

PAB'S LATEST ACCREDITATION CHANGES:
NOT MINOR AT ALL!

This letter is an appeal to all who value and care about planning education and creating an inclusive environment that embraces diversity in planning programs and in practice settings at a time where the segmentation of urban space by class and race continues to be a long-standing problem now receiving heightened awareness across US society. If you care about the recruitment and retention of a diverse student and faculty body and whether the content of planning courses relates to issues of racial or social justice, then you want to read this article, and **respond between November 16 and December 15** (see below).

The Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) regulates accredited urban planning degree programs in the U.S.; it is supported by APA, AICP, and ACSP. PAB's "Accreditation Document" specifies standards for faculty and student composition and what content needs to be covered in required planning courses. Site visitors travel to each university every few years and check to make sure that programs are meeting these standards. After years of fighting for standards that better reflect social consciousness culminating in significant changes to the standards used in reviews from 2013, the document is currently under revision. The new version, under the guide of responding to "state and federal legal concerns" takes significant backwards steps with respect to faculty and student diversity and social justice and equity in the curriculum.

As a result we call for the proposed changes (see attachments) to the standards that relate to diversity in faculty and student recruitment and retention, and social justice and equity in the curriculum be removed at this time. The PAB needs to seek appropriate consultation on the supposed "legal concerns" from those with legal expertise in this area, as well as actively seek broader input from its own Diversity Task Force and the members of the organizations it regulates before revising the language.

Below is a summary of our analysis of the new document:

1. The changes **go far beyond** addressing the sole legally questionable statement that PAB has identified ('programs shall have diversity.....' representative of regional population).

2. Student and faculty diversity: Departments would no longer have to demonstrate outcomes for racial and gender diversity in recruitment and retention of their student body or their faculty. Instead, they should "promote diversity" but with their own definitions of what diversity means. But most of the schools responding to PAB's diversity survey either don't have diversity goals, or their goals don't include race and ethnicity. PAB says the profession sets the standards, but AICP values and principles on expanding choice and opportunity for disadvantaged groups and increasing opportunities for underrepresented groups in planning would be weakened with these proposed changes.

3. Curriculum: Currently, PAB requires that all core courses incorporate issues of "diversity and social justice." Proposed changes removes social justice from being in the core and replace it with

the words "values and ethics". While the changes include promoting practice settings that are diverse, diversity does not specifically mean in under-represented and under-served communities, but could simply mean those with different 'values or politics.' Curriculum is critical. These changes are lessening the emphasis on social justice and diversity in our curriculum (for no known legal reason!). The statements on learning how to deal with diversity in planning don't meet other professional standards for cultural competency (nor is that term used) and there is no statement equivalent to the AICP code on expanding choice and opportunity, a special responsibility for the disadvantaged, and reducing economic and social segregation.

4. Leaving definitions for diversity and diversity actions to the schools does not work. The PAB diversity task force found that half of schools either do not have any diversity goals, or have goals that are just about 'perspectives' and 'specializations' being diverse, not about race/ethnicity, gender or other under-represented identities. Many of our schools are only doing this work because PAB is holding them accountable! We cannot leave goals and strategies up to schools alone.

Overall, the proposed changes to diversity standards for faculty and students and curriculum changes are out of step with the values and ethics of ACSP, APA and AICP and what society requires of emerging planning professionals. Further, they are out of step with current trends in the planning academy, given the POCIG Climate survey, published in JPER, which found there are too many planning schools where faculty of color report feeling marginalized and that their colleagues or institutions are unreceptive and antagonistic towards their scholarship, teaching, and service, the continued low numbers of faculty of color as documented in the ACSP Committee on Diversity report on diversity among planning faculty and students for accredited PAB programs, 2008-13, and the continued problem of loss of scholars of color in the planning academy (due to programs not hiring graduates or faculty being let go in the process of mid-career review or at tenure promotion), and the need for more diversity among planning practitioners and graduates with cultural competence, committed to upholding the ethics and responsibility they have to the public.

