

Report of the RIBA visiting board to the Pratt Institute School of Architecture

Date of virtual visiting board: 10, 13 & 14 May 2021
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 29 July 2021

1 Details of institution hosting courses

Pratt Institute
School of Architecture
Higgins Hall
61 St. James Place Brooklyn
NY 11238
USA

2 Dean

Dr Harriet Harriss

3 Programmes offered for validation

Bachelor of Architecture Program (5 years)
Master of Architecture Program (3 years)

4 Programme Leaders

Bachelor of Architecture Program (5 years): Erika Hinrichs, Chair of Undergraduate Architecture
Masters of Architecture Program (3 years): David Erdman, Chairperson of Graduate Architecture

5 Awarding body

The Pratt Institute

6 The visiting board

Professor Sally Stewart – Chair
Professor Lorraine Farrelly – Vice Chair
Alison Mackinder
Matthew Tabram

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – validation manager – in attendance

7 Procedures and criteria for the visit

The visiting board was carried out under the *RIBA procedures for validation and validation criteria for UK and international courses and examinations in architecture* (published July 2011, and effective from September 2011); this document is available at www.architecture.com.

The timetable was modified to allow the Board to work remotely, to accommodate the time difference between the UK and New York and the availability of visit participants. This also necessitated conducting the visit over three days.

The Board size and composition was modified with the agreement of the RIBA and Pratt team to be appropriate for a virtual visit.

8 Recommendations of the visiting board

On 29 July 2021 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed unconditional validation of the following courses and qualifications:

- Bachelor of Architecture Program (5 years): RIBA Parts 1 & 2 on completion of the 5 year programme.
- Master of Architecture Program (3 years): RIBA Part 2

The next full visiting board will take place in 2026.

Note:

- Graduates should refer to the RIBA website for membership eligibility requirements: <https://www.architecture.com/join-riba>
- Graduates wishing to register as architects in the UK will need to meet the requirements of the Architects Registration Board: www.arb.org.uk

9 **Standard requirements for continued recognition**

Continued RIBA recognition of all courses and qualifications is dependent upon:

- i external examiners (or an acceptable alternative) being appointed for the programme
- ii any significant changes to the courses and qualifications being submitted to the RIBA
- iii any change of award title, and the effective date of the change, being notified to the RIBA so that its recognition may formally be transferred to the new title
- iv submission to the RIBA of the names of students passing the courses and qualifications listed
- v In the UK, standard requirements of validation include the completion by the institution of the annual statistical return issued by the RIBA Education Department

10 **Academic position statement (written by the School)**

Throughout its history, Pratt Institute's School of Architecture, located in Brooklyn, New York, has produced highly lauded, research-driven spatial outcomes with real-world impact. Across both the undergraduate and graduate architecture programs, It's approach is distinguished by its direct engagement with the social, environmental, pedagogical, and professional challenges of our time. It develops and deploys contextually integrated design methodologies - that range from the interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary to the technologically advanced and theoretically experimental - in order to support the generation of innovative spatial outcomes. The pedagogies and curricula are enriched by research specialisms captured on the recently launched microsite. The curriculum and pedagogy are designed to educate those who aspire to practice as registered and licensed architects, as well as those that seek to impact the world with their architectural expertise across a range of other sectors and spheres of influence. This is because our program is dedicated to developing students who can critically engage with the forces that impact upon the design of the built environment, ranging from the material and ecological, the historical and technological, the ethical and theoretical, and the equitable and inclusive.

Since its inception in 2000 the Graduate Architecture and Urban Design (GAUD) department has been a progressive design environment for

advanced architectural research arguably the epicenter of cultural and architectural development in New York City. The programs within the GAUD engage in lively cultural debate, integrated architectural work and Directed Research. To this extent, we are a nimble department that joins school-wide efforts to engage issues of health (pandemics), politics (neoliberalism), economics (wealth distribution) and climate crisis in the built environment; on our own terms and with a resilience that allows us to embrace and weather disruptive, rapid changes to the profession and discourse.

ACADEMIC POSITION

The three programs comprising the GAUD and its nearly 200 students, are advanced by our esteemed faculty who encourage design research, theoretical inquiry, technological investigations and who foster "circular" thinking and methodologies. To this end, we seek to imbue our graduates with a high level of disciplinary precision, adroit technical ability, and a deep understanding of architecture and urban design that allows them to engage questions and challenges, which both the profession and discipline are facing now and in the future. We feel it is important to equip students with a balance of understanding and expertise to operate comfortably on unknowable problems. These are wicked, complex, 21st century and often intractable problems that tend to trigger more questions than answers, ones which may be provocative and/or disruptive and which require discernibly architectural thinking. By educating our students in this manner, we believe they have the necessary potential to evolve into tomorrow's thought leaders, the will and the courage to induce change in the profession and beyond.

Recent courses at Pratt Institute's GAUD examine our understanding of architectural contexts and architectural mediums, which are seen as key issues in the development of buildings, cities, their exurban and rural counterparts in emerging geopolitical and environmental frameworks. The Directed Research platform provides a vehicle for these explorations through courses that reflect a wide array of subjects and student interests. Urban densification, architectural adaptation, and building conservation, are several examples of environmentally pertinent contextual issues. Other courses have investigated the use of augmented reality, carbon fiber composites, robotics and pre-fabrication, as well as the use of color, horticulture, and other media encountered in the design and live experience of architecture. Inequity, displacement and access underscore these research areas with a concerted effort to explore the space between environmental and social justice. Each of these courses and research investigations engage partners and participants from the international, national, and greater New York City professional and academic communities.

