



DAT Meeting || B.Arch Strategic Plan Update

01/15/2026 Thu 4-6pm

<https://art.zoom.us/my/evachiu>

Attended by:

Karen Seong

Eva Chiu

Elizabeth Cohn-Martin

Shruti Dixit

Archer Firouzi

Charles Green

Rebal Knayzeh

Zachary Meade

Kris Menos

Alex Neyman

Diego Romero Evans

Sameena Sitabkhan

Transcript

https://otter.ai/u/LI0kZpbf_JI5LubxfxDfB8DFCdg?view=summary

Overview

The 2026.01.15 DAT Meeting focused on updating the strategic plan for the architecture department. Key points included the department's evolution from a younger, less established program to its current status, emphasizing inclusivity, online learning, and community engagement. The discussion highlighted the need for a rebranding to reflect the program's unique strengths, such as its ability to adapt to online and on-site learning, and its commitment to inclusive design leadership. Challenges identified included the impact of AI on student work and the need for better documentation of the design process. Suggestions for improvement included more community engagement, interdisciplinary collaboration, and enhancing critical thinking and making skills. The meeting discussed integrating AI into history courses to enhance critical thinking and personal relevance, while emphasizing the importance of discernment and hands-on skills. Participants debated the value of physical models versus digital fabrication, suggesting a balance that includes computational thinking and hand sketching. They proposed using AI as a collaborative tool and encouraging diverse forms of student expression. The need for a broader definition of "good architecture" and "good architect" was highlighted, considering both digital and physical skills. The meeting concluded with a plan to continue the discussion at a larger faculty meeting.

Action Items

- [] @Karen Seong - Design and build an online version of the ARCH 512 Community Engagement course, incorporating B Lab–style community-participation processes and tools, after the upcoming NAB review.
- [] Collect attendance records during the meeting by having faculty sign in using post-it notes on the shared board so there is a written record of who attended.



- [] Create a shared spreadsheet to capture faculty proposals for future architecture department events, including suggested films, topics, and discussion formats.
- [] Coordinate with Archer to select a date, time, and venue, add the event to the department calendar, and prepare and deliver a talk about recent architectural work for the planned faculty event.

Outline

Strategic Planning Overview and Historical Context

- Karen Seong provides a historical overview of the last strategic plan for the architecture department, which was developed in 2017-2018.
- The plan involved a retreat with faculty, practitioners, and students to collect feedback and differentiate the program while meeting NAB accreditation requirements.
- The current strategic plan update is motivated by the upcoming NAB accreditation map in 2027 and the evolution of the department over the past 80 years.

Document Sharing and Meeting Structure

- Eva Chiu shares a document to be used as a pin-up space for recording the conversation.
- Karen Seong suggests an overview of different areas before diving into specific points.
- Eva Chiu outlines the meeting structure, including an hour and a half session with six main points for discussion.
- The six main points are inclusive design leadership, critical thinking and making, active community engagement, proficiency and knowledge base, multiple modes of learning, and growing the program's presence.

Inclusive Design Leadership and Critical Thinking

- Eva Chiu introduces the first main point: inclusive design leadership, emphasizing empathy-based and ethics-driven design approaches.
- The discussion includes strengths, challenges, and opportunities in the current program, such as the majority of online and part-time students.
- The second main point, critical thinking and making, focuses on encouraging students to develop meaningful individual processes of inquiry and innovation.
- Eva Chiu highlights the importance of rigorous experimentation, making, and critical thinking in the program.



Active Community Engagement and Proficiency in Knowledge Base

- The third main point, active community engagement, is discussed, emphasizing productive dialog within the academic community.
- Eva Chiu introduces the fourth point, proficiency and knowledge base, focusing on building students' proficiency with critical skills and tools.
- The discussion includes the importance of adapting to changing student demographics and needs, including the use of AI and various software.
- The fifth main point, multiple modes of learning, is introduced, focusing on developing efficient and effective learning systems and practices.

Growing the Program's Presence

- The sixth main point, growing the program's presence, is discussed, focusing on expanding the reputation of professional proficiency and design excellence.
- Eva Chiu emphasizes the need to leverage the benefits of having a diverse body of students with various backgrounds and commitments.
- The discussion includes the importance of marketing the program's unique attributes and adapting to the changing landscape of architectural education.
- Karen Seong and other participants share their thoughts on the program's identity, the impact of online learning, and the need for a rebranding effort.

Community Engagement and Inclusive Design Leadership

- The discussion shifts to the first main point, inclusive design leadership, with a focus on community engagement and the B Lab program.
- Karen Seong praises the B Lab program's success and the need to find ways to include online students in similar community-based design experiences.
- Participants discuss the importance of teaching students the community participation process and the potential for online students to engage in design services for nonprofits.
- The conversation includes ideas for creating events and activities to foster student engagement and participation in the community.

Critical Thinking and Making: Strengths and Challenges

- The discussion moves to the second main point, critical thinking and making, with a focus on strengths and challenges in the program.
- Karen Seong highlights the faculty's commitment to not grade inflating and the importance of holding students accountable to stated outcomes.
- Participants discuss the need for students to self-critique, set value criteria, and practice productive iteration.



