

DAT Meeting || B.Arch Strategic Plan Update

01/15/2026 Thu 4-6pm

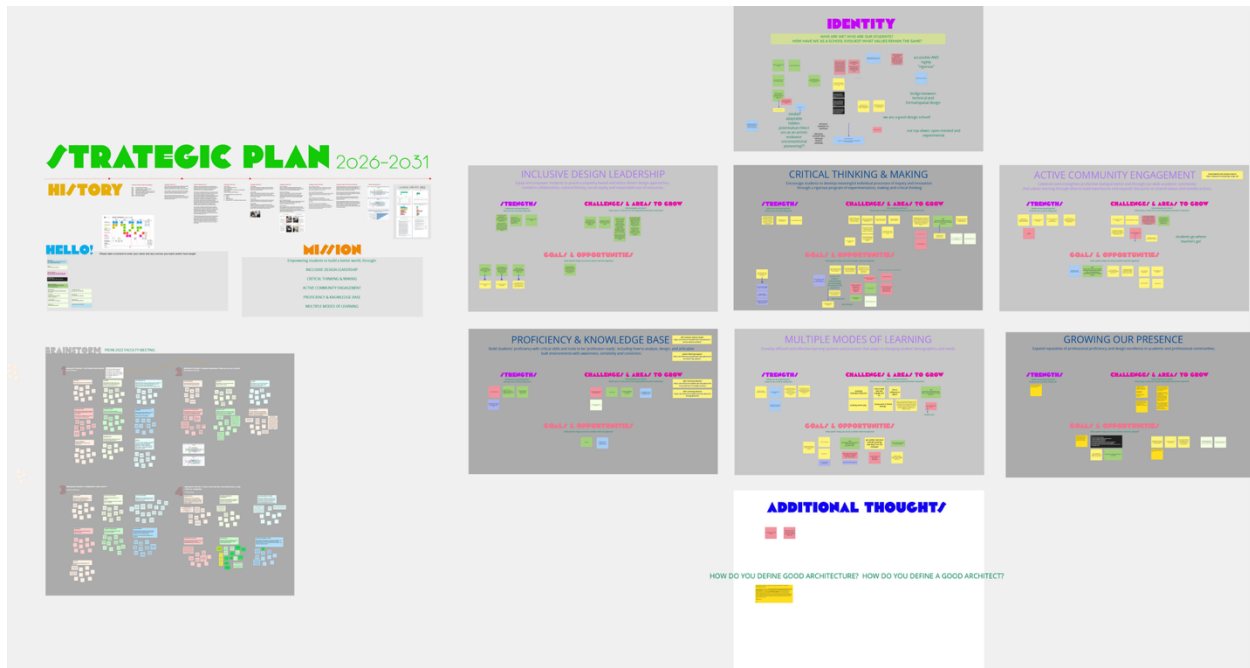
Attended by:

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

Conceptboard



<https://aau-architecture.conceptboard.com/board/qsey-0g6o-x5p2-ufqf-63r8>

Faculty met to discuss the next strategic plan for the Architecture program, with attention the evolution of the school since the previous strategic planning cycles, and the changing needs of students, faculty, and the profession. The discussion focused on how the school should define its identity, strengthen its curriculum, support a diverse student body, and position itself within architectural education and practice.

The group noted that the program has changed significantly since earlier planning efforts. The school is no longer primarily defined by its onsite student population. It now serves a majority-online, majority-part-time student body, including older students, working students, transfer students, and students located across many geographic regions. This shift requires the school to update its identity, teaching methods, student support systems, and public messaging.

1. Program Identity and Evolution

Faculty discussed the need to clarify the school's current identity. Earlier versions of the program were shaped by onsite culture, studio events, lectures, workshops, charrettes, and a younger full-time student population. Today, the program has a much larger online presence and serves students whose lives, schedules, locations, and educational pathways are more varied.



Rather than treating this change as a loss, faculty identified it as an opportunity. The school has developed considerable expertise in teaching design studio online and should recognize online education as a strength rather than a secondary mode. Faculty noted that the program is unusually personal despite being online: instructors know students well, understand their backgrounds, and often provide close support over time.

Several faculty described the school as adaptable, open, democratic, experimental, and practice-oriented. The program occupies a distinctive middle ground between highly speculative design schools and narrowly technical drafting programs. It aims to prepare students who can think creatively, use professional tools, understand technical constraints, and enter practice with useful skills.

A key strategic goal is to define and communicate this identity more clearly: an accessible, rigorous, practice-connected architecture program within an art and design university, serving diverse students through onsite, online, and hybrid modes.

