

25 March 2019

FROM: Richard Sommer, Dean

RE: Initial Report on Recent MArch CACB Accreditation Team Visit

The Visiting Team for our Master of Architecture Program accreditation by the Canadian Architectural Certification Board (CACB) concluded its visit last Wednesday, and we were briefed on their initial findings. The team was comprised of Henri de Hahn, Team Chair, from Virginia Tech School of Architecture + Design; Terri G. Fuglem, University of Manitoba; Sean F. Rodrigues, Archdiocese of Vancouver; Brent Stewart, Goguen Architecture; Carrie McMath, Murdoch & Boyd Architects; Chris Young, from Duffus Romans Architects; and Michael Jemtrud, an observer on behalf of the Faculty from McGill University's Peter Guo-ha Fu School of Architecture.

The current CACB accreditation process focuses on the way an MArch program meets 6 Program Performance Criteria and 24 Student Performance Criteria. After evaluating our MArch program, the visiting team articulated 8 broad points of strength and 5 specific points of concern in their statements at the exit meetings.

The team was very rigorous in focusing on our MArch program's unique character, as this was articulated through the mission and goals we stated in the MArch Program Report (APR). They began by stating that our program was judged to be healthy and thriving. The team observed how well the design of the Master of Architecture curriculum as well as the school's broader resources and offerings support the program's mission and goals. The articulateness, level of intellectual and creative engagement, and talent among our diverse body of MArch students was noted. Among the particular strengths identified by the team are the breadth and depth of our faculty and their distinctive accomplishments in research and creative practice. The team made specific mention of the high level of collegiality among faculty members and their ability to engage in both meaningful and critical debates on issues of substance regarding the school and important issues we face in the delivery and direction of our MArch program. The role of our new building in allowing for more dynamism and openness in both social and creative exchanges among faculty, students, staff, and the school's larger communities, was remarked upon. In addition to citing our MArch program's breadth-of-approach, they spoke to the value and benefits of having graduate and undergraduate programs in architecture, landscape, art/visual studies, and urban design joined at the faculty, and the importance of sharing interests and resources across these programs.

Referring to our previous MArch accreditation report from 2012, the team found that we had systematically and successfully addressed an overwhelming majority of the deficiencies and areas of concern (an essential milestone for continuing accreditation).

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The points of concern they expressed were: making more students aware of the resources we and the University have in place to support mental health, the need to spread our fulfillment of certain student performance criteria across more courses, working in consultation with students to better utilize the new studio and the workshop spaces, and better communicating our criteria for granting admitted students advanced placement. All these concerns — regarding curricular reforms, facilities planning, and student service protocols — are in areas that we have recognized need work. We have been working to make improvements and will continue to push in our efforts to improve quickly.

The Visiting Team will complete a written draft of their findings in the near future. We will have an opportunity to respond to their draft, and once they receive our responses, the team will draft and file a final report with recommendations to the CACB. The CACB will then make the final determination on our Master of Architecture program's accreditation status going forward. Once the review is complete, the Visiting Team Report will be made publicly available.

I want to thank Shane Williamson, Director of the MArch program, and Kate Nelischer, Assistant Dean, Academic, for the significant and sustained effort they made in preparing for this accreditation, and for the rigor and intelligence they brought to the process that led up to the visit. The visiting team cited Shane's leadership and Kate's contributions as among the MArch program's current strengths. I also want to thank Robert Levit for his contributions as the Associate Dean, Academic, and for his role as the MArch Director between 2012 and 2017, particularly in following up on the previous Visiting Team Report from 2012. Our MArch faculty and students must also be applauded for their efforts and substantial and ongoing contributions to the program, and for the time and effort they put into preparing for the accreditation visit, including our very talented students who contributed to assembling the APR and the team room. And, of course, Bohden Tymchuk, and our great and talented building/workshop staff made a major effort, as they often do, to support our school and its programs.

All-in-all the school made a great showing, from the building, to the exhibition of student work, to the exceptional turnout of support from our alumni and the professional community at a reception Tuesday night. The visiting team observed that we have a large, dedicated, and talented administration and staff, and a high-degree of support from central leadership at U of T. The Team Chair and many members of the team stated during various meetings that these assets, along with our physical resources, are without parallel among our peers in Canada.

We will certainly learn and continue to benefit from this recent accreditation process and the Visiting Team's feedback. We should be pleased that their response was overwhelmingly supportive of our MArch program. Finally, as with the MLA accreditation last fall, we should find it heartening to have a group of external peers who are familiar with other programs recognize the currency in our mission, the vibrancy of our community and resources, and how we are bringing talented people together to work in a uniquely creative space.