They bridge and interlace with a broader ecology of seven research themes emerging across the school of architecture and captured on the recently launched microsite.

CURRICULAR APPROACH

The curriculum and its diagram (pp 20, developed in 2016), is reflective of a series of restructurings and refinements following our NAAB accreditation visit in 2016; a timeframe which coincides with Chair Erdman's hire. In order to amplify the role of integrative thinking across multiple mediums and in contending with the complex design problems/thinking encountered in architectural practice, students in the first year of the core curriculum gain skills and ability in various modes of representation. In both semesters they are actively mixing 2D and 3D, physical and computational methods, gaining knowledge of their related assembly logics and understanding their architectural implications through small and medium scale design problems. Overlapping mediums courses and related history theory and structures courses complement these themes. The second year, as students are progressively approaching their third year, introduces alternative modalities of practice. Increased integration of design studios, history and theory, advanced mediums, building technology and professional practice are introduced through medium to large scale design problems focused on density, the scales between architecture and infrastructure and on sites of tangible and current political, climatological and economic sensitivity. These circular and integrative methods of thinking and designing are sharpened in the advanced curriculum by students' engagement with speculative design projects. This final year aims to resituate students as collaborative partners of the faculty, to allow them to expand their knowledge and understanding and to engage themes of interdisciplinarity that leverage design research as a mode of critical inquiry and civic engagement. RIBA General Criteria, Attributes and their associated goals of enabling skills, abilities, understanding and knowledge are mixed, in differing proportions, in the core curricula of the first two years: Design, History and Theory, Building Technology, Professional Practice and Architectural Mediums. This ensemble of courses are designed to overlap one another and, as a whole, fulfill RIBA General Criteria and Attributes. In the final year these areas of study coalesce and fan-out into individual research trajectories as students engage in both inter- and extra- disciplinary projects that test their skills and abilities and expand their levels of knowledge and understanding.

11 Commendations

The Board commends the following:

- 11.1 The Board commends the institution's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, and the degree to which this is evident within the School of Architecture from its programme aims and objectives and as a focus for its faculty and student communities.
- 11.2 The Board commends the institution's investment in the development of teaching facilities and library and workshop facilities. This includes the extent to which specialist staff support the work generated in academic programmes.

- 11.3 The Board commends the School of Architecture on the extent to which the student voice is evident as a dynamic presence within the school and programmes, and in a rich variety of ways through student representation, employment and mentoring opportunities.
- 12 Conditions**
There are no conditions.
- 13 Action points**
The visiting board proposes the following action points. The RIBA expects the university to report on how it will address these action points. The university is referred to the RIBA's criteria and procedures for validation for details of mid-term monitoring processes. Failure by the university to satisfactorily resolve action points may result in a course being conditioned by a future visiting board.
- 13.1 The Board encourages the school to consider how the evidencing of General Criteria GC8 & GC9 can be sustained and developed in the later years of the Bachelor of Architecture programme.
- 14. Advice**
The visiting board offers the following advice to the School on desirable, but not essential improvements, which, it is felt, would assist course development and raise standards.
- 14.1 The Board advises the School to consider how the distinct characteristics from the two programmes can be clearly articulated.
- 14.2 The Board encourages both programmes to further explore the potential for the exploration of social and physical context through design project site evaluation, analysis and brief development in supporting the pursuit of the institution's pillars of *diversity, equity and inclusion & civic engagement*.
- 14.3 The Board advises the School to provide clear documentation for students confirming the benefits and status that RIBA validation provides to graduates of both programmes.
- 14.4 The Board advises the School to consider introducing an equivalent to the Critic-at-Large system in the Bachelor programme.
- 15 Delivery of graduate attributes**
It should be noted that where the visiting board considered graduate attributes to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or an attribute clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested a graduate attribute was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.
- 15.1 Part 1**
The Board confirmed that all Part 1 graduate attributes were met by the graduates of the BArch programme on completion of all semesters.

15.2 Part 2

The Board confirmed that all Part 2 graduate attributes were met by the graduates of the BArch and MArch programmes.

16 Review of work against criteria

It should be noted that where the visiting board considered a criterion to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or a criterion clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested a criterion was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

16.1 The Board made no further comments.

17 Other information

17.1 Student numbers

There were 1001-1010 students enrolled during the academic year across 2020-21 semester 01 and semester 02.

17.2 Documentation provided

The Department provided all documentation as required by the Procedures for Validation.

18 Notes of meetings

On request, the RIBA will issue a copy of the minutes taken from the following meetings: **These notes will not form part of the published report but will be made available on request. The full set of notes will be issued to the mid-term panel and the next full visiting board.**

- Meeting with head of school course leaders and curriculum area coordinators
- Meeting with students
- Meeting with the head of institution
- Meeting with MArch Critics-at-large
- Meeting with staff
- Resources