Please Note: We have no objection to proposed changes to standards for size of student body or for consolidation of standards 1, 6 and 7. In fact, POCIG has advocated for PAB to drop the minimum program size requirement altogether, as doing so would be a positive change for the programs that serve the most diverse student populations: programs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and at urban-serving universities.

Responses by a few faculty members may not lead to the necessary action (stopping these proposed revisions, engaging in appropriate and proactive broader consultation). We need members of the academy, the various divisions within APA and AICP, allied organizations and the practitioner community to respond as well! Please go to the web page that contains the document and write the PAB board about your opinion. See a fuller "call for responses," in a separate block below. Direct comments to pab@planning.org

Signed,

The Executive Board of the Planners of Color Interest Group (POCIG),
Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning
<http://www.acsp.org/aboutpocig>

“The mission of the Planners of Color Interest Group (POCIG) is to advance the interest and concerns of people and communities of color within the planning academy and the profession.”

Attachments:

PAB Proposed Revisions

POCIG Detailed Analysis of Proposed Revisions

HOW TO RESPOND TO PROPOSED

ACCREDITATION CHANGES

The Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) is seeking comments on a proposed amendment to the Standards for Program Review. PAB significantly changed its standards in 2012 and began using them for accreditation reviews beginning fall 2013. We have received feedback from 3 beta programs, 33 program administrators and site visitors who have gone through reviews using new standards, and conducted 2 in-person comment sessions at APA and ACSP conferences.

PAB has presented the proposed amendment to the boards of ACSP, AICP and APA at their fall, 2015 meetings. In addition we held a well-attended feedback session at the 2015 ACSP conference in Houston where we received a variety of comments on the proposed amendment.

PAB seeks to focus on program-driven outcomes and continuous improvement in accordance with accreditation practice as defined by the Commission on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the organization that recognizes PAB as a specialized accreditor.

A link to the track-change draft of the proposed revised standards may be found on a sidebar on the PAB homepage: <http://www.planningaccreditationboard.org/>

Material changes proposed in the standards include:

- Number of Standards reduced from 7 to 5; criteria reduced from 35 to 27; outcomes stressed and inputs reduced;
- New language addressing distance learning included;
- New Standard 1 (Strategic Planning and Progress):
 - Replaces Standards 1, 6 and 7: Mission and Strategic Plan; Program Assessment; and Progress
 - Differentiates more specifically between programmatic and student learning outcomes;
- Student size requirement removed; emphasis on preparing students to contribute to a diverse society;
- Diversity components are now included in five of the seven Standards: Strategic Plan, Students, Faculty, Curriculum, Student Services/Advising; in addition, the standards have been modified to reflect state and federal legal concerns.

The formal process for amending the standards includes two separate periods of public notice and comment. This process enables PAB to consider comments received and obtain feedback on any revisions. The first comment period will take place this fall, when PAB will be sending notice of the proposed amendment to a wide variety of constituent groups for comment.

PAB will review all comments received, and prepare a revised draft of the amendment for a second round of comments, currently scheduled to follow presentations to the governing bodies of ACSP, APA and AICP in April.

In accordance with PAB's stated policy for amending accreditation standards, the following constituents will be informed directly of the amendment and asked to comment: program directors and chief executive officers of all accredited and non-accredited planning programs, specialized accreditors recognized by CHEA. In addition, notice will be placed on the PAB and ACSP websites in addition to APA's *Interact* e-newsletter.

To provide additional time for review, the first formal 30-day comment period will begin on November 16 and run to December 15. Please send your comments as per the instructions on the PAB website.

Barry

Barry Nocks, PhD, FAICP

Professor Emeritus, Graduate Program in City & Regional Planning
Chair, Planning Accreditation Board

2-213 Lee Hall

Department of Planning, Development & Preservation

College of Architecture, Arts & Humanities

Clemson University

Clemson, SC 29634-0511

Office: [864-656-4094](tel:864-656-4094)

Fax: [864-656-0204](tel:864-656-0204)

nocks2@clemson.edu