C was met with distinction in the 2019 visit; hence, the decision was taken to adopt the same courses to address SC.5: Construction Documents, Design VII and Final Year Project. Until the date of the visit, the design courses were still referring to the previous NAAB SPCs. The recommendations of the Assessing Committee will be implemented starting AY 2023-24, to reflect the 2020 NAAB Conditions terminology, in addition to updating the grading rubrics to clearly assess all components (sub-criteria) of SC.5 where applicable.

The randomly selected student work from ARCH 481, 531 and 632 demonstrated a synthesis of user requirements, regulatory requirements and site conditions. In the student work for those courses, the team noted inconsistencies in student work addressing accessible design and could not find consideration of measurable environmental impacts of their design decisions. In the live-class presentation of ARCH 431 Design Studio V and 422 Climate & Energy students demonstrated considerations of measurable environmental impacts of their design decisions through calculations of carbon impact, calculating window sizes for daylighting, calculating cooling through cross ventilation and heat-load calculations. LAU faculty described the actual synthesis of these elements occurring in ARCH 431 Design V; however, randomly selected design examples were not yet available for this new sequence.

The visiting team noted that the program has responded to a number of recent changes in a short amount of time. This includes quick changes in teaching and learning due to Covid-19, economic and political crises in Lebanon, the Port of Beirut explosion, and updating its program from the NAAB 2014 conditions (under which it received its initial accreditation) to the 2020 conditions. In discussions with administration, the updating of the program to the 2020 conditions was not able to happen until 2021.

SArD Response: The NAAB Visiting Team aptly noted that the evidence provided for SC.5 did not align to two elements of the criterion: accessible design, and measurable environmental impact. The team also noted that upon further request, evidence was provided during their live-class visitations of the ARCH 431 Design Studio V and ARCH 422 Climate & Energy courses.

The program plans to amend the assessment sequence for SC5, to better align with the new NAAB requirements. The new assessment sequence will include three consecutive design studios which will cover the various criteria for SC5: ARCH 431 Design Studio V, ARCH 432 Design Studio VI, and ARCH 532 Design Studio VII. The studios will be supported by specific courses which run in parallel and in sync with the studios, and effectively contribute to the understanding of the various criteria.

The sequence of design studios V and VI culminates in Design Studio VII, which still effectively plays the role of the “comprehensive studio”, and provides an additional measure for the synthesis of multiple factors affecting design decisions, such as user requirements, regulatory requirements, site conditions, accessible design and considerations of measurable environmental impact.

Updated Assessment Timeline:

Having decided on all benchmarks for all PCs and SCs, then collected and aggregated all required data before the on-site NAAB visit, the CAC completed its recommendations for the first cycle of assessment during the Spring and Summer 2023 terms. The implementation of the recommendations will take place during AY 2023-24, thus closing the first full cycle of assessment under the 2020 Conditions.

As of Fall 2024, a new cycle of assessment will be launched. The duration of the cycle was reduced to four years, including the implementation of all the recommendations.

The revised timeline grouped the 14 criteria by closely related topics as per the following:

- Sustainability: PC3 + SC1 [Fall 2024 – Fall 2025]
- Design Sequence: PC2 + SC4 [Spring 2025 – Spring 2026]
- History & theory Sequence: PC4 + PC7 + PC8 [Fall 2025 – Fall 2026]
- Professional Codes: SC2 + SC3 [Spring 2026 – Spring 2027]
- Career Development: PC1 + PC6 [Fall 2026 – Fall 2027]
- Advanced Design Integrations: PC5 + SC5 + SC6 [Spring 2027 – Spring 2028]

Revised Assessment Cycle												
	F24	S25	SS25	F25	S26	SS26	F26	S27	SS27	F27	28S	SS28
PC.1												
PC.2												
PC.3												
PC.4												
PC.5												
PC.6												
PC.7												
PC.8												
SC.1												
SC.2												
SC.3												
SC.4												
SC.5												
SC.6												

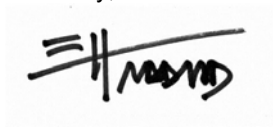
The full assessment cycle for a criterion takes 4 terms to cover the following phases:

- Collect data
- Aggregate and analyse data then issue recommendations for change
- Approve the recommended changes and coordinate with concerned faculty and staff
- Implement the changes in the following cycle

Finally, we would like to mention that our engagement in the NAAB Accreditation process is an articulation of LAU’s mission of seeking academic excellence, developing student capacities and promoting civic engagement. We consider this accreditation as a major step in our quest for quality education, and look forward to form future leaders and team-players in architecture, who would contribute to finding solutions to the challenges facing humanity, in different regions of the world.

We look forward to your response, and thank you for all your efforts.

Sincerely,



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 Lebanese American University