Session 11

The Accreditation of Art Libraries: Benefit or Burden?

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Moderators:

Paul Glassman, Director of the Library, New York School of Interior Design
Clayton Kirking, Director, Adam & Sophie Gimbel Design Library, Parsons School of Design
Robert Craddick, Head Librarian, Pacific Northwest College of Art

Sponsors:

Art & Design School Library Division; Standards Committee; Architecture Section

Speakers:

Harold B. Nelson, Director, Long Beach Museum of Art, "Museum Accreditation as a Self-Study Tool"

Thomas Ferreira, Professor of Art Emeritus, California State University Long Beach; visiting team member, National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD), "NASAD Evaluations of Art and Design School Resources"

Janice Stevenor Dale, FIIDA, CID, JSDA Inc., "FIDER Standards for Information Resources in Interior Design"

Katherine Diamond, FAIA, Siegel Diamond Architecture, "NAAB Accreditation and Standards for Information Resources in Architecture"

Elizabeth Douthitt Byrne, Head Librarian, Environmental Design Library, Berkeley, "Guidelines for Visiting Teams: The Experience of an Architecture Librarian with NAAB Accreditation"

Harold Nelson described the American Association of Museums (AAM) accreditation process that includes a self-evaluation, an external review by an appointed committee, and a narrative report to a national accrediting board. Museum accreditation is not mandatory: out of 10,000 AAM museums, only 800 are accredited. But AAM has committed resources to this program: a knowledgeable staff guides institutions through the review and a handbook with guidelines is available to the committee. The guidelines respect differences while being mindful of professional standards. Mr. Nelson recommends that museums take charge of their accreditation review process, by choosing a committee chair, training the committee, and using the self-evaluation as an opportunity to educate museum staff and the community about their mission and goals and impact on the community. Benefits include institutional pride and confidence, a renewed focus on priorities, and ability to secure loans.

Thomas Ferreira discussed NASAD accreditation procedures. Baseline standards are outlined in the NASAD Handbook that also describes the onsite visit and includes operational norms. There is a library component to the standards that consists of a minimum number of volumes (10,000), periodical holdings (50 subscriptions), and visual resources (30,000 slides), as well as electronic access. Lacunae, issues of governance, and staffing are to be addressed in a report for the accreditation team. The visiting team is charged with verifying the institution's needs.

Janice Stevenor Dale reviewed the FIDER (Foundation for Interior Design Education Research) accreditation process that is focused on learning outcomes. It is a peer review process that includes a site visit by trained evaluators. FIDER was established in 1970 and accredits 200 schools. It concentrates on the "Three E's:" education, experience, and examination. She considers it critical that a school in pursuit of excellence is able to demonstrate its ability to deliver information resources. The main body of work judged is the student work. If library and information resources are not sufficient, it will show in student work.

Katherine Diamond described the NAAB (National Architectural Accrediting Board) accreditation process for schools offering B.Arch and M.Arch degrees. The accreditation team consists of representatives from the American Institute of Architects (AIA), the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, and the Association of Student Chapters of the AIA. Accreditation is supposed to protect consumers (graduates of accredited programs are able to get licensure after two years of practice instead of eight). A school is
accredited for a maximum of five years. NAAB publishes a handbook of standards to guide schools through the process. Standards are qualitative rather than quantitative. The focus is on students' achievements and ability to synthesize information. This is reflected in student work: both passing and failing work must be collected for the visiting team. The process allows for reflection: to celebrate strengths and discover deficiencies, to engage the faculty in strengthening the program. The process is also a good way for schools to show their university administration the value of their program. She recommends that librarians infiltrate the accreditation process.

Elizabeth Byrne described her experience with accreditation reviews. Most visiting teams spend 15 minutes or less in the library. Her suggestions for librarians include: a) take a more assertive role: find out what the team's schedule is ahead of time b) insist that the librarian write the information resources assessment and discuss any deficiency with your administration ahead of time c) worm your way into the accreditation team's welcoming reception and orientation d) insist that the librarian give the library tour e) compare your collections and services to those of peer institutions and libraries f) respond to any criticisms in previous reports Her suggestions for accrediting teams include: a) ask who wrote the information resources accreditation report: if not the librarian, why not? Read the report. Ask for a minimum of 30 minutes with the librarian responsible for the discipline b) talk with librarians at peer institutions (or at your own institution) and ask for guidance in evaluating the library's report c) read over the information resources guidelines in the NAAB Conditions and Procedures document d) look over the statistics and compare them to those in previous reports e) ask questions that elicit narrative responses (such as "describe the relationship between the library and the architecture program") f) consider providing visiting teams with training about libraries (can a librarian provide this training? We could even prepare a list of questions for teams to ask librarians) g) revise the annual NAAB statistics gathering form and include guidelines for library collection statistics

This session generated the following questions:

How would NAAB information standards apply to a satellite campus? It was suggested that we consult with the NAAB in this situation since information access is an issue.

What training is provided to NASAD evaluators? Teams can only address the evidence presented to them: the narrative self-study should prepare and prompt the team to ask intelligent questions.

Presenters suggested that ARLIS/NA members prepare a training primer for accrediting teams. Standards provided to accreditation boards by ARLIS/NA might be the only way to improve the process (especially in the case of AAM accreditation, which does not have a library component).

Submitted by Janine Henri, University of Texas at Austin