

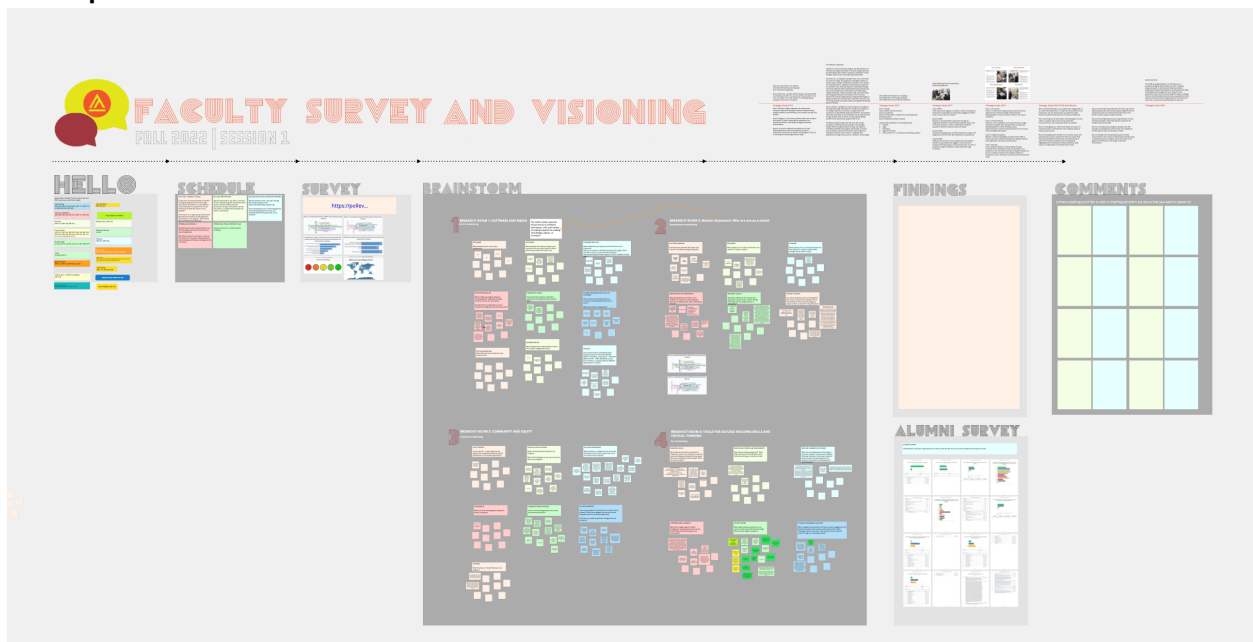
ARH UG Faculty Visioning Session Meeting Notes

9/15/2022 Thu 12-1:30pm

Attended by:

- | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Karen Seong | 9. Archer Firouzi | 17. Nastaran Mousavi |
| 2. Sameena Sitabkhan | 10. Charles Green | 18. Alex Neyman |
| 3. Doron Serban | 11. Dan Hogman | 19. Philip Ra |
| 4. Braden Engel | 12. Yim Lim | 20. Gilberto Rodriguez |
| 5. Eva Chiu | 13. Antonio Lao | 21. Carlo Sturken |
| 6. Paul Adamson | 14. Ines Brito Rodriguez | 22. Ethen Wood |
| 7. Laura Brugger | 15. Zach Meade | 23. Rebal Knayzeh |
| 8. Shruti Dixit | 16. Hannah Moon | 24. Ricardo Solar |

Conceptboard



<https://aau-architecture.conceptboard.com/board/ga3n-bbpb-42bf-kao8-dxd0>

Overview

Faculty discussed the future direction of the School of Architecture, with emphasis on school identity, online education, community engagement, professional preparation, communication skills, curriculum structure, and the balance between conceptual design, technical skill-building, and professional readiness.

A recurring theme was the need to define what distinguishes the school: not as a narrowly specialized “hammer,” but as a “Swiss knife” model that prepares students with adaptable design, technical, communication, and community-engagement skills for many different professional contexts.

1. School Identity and Strategic Position

Faculty discussed the need to clarify the identity and ethos of the School of Architecture within the broader context of an art and design university.