- The conversation includes ideas for integrating technical skills and data-driven tools into the design process and emphasizing the importance of questioning and problem-solving.

Addressing AI Misuse in Assignments

- Karen Seong raises concerns about the rampant use of AI in reading and writing assignments in history classes.
- The discussion includes the need to focus on delivering content and learning history, even if the writing quality is compromised.
- Participants share their experiences with AI misuse in their classes and the challenges of maintaining academic integrity.
- The conversation includes ideas for adapting assignments and evaluation methods to address the issue of AI misuse.

Process Documentation and Collaboration

- The discussion shifts to the importance of documenting the design process and emphasizing collaboration with technical advisors.
- Speaker 13 suggests that the final project should be 30% done, but the process should be 90% done to focus on the learning and understanding of the process.
- Participants discuss the need for students to present their process through diagrams and other visual tools to demonstrate their thinking and decision-making.
- The conversation includes ideas for creating an Academy of Art University standard for process documentation and emphasizing collaboration and communication in the design process.

Final Thoughts and Next Steps

- Eva Chiu and Karen Seong summarize the key points discussed and emphasize the importance of continuous feedback and collaboration.
- Participants express their appreciation for the discussion and the opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas.
- The meeting concludes with plans to continue the conversation and develop actionable steps for the strategic plan update.
- Karen Seong suggests starting with a lecture series and invites faculty to participate and contribute to the ongoing efforts.

Rebuilding History Courses and AI Integration

- Eva Chiu discusses the use of AI in history classes for pre-vetting writing, emphasizing the need for a more proactive and longer-term approach.



- Speaker 6 highlights the importance of understanding historical concepts and making them relevant to contemporary settings.
- Speaker 6 suggests using personal experiences and images to connect historical ideas to modern life.
- Karen Seong and Speaker 6 agree that making the learning process personal can help students better understand and retain information.

Challenges with AI-Generated Writing

- Karen Seong expresses concern about students' ability to distinguish good writing if they don't learn to write themselves.
- Speaker 6 shares an example of a student's AI-generated discussion post that lacked coherence and context.
- Karen Seong laments the loss of teaching the craft of writing and the impact on students' ability to discern quality.
- Speaker 14 suggests integrating AI into the curriculum as a critical thinking tool rather than a separate software lesson.

Discernment and Group Discussions

- Eva Chiu emphasizes the importance of teaching discernment skills, even if AI can generate plans.
- Eva Chiu proposes replacing written discussion topics with recorded group discussions to encourage different forms of expression.
- Karen Seong supports the idea of moving away from written responses to other forms of communication like drawings or audio recordings.
- Karen Seong notes that some students resort to AI-generated work out of desperation, indicating a need for alternative assessment methods.

Exploring Different Forms of Expression

- Eva Chiu encourages faculty to experiment with different discussion topics and methods to find what works best.
- Speaker 13 suggests using follow-up questions to force students to read and engage with their AI-generated work.
- Speaker 7 and Speaker 13 discuss the challenges of students using AI to bypass assignments but agree that requiring follow-up questions can help.
- Eva Chiu proposes pushing the discussion on AI and its integration into the curriculum to a larger faculty meeting.

Defining Good Architecture and Skills



- Karen Seong asks the group to define what constitutes good architecture and a good architect in the context of their school's identity.
- Eva Chiu suggests that the discussion on digital versus physical skills is too broad for the current meeting.
- Karen Seong proposes a lightning round of brief comments on the topic as a way to conclude the meeting.
- Karen Seong and Speaker 13 discuss the importance of both digital and physical skills in architecture and the need for a balanced approach.

Balancing Digital and Physical Skills

- Speaker 14 suggests using computational thinking to enhance physical model-making skills.
- Speaker 7 shares an example of using Grasshopper scripts to demonstrate the complexity of students' rule sets.
- Speaker 16 highlights the availability of digital fabrication tools in libraries and other resources that can support students.
- Speaker 15 emphasizes the importance of hand sketching and critical thinking in upper-level studios.

Encouraging Hand Sketching and Critical Thinking

- Speaker 15 suggests encouraging hand sketching as a way to improve students' ability to communicate and think critically.
- Speaker 7 notes that students often hide their best work in their sketchbooks and suggests making sketches a deliverable.
- Speaker 13 requires students to use specific sketchbooks and show their sketches weekly, which helps them develop their skills.
- Karen Seong confirms that the 5x7 sketchbook is a required supply in many courses, and faculty can ask to see students' work.

Final Thoughts and Next Steps

- Karen Seong thanks everyone for their contributions and emphasizes the importance of continuing the discussion on AI and strategic planning.
- Eva Chiu mentions that the next steps will be discussed in a larger faculty meeting.
- Speaker 7 and Speaker 9 express their appreciation for the meeting and the opportunity to share their thoughts.
- Speaker 13 asks for a quick update, and Karen Seong confirms that the meeting was scheduled for two hours, as requested by Richard.