

July 20, 2024

University of Idaho Response to the 2024 VTR

To Whom it May Concern:

We would like to thank the visiting team for their conscientious review of our program during our 2024 site visit. In response to the visit, we have systematically investigated the facts around conditions “not met.” In what follows, I provide more information collected through interviews with student leaders and discussions with faculty. I hope that this information will be a useful correction to several - claims presented in the report and will demonstrate our department’s responsiveness to the team’s concerns through actions we have taken since the visit to correct identified deficiencies.

“NOT MET’S”

Shared Values of the Discipline and Profession

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion: The program has in place a series of measures and physical resources to allow for an environment where students have equal opportunity for achievement; however, while on site students expressed that the program was made aware of an incident from one of the students.

RESPONSE: We are deeply sympathetic to problems in the realm of equity, diversity and inclusion and we are grateful that the team identified what appear to be inadequacies and/or flaws within our culture and our processes to uphold equity, diversity, and inclusion. Given the claim by some students that the program was made aware of an incident, I want to clarify that no incidents were brought to any level of college or department administration

After reading the report, I reached out to several student leaders and learned that a student did report an incident to AIAS National on September 13th 2023. The incident involved an AIAS Board member posting material insensitive to the LGBTQIA+ community on the board member’s personal social media page. It appears that AIAS National responded immediately, but then lapsed in their follow up. The student who reported the incident reached out again to AIAS National on December 9th 2023; he got a reply on December 18th 2023 stating that AIAS National intended to reach out to the University of Idaho AIAS chapter advisor, Philip Mead, to discuss how to best address the complaint/incident. Professor Mead was never contacted by AIAS, nor was any administrator in our department or college made aware of the situation by AIAS National.

In meeting with the student who lodged the complaint, I first communicated that I appreciated him supporting the department’s values of equity and inclusion, I thanked him for his efforts to promote ethical behavior amongst students, and I commended his willingness to step up in support of his classmates. I also impressed upon him the importance of bringing such important concerns to departmental leadership first as the department a.) will initiate any action required to rectify such situations, and b.) needs to be informed in order to provide support for students who have been wronged or are feeling uncomfortable in any way.

Now that this information has been made available, the department has acted swiftly and decisively to get AIAS back on track. In response to the incident, we have taken the following steps:

- I have appointed two new faculty advisors for AIAS, in hopes of creating more active dialogue between students and faculty (the former advisor, who is set to retire in 2025, has been relatively “hands off” in his role as AIAS advisor).
- I have met with the AIAS board several times (with and without the new faculty advisors) to make them aware of the complaint made to the National Board and to discuss how to make inclusion a priority for this chapter.
- I have provided funds for the new President and Vice-President of the chapter to attend AIAS Grassroots in hopes that being exposed to other student leaders across architecture programs will give them some perspective on how to better serve our students and promote positive values amongst them.
- I am currently writing a letter to support their application to host a West Quad Event at the University of Idaho Campus, in part, because our incoming leadership has expressed a desire to make this event aimed at collaboration and diversity.
- I contacted two of our former Chapter Presidents, one of whom was the AIAS National President in 2010-2011 and asked them if they would be willing to advise our chapter – they both agreed. I have thus connected AIAS chapter leadership with these two individuals and will follow up with all in the fall. I believe these two successful leaders will help our chapter run a more effective organization and help them fold in some aspects of the inclusive worldview exhibited by these two former leaders.
- I have asked AIAS leadership to begin the year by presenting/reviewing the AIAS Code of Ethics with the chapter.
- I have tasked leadership with writing new chapter by-laws during the fall semester.
- Finally, I asked AIAS leadership to provide a statement acknowledging the need to improve their workings and to point to ways in which they aim to improve – with a focus on inclusion — going forward.

The statement is as follows:

“NAAB,

Our chapter has received some worrying complaints about a culture that lacks respect, inclusivity, and diversity. This puts both the chapter and the university in a bad light; as this semester ends both the previous and current boards have collaborated to make sure that from now and into the future, we maintain a clear and transparent relationship with our student body, department level faculty, and the university that we represent. This year’s chapter board is setting multiple goals to focus on cultivating a fun and inviting environment that students will want to sink their time and energy into. Starting next year at least one meeting a month will focus on engaging people with the different ways they can voice their opinion to the board and national.