The school's strength may not be in producing a single recognizable design style or "signature" project type, but in preparing students who are versatile, professionally useful, and able to adapt to varied contexts. One comparison framed highly specialized schools as a "hammer," while AAU may be better understood as a "Swiss knife": practical, adaptable, and broad in its applications.

Several questions emerged:

- What is the school's distinctive design identity?
- What is the "signature" class, project, or experience that defines the program?
- How should the curriculum balance conceptual ambition, art-school experimentation, software skills, and professional readiness?
- Are students being prepared to produce buildings, objects, systems, communities, or professional design leaders?
- What kind of graduates is the school putting back into the world?

Faculty noted that AAU students are often valued in practice because they have strong skills, require little ramp-up time, and can become productive quickly. At the same time, the program should continue to develop students' ability to think critically, ask large design questions, and articulate the broader value of architecture.

2. Community, Equity, and Place-Based Engagement

A major theme was the need to expand the school's understanding of community engagement beyond San Francisco. As the online student population grows, students are increasingly located in different regions, communities, and cultural contexts. This creates an opportunity for students to work hands-on in their own communities and bring local knowledge into the design process.

Faculty noted that focusing only on San Francisco can create a form of assimilation into one local urban model. Online students, by contrast, may be working from places with different community needs, local histories, construction practices, regulatory frameworks, and social conditions. The school can learn from what students bring from their own locations.

This suggests a strategic opportunity: use the distributed nature of online education as a strength rather than a limitation. Students can engage their own communities, local stakeholders, building departments, codes, construction practices, and social conditions.

Possible strategic directions include:

- Encourage students to select project sites in their own communities.
- Develop clearer site-selection criteria for thesis and studio projects.
- Require students to explain why a site is appropriate, not simply where it is located.
- Support mapping, site description, stakeholder identification, and local research as part of project development.
- Invite community members and non-architects as guest speakers or reviewers.
- Frame community engagement, equity, craft, and place as interconnected values.

Faculty also discussed the importance of teaching students to present architecture to non-architects. Students often learn to present to other architects, but in practice they must explain design value to clients, contractors, community members, and public agencies.

3. Site Selection, Site Analysis, and Local Context

Faculty identified site selection and site analysis as areas needing greater rigor, especially in thesis and upper-level studios. Thesis students often select their own sites, but the challenge is helping them explain why a site is meaningful, appropriate, and strategically selected.



Online site engagement can be difficult when students rely mainly on Google Earth or remote research. Students need better methods for understanding local conditions, including codes, construction practices, community needs, climate, neighborhood context, and bureaucratic processes.

Faculty discussed the need to teach students how to reduce the complexity of a site without oversimplifying it. Rigorous site analysis should help students “boil things down” into a few clear, critical questions that can be presented to community members, reviewers, or building departments.

Possible curricular strategies include:

- Develop site-selection criteria for thesis and advanced studios.
- Teach students to distinguish between site description and site argument.
- Require students to define the social, environmental, regulatory, and construction context of a site.
- Include local codes, building departments, and construction practices in site research.
- Ask students to translate complex site conditions into two or three core design questions.
- Encourage students to engage with local communities, not only remote mapping tools.

4. Online Education, Hybrid Teaching, and Studio Culture

Faculty discussed the growing importance of online education and the need to improve online studio culture. Online education is now central to the school, not secondary. It allows students to participate from different locations and connect design work to their own communities. However, online sections can become siloed, and students may feel less connected to the broader school culture.

Online formats can create a more democratic space for participation when they are well organized. At the same time, technical problems can disrupt teaching and reviews. Large shared digital reviews have promise, but issues such as screen sharing, file size, slow loading, and presentation setup need clearer standards.

Students also need to learn how to present effectively online. Digital presentations must often be more self-contained, legible, and carefully structured than in-person pin-ups. Faculty suggested workshops on online presentation, collaboration workflows, file preparation, and digital review etiquette.

Potential actions include making reviews more public across sections, creating shared online review events, developing presentation standards, improving file-sharing protocols, and building stronger connections between onsite and online students.

5. Communication, Critical Listening, and Public Presentation

Faculty identified communication as a central skill that should be developed from first year through thesis. This includes verbal presentation, written communication, critical listening, and the ability to explain architectural value to non-architects.

Several faculty noted that students may have strong graphic skills but struggle to speak confidently about their work. This challenge is not only a language issue for international students. It is also about learning how to structure an argument, respond to feedback, summarize ideas, and present with clarity. Students need repeated practice explaining projects to both architects and non-architects.

