

# AIAS

FROM THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTURE STUDENTS

## RE: The Degree Nomenclature Discussion

### *Students believe BArch degree should not be eliminated*

As the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) discusses ceasing to accredit all existing bachelor of architecture programs after 2010, the American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS) feels that it is important to present the student perspective on these issues. This article—presented on behalf of the AIAS, the nonprofit, student-run organization representing over 5,300 students—represents a compilation of individual members' views.

The AIAS believes that the debate over degree nomenclature and the possible elimination of the BArch program requires discussion of

- Diversity
- Time
- Cost
- Reputation
- Degree confusion
- The emerging trend of converting BArch programs to MArch programs.

#### **Elimination of the BArch is premature**

Although the AIAS has more questions than answers, the group has come to realize that the issues go beyond eliminating the BArch. Therefore, the AIAS believes that at this time the elimination of the BArch degree is premature, and efforts should instead focus on addressing architecture education in a more holistic manner.

The education discussion should be on elevating programs, not degree title. To adjust curriculum and convert programs could consume time and money better spent raising program standards and producing higher caliber graduates. Re-evaluation will lead to a natural progression of architecture education programs, most likely including conversion of many programs from BArch to MArch. Indeed,

degree conversion should be evolutionary, and NAAB's ceasing to accept applications after October 14, 2000, for new BArch programs may be the first step.

Ultimately, it is the trend of converting five-year BArch programs to five-year MArch programs that most concerns AIAS members. This should be a key discussion for the five collateral organizations [AIA, AIAS, NAAB, National Council of Architecture Registration Boards, and Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture]. The profession and students alike demand a broad education, which becomes less likely under the development of the five-year MArch.

Eliminating the BArch and allowing 5-year BArch programs to switch to 5-year MArch programs are simplistic solutions to a complex problem. The NAAB would better serve architecture education by identifying clear differences in requirements between bachelor's and master's degrees. This is the only way the master of architecture will ever approach the prestige people want it to hold.

The chief benefit of the NAAB action is initiating discussion; the worst possible outcome of the July NAAB meeting is that the discussion ends. Pass or fail, the AIAS hopes this issue—and this article—encourage dialogue and change toward advancing architecture education.

#### **Diversity**

Diversity of degrees is important to the profession, and is a key argument among the five collateral organizations for keeping the BArch program as is. At the same time, the diversity of experiences gained through the 4+2 program gives cause to accredit only the MArch. BArch programs in general will face challenges in converting to MArch programs, such as state/re-

gional requirements for accreditation of a masters program and university graduate curriculum requirements.

Additionally, many of the current BArch schools are historically black colleges/universities:

- Hampton University
- Howard University
- Morgan State University
- Prairie View A&M University
- Southern University and A&M College
- Tuskegee University
- The University of the District of Columbia.

In most cases, the colleges with high minority enrollments do not have graduate programs. Their charters may not even allow for such programs. Without knowing the effects of the elimination of the BArch on these programs, AIAS members have reservations about making any decisions regarding the BArch.

In the recent discussions about the diversity of degrees, people have neglected to mention that support of the 4+2 program is another way to foster diversity within architectural education. The 4+2 program allows for undergraduate programs to be diverse in their focus while maintaining a strong basis in the liberal arts. The graduate part of the 4+2 program allows students to focus more directly on architecture while pursuing more specialized interests discovered as an undergraduate.

The 4+2 program also allows diversity through the option of staying at one school for six full years or attending a different school after four years. Attending more than one school to complete one's architecture education should be viewed

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as highly desirable, as it allows students to experience a variety of approaches to design and practice.

Finally, not everyone goes to architecture school to become a licensed architect. The 4+2 program allows the benefits of an architecture education without the intensity level of a 5-year program. Four years of architecture education offers almost limitless opportunities for graduate school or life.

#### **Time**

Time should be part of the discussion in terms of the length of one's education in architecture, as well as in consideration of the existing curriculum structure and the need to integrate coursework better. The BArch is the quickest path to licensure, but it may lead to overworked students with limited exposure to essential life skills.

AIAS members have repeatedly reported that their programs do not allow them to graduate on schedule and take free elective courses. This is despite the NAAB requirement that all students who receive an accredited degree in architecture not be required to take more than 60 percent of their classes in professional studies. General studies not among the basic English, science, and math universitywide requirements still tend to be within the architecture department and overlap with "required" elective courses.

The need for more liberal arts education is in addition to the constantly evolving and expanding components of architecture education. Students want more education in:

- The ability to adapt to team-oriented

roles in the current marketplace

- Design trends and the economic markets
- Project management
- Communicative and programmatic skills
- Sustainability.

Learning institutions must take steps to prepare graduates for these essential life skills in the ever-changing market. However, many BArch students already feel that their program is very rigorous and bears more similarity to many graduate programs than most bachelor degrees.

An accredited degree, which includes a four-year degree built on a core curriculum of liberal arts classes followed by an advanced degree that includes research and focused study in architecture (the 4+2 or 4+3 models) would provide the flexibility to expand curriculum based on market trends. The 4+2 and 4+3 models simply provide more education opportunities than a five-year BArch or MArch.

The ability to have a life outside architecture school and even outside of the studio itself is a major concern (currently being addressed by the AIAS Studio Culture Task Force) that should be considered when debating the length of an architecture program. Early on, students have noted that many teachers demand they focus *all* their attention on studio, and that "non-architecture classes are secondary." It is impossible to have a well-rounded education when the studio demands all of a student's time.

#### **Cost**

In general, graduate tuition is higher than undergraduate tuition at a given school, and, of course, more years in school means more tuition. This is a valid rea-

son for maintaining the BArch for those students who cannot afford graduate education.

Also, a number of AIAS members in BArch programs have reported the loss of financial aid in their fifth year, because standard undergraduate programs only support four years of study. This presents a problem that needs to be addressed regardless of the NAAB decision. A possible solution to help reduce the cost of architecture education and ensure equal access is the development of a scholarship database geared specifically to architecture students.

While a five-year MArch may appear to alleviate many cost issues, students in these programs are finding that it actually requires quite a bit of summer study to complete the program in the allotted five years. Unfortunately, summer study takes place when most students are working to support themselves during the school year. On the other hand, a graduate degree program may offer more opportunity for aid in the form of scholarships, low-interest federal loans, and teaching-assistant positions.

#### **Reputation**

One argument for eliminating the BArch degree says that a MArch degree is more prestigious, especially in the public's perception. This might be a factor if architects used their degrees as a way to designate their profession, as "MD" and "JD" are used. The public is rarely informed about whether an architect has a BArch or a MArch.

Among students and within the profession itself, reputation of degree title is not much of a factor. One degree title does not appear to be more prestigious than

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the other, nor does one degree mean better jobs or more pay.

Reputation comes down not to degree title, but to one's ability to present ideas graphically and verbally. The former is what architecture students are trained to do. However, the ability of many architecture students to present ideas through written and oral communication is in question, and that goes directly to the issue of a liberal arts education.

### **Degree Confusion**

Degree confusion occurs primarily

among new architecture students, high school students and guidance counselors, and parents. Eliminating the BArch would not clear up the confusion, because numerous unaccredited degrees would still exist.

The path a student takes is somewhat dependent on the knowledge of his or her high school counselor or a mentor. This confusion alone is not a reason to eliminate the BArch. Instead, it should be motivation to inform high school counselors and students better and to encourage schools of architecture to make sure that visiting students understand their options. 