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School of Constructed Environments

2010 NAAB Annual Report
Part II (Narrative Report)
Submitted November 30, 2010

Parsons The New School for Design
Master of Architecture (degree + 3 years)
School of Constructed Environments
David Leven, Program Administrator

Last Accreditation Visit: February 2010
Team Report: July 27, 2010

Section 1.4 Conditions Not Met

8. Physical Resources: *“The accredited degree program must provide the physical resources appropriate for a professional degree program in architecture, including design studio space for the exclusive use of each student in a studio class; lecture and seminar space to accommodate both didactic and interactive learning; office space for the exclusive use of each full-time faculty member; and related instructional support space. The facilities must also be in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and applicable building codes.*

Visiting Team Report 2010:

The School of Constructed Environments within Parsons The New School for Design generally occupies two floors in a converted loft building located at 25 East 13th Street in Greenwich Village, New York City. The heart of the Master of Architecture facility is the design studios located on the third floor of this historical building. This large common area with 15 foot ceilings encourages interaction not only among the Master of Architecture students; but, also with the undergraduate students located on the second floor. Each of the Master of Architecture students is assigned a newly designed work area consisting of a tabletop, locker, bookshelves and model storage area. This space also houses classrooms, studio pinup walls, work tables and an area for model making. A small shop area, laser cutting room, classrooms and ancillary rooms are located around this studio space.

While opportunities are provided by this space, there nonetheless remain significant issues and concerns regarding the physical resources available to this program. Please note the following:

1. Wood Shop on the Second Floor

The shop is long and narrow with a small amount of space and a very limited number of tools. The tightness of the space available to a limited number of students is logically a safety hazard. Further, dust collection and fire suppression enter this same realm of safety. Students indicated the practice of removing the tools from the shop and taking them to their desks so they can use them for model construction or building material samples. This practice takes the tools out of view of the shop advisor and in turn raises the concern of proper use and safety.

2. Design Studios and Classrooms

The open design studio format seems to work well and has certainly benefited from the modular desks added to this space. This interaction of students from different studios and even different years can certainly be seen as a benefit. However, the pinup area during studio reviews can be congested and a disturbance with other activities within adjacent spaces. Separate rooms, adjoining alcoves and other spaces would be beneficial for conducting these student activities.

It was noted that some class and studio activities were occurring in open spaces including tables in the entry area and adjacent spaces in the studios. Adequate classrooms, seminar space and small activity areas must be provided so students can properly concentrate in a congenial area for learning.

3. Full-Time Faculty Offices

The program has made significant strides in addressing previous VTR concerns regarding full-time faculty. While this issue is addressed in other areas of this report the result of taking care of this issue is now raised within the realm of faculty offices. Each full-time faculty member is required to have an office space for exclusive use. This requirement is not met as there are some —hot offices! being used by more than one full-time faculty member.

The requirement for part-time faculty members is not as stringent – simply, part-time faculty members need to have a space where they can prepare for their courses and take care of some of their other teaching responsibilities. The number of part-time faculty within this program would certainly justify more space for their use.

4. Accessibility

Consideration certainly needs to be given to the age and historical nature of the building in which the Master of Architecture program exists. While this team recognizes the limitations and restrictions of renovation we must also indicate the requirement of adequately meeting ADA requirements. Restrooms on the second floor are up three steps and have no accessible fixtures or stalls. Restrooms on the third floor have somewhat been renovated to include an accessible sink but no accessible toilets or toilet stalls exist.

5. Existing Space / Expanded Program

The limitations of the existing space are enumerated above. The greatest limitation for this existing space is the lack of any ability to expand the program beyond present numbers. However, discussion with different administrators indicated the possibility of expansion. Greater numbers would certainly require more space on other floors or within other buildings.

Some of these physical resources issues were mentioned in the previous Visiting Team Report of 2004. Some of the physical conditions have changed but many of the issues still remain along with additional issues mentioned above. This ‘Physical Resources’ condition is considered by this 2010 visiting team to be “Not Met”.