Critical listening was also identified as an important gap. Students may hear lectures, desk critiques, or review comments without being able to identify the main takeaways. Faculty discussed exercises such as watching architect lectures with students, asking what they heard, and helping them form informed opinions. Recording desk critiques could also help students review feedback and reflect on it later.



Possible actions include adding communication exercises across the curriculum, requiring students to summarize feedback after reviews, practicing non-jargon presentations, strengthening written reflection, and inviting non-architect reviewers.

6. Professional Preparation and Career Readiness

Faculty discussed the transition from school to practice, especially in upper-level studios and thesis. Students may not fully understand how to get a job, how professional relationships work, or how reviews can function as informal job interviews. Faculty, guest critics, and reviewers are part of a professional network. Students need to understand that conduct, presentation, responsiveness, and reputation matter.

The school should make professional expectations more explicit. Students should learn how recommendations, references, introductions, and long-term relationships affect career opportunities. They should also recognize that professional behavior in studio can influence future opportunities.

There was interest in creating a more centralized internship or placement support system. One model discussed was a system in which instructors pool professional connections into a shared resource managed by the school. This could make access to internships and professional networks more equitable.

Faculty also noted that while AAU graduates may be well prepared for entry-level production work, the school should consider how to prepare them for later growth, including managing teams, leading projects, and communicating with clients.

7. Curriculum Balance: Concept, Tools, Documentation, and Making

Faculty discussed the balance between conceptual design, technical skill-building, software proficiency, and professional documentation. Some courses, particularly those with strict Revit or documentation deliverables, may risk prioritizing production over design development. Other studios may allow more self-directed conceptual exploration.

The school needs to clarify where software training belongs, how tools support design thinking, and how each studio contributes to the overall sequence. The issue is not whether technical skills matter, but whether they are properly integrated into a broader design education.

Faculty also discussed physical making, prototypes, tactility, and digital fabrication. There was interest in reconnecting digital tools with material experimentation, physical models, and potentially full-scale fabrication. The school should consider how making is supported in studio, support courses, and online education, especially given differences in access to tools and facilities.

8. Equity, Access, and Student Backgrounds

Faculty noted that AAU students come from varied backgrounds and locations. This diversity should be treated as an asset in the curriculum. Students' local communities, prior experiences, cultural backgrounds, and professional goals can enrich studio work.

At the same time, equity issues arise in access to technology, software, fabrication, physical workspace, and professional networks. Online students may have different resources than onsite students. International students may face additional communication and cultural barriers.

Possible strategic priorities include:

- Treat student background and location as curricular strengths.
- Support multiple pathways into the profession.
- Make professional networking more transparent and equitable.
- Address disparities in access to computing, software, and fabrication.



- Create more inclusive review formats.
- Include community members and non-architects in school conversations.
- Ensure that students can communicate effectively across cultural, professional, and public audiences.

Strategic Priorities

1. Develop a school-wide statement of identity and ethos.
2. Identify the signature curricular experiences that define the school.
3. Review the studio sequence to clarify the distinct role of each studio.
4. Reassess the balance between conceptual design and technical deliverables in upper-level studios.
5. Create site-selection and site-analysis criteria for thesis and advanced studios.
6. Develop online presentation and collaboration guidelines.
7. Increase public, cross-section, and hybrid reviews.
8. Invite more non-architects, community members, and local stakeholders into reviews.
9. Add critical listening and verbal communication exercises across the curriculum.
10. Build a centralized internship and professional networking resource.
11. Teach students how reviews, faculty, and critics connect to professional opportunities.
12. Address equity in access to software, computing, fabrication, and professional networks.

Questions for Further Discussion

- What is the school's identity within an art and design university?
- Is the school's strength specialization, versatility, or a combination of both?
- What should every graduate be able to do, say, make, and explain?
- How can online education become a defining strength of the school?
- How can students' own communities become active sites of architectural learning?
- How should the curriculum balance conceptual ambition and employable skills?
- What role should Revit, Rhino, fabrication, and physical making play in the design sequence?
- How can the school help students build professional networks more equitably?
- How can students learn to communicate the value of architecture to non-architects?
- What kind of architect is the school preparing for the future?