2. Inclusive Design Leadership and Access to the Profession

Faculty discussed the importance of inclusive design leadership as both a program value and a strategic responsibility. Because the program is open-access and available online, it serves students who may not have access to more selective, full-time, or geographically limited architecture programs. Faculty noted that this creates real challenges, but also positions the school as an important pathway into the profession.

The school's student body includes working adults, students with family or professional commitments, transfer students, and students from many locations and backgrounds. These students may have less time for studio work than traditional full-time students, but they also bring maturity, lived experience, practical knowledge, and diverse perspectives.

Faculty emphasized that if the profession is serious about expanding access and building a more inclusive pipeline, programs like this one are essential. The school should therefore frame accessibility, diversity, and professional preparation as central strengths, not as compromises.

Strategic goals in this area include supporting part-time and working students more effectively, valuing students' lived experience, making professional pathways more transparent, and helping students understand how architecture can serve different communities.

3. Online Education as a Defining Strength

Faculty agreed that online education should become a more explicit part of the school's identity. The program has learned how to teach architecture studio remotely in ways that many previously thought were impossible. Faculty noted improvements in Zoom engagement, online critique, digital pin-up spaces, and student participation.

At the same time, faculty recognized that online education requires intentional design. Online students can feel isolated or siloed within individual sections. The school needs stronger methods for building community across courses, levels, and modalities. Faculty discussed bringing back some of the energy of onsite culture through online lectures, workshops, movie discussions, faculty conversations, student events, and public reviews.

Possible initiatives include a monthly lecture or discussion series, online movie nights focused on architecture and spatial experience, faculty talks about current work, student organization partnerships, and an architecture department YouTube channel or podcast. These events could include both onsite and online students and help create a stronger shared school culture.

A strategic goal is to make online learning more visible, more communal, and more publicly celebrated.

4. Community Engagement and Place-Based Learning



Faculty discussed community engagement as a major opportunity, especially because online students are located in many different communities. Rather than centering all design work in San Francisco, the program can encourage students to work with local issues, local sites, local codes, local building practices, and local community needs.

The B.Lab program was identified as a strong model of community-based learning. Faculty praised its impact, public recognition, student pride, and ability to connect design education with real community benefit. The challenge is to determine how similar opportunities can be extended to online students.

Faculty noted that community-based design does not always need to involve physical construction. Online students could provide design services, research, drawings, community engagement tools, or speculative design proposals for nonprofits, public groups, or local organizations. Faculty also discussed the importance of teaching students community participation methods, especially for public, landscape, urban, and neighborhood-scale projects.

Strategic goals include expanding community-based learning, developing online-accessible versions of B.Lab or related courses, helping students engage their own communities, and teaching community participation as a design skill.

5. Critical Thinking, Process, and Design Judgment

Faculty identified critical thinking and design process as areas needing continued emphasis. Students should learn to evaluate their own work, define criteria for decision-making, and understand design as a process of inquiry rather than simply the production of final artifacts.

Several faculty emphasized that students often focus too quickly on the final building, image, or deliverable. The program should help them understand projects as arguments, questions, and evolving investigations. Final work matters, but the process of arriving at that work is equally important.

Faculty discussed the need for stronger process documentation. Students should be expected to show sketches, diagrams, iterations, research, testing, feedback, and decision-making. This documentation should not be treated as filler; it should demonstrate how the student thinks. Faculty compared this to graphic design portfolios, where process is often an industry-standard part of presenting work.

Strategic goals include creating clearer expectations for process documentation, teaching students to identify design criteria, emphasizing diagrams as generative tools, and helping students critique their own work as both artifacts and arguments.

6. Making, Materiality, and the Physical-Digital Relationship

Faculty discussed concern that physical model making, hand sketching, and material experimentation may be diminishing. While digital tools are essential, students also need tactile, physical, and iterative ways of understanding architecture.

The group discussed the importance of reconnecting digital work with physical making. Digital fabrication, model making, prototyping, and material studies can help students understand scale, assembly, construction, and spatial experience. Faculty also noted that sketching remains important as part of the design process, not only as a representational skill.

The school should consider how physical making can be supported for both onsite and online students. This includes questions of access, equity, fabrication facilities, model-making expectations, and alternative methods for students who are remote.

Strategic goals include strengthening the role of physical models, integrating digital fabrication with design inquiry, reinforcing sketching and diagramming, and helping students understand the relationship between digital design and built reality.



