



Board Members

March 16, 2020

Educators

Jack Ahern, Ph.D., FASLA, FCELA  
Chair-Elect  
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University of Kentucky

Lynn Ewanow  
Kansas State University

Matthew J. Kirkwood, ASLA  
Professor and Program Director  
Department of Architecture and Landscape Architecture  
North Dakota State University  
Fargo, North Dakota 58108

Dear Professor Kirkwood:

Practitioners

Joy Lyndes, ASLA, Chair  
Coastal Sage

Ramon Murray, ASLA  
Murray Design Group, Inc.

Juanita Shearer-Swink, FASLA, PLA

The Landscape Architectural Accreditation Board (LAAB or the Board) at its February 7-8, 2020 meeting considered the initial accreditation of the course of study leading to the professional MLA degree at North Dakota State University (NDSU) and decided to defer action until the Winter 2021 LAAB meeting. Deferment is not an adverse action and therefore is not subject to appeal. The reason for the LAAB's decision is set forth below.

Public Representatives

Gilbert Holmes  
University of LaVerne College of Law

Tom Jacobs  
Mid-America Regional Council

Lucinda McDade, Ph.D.  
Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden

LAAB Accreditation Standards state a graduate first-professional program must be a master's program equivalent to at least three academic years' duration.<sup>1</sup> According to the materials reviewed by the LAAB, the MLA program is designed so that students initially enroll and complete a four-year Bachelor of Science (BS) degree in Environmental Design. Students are then eligible to apply to the NDSU Graduate School and, if accepted, complete one year at the graduate level to earn the MLA degree. The LAAB has determined that the design of the program does not meet LAAB's Standard because the one year of graduate level work is not equivalent to "at least three academic years' duration" as required by the Standard for MLA programs.<sup>2</sup>

ASLA Representative

Leonard Hopper, FASLA  
Weintraub Diaz, LLC

CELA Representative

Roxi Thoren., ASLA  
University of Oregon

CLARB Representative

Christine Anderson, ASLA, PLA  
Mark Thomas

The LAAB considered the program's Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and from the description on page 5, it appeared that the University intended to follow the transition plan used when the five-year Bachelor of Arts in Architecture (BARCH) transitioned to the Master of Arts in Architecture (MARCH) degree in 2012. As presented in the SER, the MLA program is distinguishable from the MARCH program in that students in the MARCH program may apply for graduate school as early as their third year. Students in the MLA program do not apply for graduate school until their fifth year. It is unclear whether the students receive more than one-year of graduate-level course work and therefore, the program has not demonstrated that it meets the LAAB three-year equivalency Standard. As recommended in LAAB's September 2018 letter to NDSU, the MLA program could have applied for a candidacy visit, as issues like this can often be worked through during the candidacy process. Since NDSU opted not to take that approach, and since this issue was not raised specifically in the visiting team report, the LAAB has determined that deferring a decision on the MLA is appropriate and will provide another opportunity for NDSU to revise the content and course sequencing of the MLA program to meet the equivalency standard.

Executive Director

Kristopher Pritchard

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<sup>1</sup> See LAAB Accreditation Standards, Minimum Requirements for Achieving Accreditation, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> LAAB recognizes that some programs may allow for advanced placement of up to one academic year of study, provided they have clearly articulated policies and criteria for advanced placement. However, LAAB Standards does not have any provision or criteria that would allow for a one year accredited MLA degree.

Therefore, in response to the deferral, LAAB requests NDSU to submit documentation demonstrating that adjustments have been made to the content and course sequencing of the MLA program so that it is a Master's Degree with sufficient graduate-level course equivalent to three academic years. By July 1, 2020 please provide an action plan outlining how NDSU is going to rectify the concerns addressed in this deferral letter. This plan should describe the changes that are being made to the courses and/or course sequencing, any changes to the timing of application and enrollment of students into the MLA program, proposed changes to the institution's website and public information reflecting the changes and a timeframe for when changes are to be adopted and/or implemented. If the plan is submitted by July 1, 2020, LAAB will review it at its summer board meeting and provide additional feedback. If the plan is approved by the LAAB, evidence of the plan's implementation will also be required and, at the discretion of the LAAB, another site visit with a full or partial team may also be required to verify the implementation of changes on the campus. In any event, LAAB expects to consider the application for initial accreditation again at its Winter, 2021 meeting.

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

Sincerely,



Joy Lyndes, ASLA  
LAAB Chair

Enclosure

cc: Dean L. Bresciani, President