A cornerstone of AIAS as an organization is the code of ethics. In which every chapter must commit and exude transparency, effective communication, and advocating for a supportive studio environment. This year’s board is planning to revise and ratify our chapter by-laws by using the AIAS code of ethics as a backbone to support all future board generations.

As a board we also plan to start the semester strong with engaging events such as an incoming freshman social, new member information session, and a semester kickoff event. Throughout the year we’ll also be having design workshops, guest lectures, and leisure activities. With consistency a culture of respect, integrity, and passion will follow.

Words are only as good as the actions we take. We are committed to reshaping this chapter to output passionate and enthusiastic designers that the professional world will wholly benefit from.

*Thank you,
University of Idaho AIAS Chapter Board
idaaho@aias.org*

PC. 7 Learning and Teaching Culture

While on site, the team interviewed students who shared their experiences of student-to-student incidents which resulted in students lacking confidence that the program is ensuring a positive and respectful environment. The team observed that the program encourages sharing, engagement, and innovation among its faculty, administration, and staff. Although these topics are discussed by staff with the students to promote awareness and a safe environment, students reported to the team that student to student incidents and concerns related to a respectful and safe environment have not been addressed. Students voiced concern that the Learning and Teaching Culture was not encouraging respect. Students cited that the AIAS Chapter was not inclusive, and a large group of students formed their own student organization to address this.

RESPONSE: We take great pride in our teaching and learning culture to problems in the realm of equity, diversity and inclusion, and we are grateful that the team identified what appear to be inadequacies and/or flaws within our culture and our processes to uphold equity, diversity, and inclusion. As noted above, no concerns regarding inclusion have been brought to any level of college or department administration. Further, according to the University of Idaho "Students of Design," the notion that "Students of Design" "formed their own student organization" to address AIAS's lack on inclusivity is not correct. They provided the department the following statement:

"Students of Design is dedicated to bridge the gap between disciplines within the College of Art and Architecture at the University of Idaho and also to reach out to students that may not be in a program associated with CAA but are interested in Art and Design. This club was founded to become an inclusive space to connect and collaborate with a wide range of students with diverse backgrounds, affiliations, and interests. Any student at the University of Idaho, regardless of their educational discipline, interested in the world of design can become a member of the club with no membership fee or CAA affiliation required. We believe we are all designers in one way or another and we will strive to foster a nurturing environment for all future designers.

In response to the commentary of Students of Design forming as a club to address the lack of inclusivity of the AIAS chapter, it is simply untrue. The formation of the club happened two years ago during a homecoming parade and the desire to include design students with university wide events. Before the submission of the club was made, Litzzy Gomez and Asia Davis, president and vice president respectively, hosted a kickball game (Fall 2022 Oct 23) as students to bring together different design disciplines. We were shocked by the number of students that participated and realized we can collectively form a club where we can all collaborate and reflect the comradery during the kickball event.

We were not formed to oppose any student club, in fact we welcome and have friends and colleagues involved in specific disciplined clubs such as AIAS, Interiors UI, Landscape and VTD Club."

In my interviews with student leaders, evidence strongly suggests that there are no *additional* incidents and concerns related to a respectful and safe environment,” only the single “incident” outlined in our response to “Shared Values of the Discipline and Profession.”

5.1 Structure and Governance

5.1.2 Faculty and staff governance was met. For faculty in the college, influence over decision-making starts at the program and department level primarily through faculty meetings. Discussion is then filtered into the college processes via dialogue between department heads and the dean in ACT meetings. The college interfaces with university shared governance through university-level committees and faculty senate. Alternatively, there is not a clear pathway for students to voice concerns in a clearly outlined process where they have a representative voice and can expect an outcome to a raised issue by the program or college. In informal conversations, there were issues raised with access to needed educational resources (e.g. printers) and at a shared values level where student governance seemed in need. There is no clear oversight to the AIAS Chapter and due to inclusivity concerns, a separate student-led Design Community has formed outside of AIAS to offer an alternative.

RESPONSE:

We value student input, and we appreciate this observation from the NAAB team. In response to this concern, we have written a draft of our new department by-laws that includes provisions for representatives of student groups to be invited to regular faculty meetings (on appropriate topics) and for the inclusion of a student representative as part of all tenure-track search committees going forward. These bylaws will be ratified and adopted in fall 2024.

On behalf of the University of Idaho Architecture Department, I thank you for your support and your consideration of our responses to the deficiencies that have been identified by the visiting team.

Sincerely,



Randall F. Teal, PhD
Professor
Architecture Department Chair