7. Technical Skills, Professional Proficiency, and Collaboration

Faculty recognized the school's strength in preparing students with professional and technical skills. Students often gain experience with software, documentation, building systems, structures, sustainability, and representation. This practice-based orientation is a major part of the program's value.

However, faculty emphasized that technical skills should support design thinking rather than replace it. Data-driven tools, performance analysis, building systems, and technical advising should help students make better design decisions. Students should be asked not only to apply technical advice, but to explain how they interpreted it and how it affected the project.

Faculty also discussed the importance of collaboration. In early studios, students often work individually, but professional architecture requires coordination with consultants, clients, engineers, builders, and public agencies. The use of technical advisors in upper-level studios was identified as a strong model because it asks students to receive expert feedback, document it, reflect on it, and incorporate it into design development.

Strategic goals include strengthening coordination between technical courses and studios, teaching students how to collaborate with consultants, and requiring reflection on how technical information informs design decisions.

8. AI, Reading, Writing, and Discernment

Faculty discussed the growing impact of AI on student work, especially in history courses, discussion posts, written assignments, and research-based work. AI misuse has made some traditional writing assignments less effective as measures of student learning.

Faculty noted that the program should move from reactive responses to a more proactive strategy. Rather than simply policing AI use, the school should clarify what skills students must still develop: historical knowledge, critical thinking, discernment, observation, analysis, visual communication, and the ability to form an informed opinion.

In history courses, faculty discussed shifting some assignments away from conventional writing and toward other forms of demonstrating understanding, such as diagrams, visual analysis, annotated images, comparisons, and short interpretive responses. The goal is to ensure students still learn architectural history and develop analytical judgment, even as AI changes how writing is produced.

Strategic goals include developing department-wide guidance on AI use, redesigning discussion prompts, emphasizing personal judgment and critique, and creating assignments that ask students to demonstrate understanding in ways AI cannot easily replace.

9. Interdisciplinary Opportunities within the University

Faculty discussed the value of being located within a larger art and design university. Students have potential access to fields such as gaming, animation, fashion, sculpture, film, and other creative disciplines. Faculty noted that the school does not always take full advantage of this context.

There was interest in developing more intentional interdisciplinary opportunities. These could include selected courses from other departments, collaborative studios, cross-listed projects, or partnerships with faculty in other disciplines. Prior collaborations with fashion, gaming, animation, and film were mentioned as examples.

Strategic goals include identifying appropriate courses in other departments, building relationships with department directors, encouraging faculty to audit or explore other courses, and creating interdisciplinary projects that expand how architecture students think about space, narrative, material, media, and experience.

10. Public Presence and Reputation



Faculty discussed the need to grow the school's public presence. Although the program has strong faculty, strong students, and meaningful community-based work, it is not always visible enough in the Bay Area or in broader academic and professional communities.

The school should more actively share faculty work, student work, community projects, awards, lectures, reviews, and events. Faculty discussed the possibility of an architecture department YouTube channel, podcast, public lecture series, interviews, roundtable conversations, and more visible celebration of faculty and student accomplishments.

Strategic goals include building a stronger public identity, increasing visibility of faculty and student achievements, using digital platforms more effectively, and positioning the school as a serious architecture program within the Bay Area and beyond.

11. Emerging Strategic Goals

The discussion suggests the following strategic goals for the next planning cycle:

1. Clarify and communicate the school's identity as accessible, rigorous, adaptable, practice-connected, and design-driven.
2. Treat online education as a defining strength of the program.
3. Build stronger community across onsite and online students.
4. Expand community-based and place-based learning opportunities.
5. Extend B.Lab curriculum to online learning.
6. Strengthen critical thinking, process documentation, and student self-critique.
7. Rebalance digital tools, physical making, sketching, and material experimentation.
8. Integrate technical knowledge more directly with design decision-making.
9. Prepare students for collaboration with consultants, clients, communities, and other professionals.
10. Develop a proactive strategy for AI, writing, history, and critical discernment.
11. Create more interdisciplinary opportunities within the university.
12. Increase the school's public presence, reputation, and visibility.
13. Support faculty as central to the program's quality, culture, and student success.

12. Next Steps

- Draft a revised identity statement for the Architecture program.
- Define the six strategic goal areas in clearer language.
- Identify measurable actions for each goal.
- Develop online community-building events for students and faculty.
- Develop an online version of B.Lab.
- Review studio expectations for process documentation and design criteria.
- Create department-wide guidance for AI use in courses.
- Identify interdisciplinary course or project opportunities.
- Develop a public-facing communications plan for lectures, events, student work, and faculty achievements.
- Revisit the strategic plan annually to assess progress and adjust priorities.