



Advocating, advancing, and evaluating quality education in Landscape Architecture

Board Members

August 21, 2023

Educators

Weimin Li, Ph.D., ASLA
California State Polytechnic University

Daniel H. Ortega, ASLA
University of Nevada Las Vegas

Allan Shearer, Ph.D., FASLA
University of Texas at Austin

Elisabeth Orr, ASLA, RLA
Associate Professor and Program Coordinator
Landscape Architecture Program
School of Design and Community Development
Davis College of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Design
West Virginia University
Morgantown, West Virginia 26506

Practitioners

Erin Degutis, ASLA, RLA
SWCA Environmental Consultants

Dale Jaeger, FASLA, PLA
WLA Studio

Juanita Shearer-Swink, FASLA, PLA
LAAB Chair

Public Representatives

Derrek Niec-Williams
Howard University

Patty Reece
The Volland Store

David N. Yellen
University of Miami School of Law

ASLA Representative

Kona Gray, FASLA
EDSA

CELA Representative

Roxi Thoren., ASLA
LAAB Chair-Elect
Pennsylvania State University

CLARB Representative

Christine Anderson, ASLA, PLA
LAAB Secretary
Mark Thomas

Director

Kristopher Pritchard

Dear Professor Orr:

The Landscape Architectural Accreditation Board (LAAB) at its July 10, 2023, meeting granted provisional accreditation for a period of two (2) years to the course of study leading to the professional MLA degree at West Virginia University (WVU). This status is subject to review of annual reports and maintenance of good standing.

Accreditation is awarded on a time-certain basis. The two-year period of accreditation ends June 30, 2025. Accordingly, the MLA program at WVU is next scheduled for a review during the spring of 2025.

The MLA program at WVU has four standards met with recommendation or not met and the cited deficiencies are such that continued overall program quality or conformation to standards is uncertain. For Standard 1: Program Mission and Goals, the program needs to develop a formal long-range plan. In addition, a recent revision of the College's vision has left the program in need of updates to their parallel materials (mission, educational goals, and procedures to assess and determine progress). Additionally, the program does not currently have a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Plan. For Standard 2: Program Autonomy, Governance and Administration there is a need for clarity in administrative roles around transparency in budget allocations such as assistantships, new program development, and program assessment. For Standard 3: Professional Curriculum, the tightly integrated nature of the MLA and BSLA programs directly leads to similar conditions. The lack of a clearly structured curricular assessment process remains a substantial concern. It threatens the programs' abilities to assure that the current quality continues, and that the curriculum adapts to future challenges and changes. A greater concern may be the small size of the MLA student body (currently 4) which makes it difficult to deliver graduate-student-only courses consistently in areas like research methods. For Standard 5: Faculty, the program needs more evaluation assessments than only student evaluations.

As such, there was a long and serious discussion by LAAB concerning the program. Deficiencies in these standards impact the program to a profound degree. The lack of a current mission and goals statement, a long-range/strategic plan, a DEI plan, and an immediate need for curriculum review threaten the overall program quality and its continued conformance to these and other standards uncertain.

Therefore, LAAB voted to grant WVU provisional accreditation for a period of two (2) years which will require an accreditation visit to take place during spring 2025, allowing WVU time to meet all minimum requirements for maintaining accreditation.

In making its decision, LAAB considered the program's self-evaluation report, the visiting team report, and the program's response to the report.

Enclosed is a list of recommendations affecting accreditation. This list was developed by LAAB from the materials reviewed during the meeting. As a reminder, provisional accreditation status is not deemed to be an adverse action and is not subject to be appealed, as outlined in the LAAB Accreditation Procedures.

On behalf of the visiting team, I would like to thank you for the hospitality extended to them by the faculty, staff, and students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Juanita Shearer-Swink". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Juanita Shearer-Swink, FASLA
LAAB Chair

Enclosure

cc: E. Gordon Gee, President

West Virginia University
MLA Program
LAAB Meeting
July 10, 2023

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations Affecting Accreditation

1. The program needs a revised mission and goals as well as procedures for assessment (Standard 1):
 - a. Update the program's mission to reflect its purpose and values, which relate to the institution's mission and address the core values.
 - b. The program should revise their educational goals to correlate with mission.
 - c. The program needs effective procedures to assess and determine progress in meeting its goals.
 - d. The program needs benchmarks for assessing and advancing the program in meeting its goals.
2. The program needs to develop a DEI plan to address (Standard 1):
 - a. The program needs to define its under-represented populations, explains why these groups are of interest and importance to the program, and describes the process used to define under-represented populations.
 - b. The program needs to describe its specific goals for increasing the representation and retention of under-represented population(s) among students, faculty, and staff; the actions and strategies it has identified to advance those goals; and its method for measuring success.
 - c. The program shall demonstrate its commitment to advance diversity and cultural competency through various practices.
3. The program needs to develop long range plans/strategic plan (Standard 1):
 - a. The program needs to develop a long-range/strategic plan.
 - b. The long-range plan needs to describe how the professional program's mission, goals, and objectives will be met, and the professional program documents the review and evaluation process.
 - c. The program needs to identify how it reviews and revises its long-range plan.
4. The landscape architecture program should develop a set of guidelines that clearly identify (Standard 2):
 - a. Budget allocations such as assistantship assignments,
 - b. Program governance for new program development,
 - c. Procedures for program assessment, and
 - d. Administrative structure, leadership, and roles (who to go to for issues/concerns, who is responsible for curriculum review, who is responsible for reports and assessment).
5. Upon completion of revisions of the mission and goals and procedures for assessment, the curriculum needs to be revised, including clear indicators, for demonstrating how the curriculum reflects its mission and goals and the Core Values (Standard 3).
6. Develop and implement clear evaluation methods and metrics, curriculum development, and then identify the parties responsible for review (Standard 3).
7. The new graduate program's evaluation needs to examine, document, and track the professional program's progress in advancing the mission and goals (including instruction, scholarship, and service), alignment with the Core Values, and promoting student competency with evidence that the assessment has been implemented (Standard 3).
8. Regularly assess and document the program's strengths and weaknesses related to this standard and identify opportunities for improvement in accordance with the evaluation procedures (Standard 3).

9. Assess and document the effectiveness of curricular development and refinement in addressing issues identified through the evaluation process (Standard 3).
10. Faculty should undergo more evaluation assessments than just student evaluations (Standard 5).
11. Complete a program-level DEI plan (Standard 5).