Program Response 2010:

8. Physical Resources

In response to the growing needs in the School of Constructed Environments (SCE) as well as the issues addressed in the NAAB Visiting Team Report, Parsons is embarking on a multi-year space programming and allocation process to address these needs. A total of over 26,000 square feet will be added. The first phase of the plan – scheduled for summer 2011 – includes the addition of a floor at 25 East 13th Street to support the programmatic needs. The second phase of the plan in 2012 or 2013 will include the addition of another floor at 25 East 13th Street, which will open up further opportunities for the school.

1. Wood Shop on the Second Floor

Included in the phase one process above, a 6,500 sf (note: number includes existing metal shop) fabrication facility will be housed on the fourth floor at 25 East 13th and all activities in the second floor wood shop will be moved to that location. The shop will have expanded capacity, a greater range of tools, and provide a work space for students. This will help to eliminate the practice of tools leaving the shop and migrating to student desks.

2. Design Studios and Classrooms

The two phase expansion will create additional studios, classrooms, and adjoining spaces for small activities and pin-ups during studio reviews. The addition of these spaces will enable the school to provide spaces for break-out activities that may require a less distracting environment than a studio based pinup space. There will also be spaces that are flexible and allow for the productive cross-overs and overlaps that occur when students can see and understand other activities happening in the school that may be from other disciplines, programs, or levels. This sort of positive congestion is seen as an advantage in a vibrant design school, and the expansion will enable the school to accommodate all types of learning spaces, separate and contiguous.

3. Full-Time Faculty Offices

The additional floors and move of the shop will allow us the opportunity to address issues related to private full-time faculty office needs. There are presently ten full-time faculty who teach in the Master of Architecture program. Of those, five already have private offices and five will need them. We will achieve sufficient increases in space over the next two summers to accommodate their needs.

4. Accessibility

Phase one work will include the second and third floor restrooms to address the need for accessible toilets and/or toilet stalls.

5. Existing Space / Expanded Program

As noted above, the additional two floors will allow the appropriate accommodation of our present students as well as opportunities, in the future, for program expansion.

13.26 Technical Documentation***Ability to make technically precise drawings and write outline specifications for a proposed design.*****Visiting Team Report 2010:**

The presentation of precise technical drawings is evident in all of the different design studios. Well-presented drawing and detail is shown in Comprehensive Studio IV PGAR 5202. There is indication within the studios and in some of the coursework of material selection and even some installation requirements. However, the actual review and development of an outline specification is not evident. This criterion is "Not Met".

Program Response 2010:

As part of an expanded Comprehensive Studio that incorporates a direct collaboration with the Construction Technology 2 class, course professors have been instructed that as an integral part of this course, students will produce outline specifications as part of the deliverables for this course. Each student will produce a design project that will be represented in full detail as previous Comprehensive Studio projects have done, but will now be supported by a Construction Technology 2 class that will focus more specifically on the production of construction documents for an architecture project. These documents will incorporate exercises on specification writing as well as drawings and will use the students' design studio projects as bases for the specifications. These specifications, just like the construction drawings will be reviewed and critiqued so that students can understand the relevance of a comprehensive specification to a set of construction drawings and for project delivery in general.

The school has been selected to compete for the Department of Energy's Solar Decathlon and is currently working on this project. The project will be installed on the Washington DC mall in Fall 2011. In the studios and seminars that support this project students submit specifications to adequately describe the project. Although not all of the students in the MArch program are involved in the Solar Decathlon, the project serves as a paradigm of comprehensive design at all levels and students who will be involved in this type and other comprehensive projects in the future will be able to learn from its example. This work will be understood through its archive of design representations and technical documents that include construction documents and specifications.

Section 1.5 Causes of Concern of the VTR**No causes of concern were found.**