
Guidelines for the Use of Digital Content in Accreditation Visits

**The National Architectural
Accrediting Board®**



Revised, August 2017

First ed., May 2017

Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Why Digital?	2
3. File Type, Size, and Legibility	3
4. Organizing Digital Content	4
A. Digital Folder Structure for Accreditation Visits	
B. Digital PDF-Only Structure for Accreditation Visits	
5. Organizing Course Notebooks and Flagging Content	7
6. Team Room Requirements	11
7. Acknowledgments	12

Introduction

Welcome to the NAAB's "Guidelines for the Use of Digital Content in Accreditation Visits." In response to increased interest from programs that want to present digital content in visits, the NAAB appointed a task force to examine how accreditation agencies in other professions have worked to accommodate digital evidence as well as how the use of digital media might increase the value and effectiveness of the NAAB accreditation process. These guidelines represent the culmination of the task force's work.

Although the inclusion of digital content is optional, the NAAB now requires programs that have decided to pursue digital content in their visits to follow these guidelines at a minimum level. Programs with sufficient resources, technological support, and ambition are welcome to go above and beyond these guidelines, but they should communicate their intent to do so with the team chair. This will ensure that visiting teams receive adequate training and have a good understanding of how the digital content will be organized and presented.

Programs that want to pursue the use of digital content in a visit should contact the NAAB in the early stages of visit planning, so the NAAB can prepare an appropriate team and the team chair can begin a conversation with the program administrator about expectations.

We hope you find these guidelines useful and thank you for helping to move the accreditation process forward! The NAAB welcomes your feedback on the guidelines (send to info@naab.org).

Why Digital?

When it established the Digital Accreditation Advisory Task Force, the NAAB sought to explore ways in which the use of digital content could create opportunities for programs to save time and money (and some trees in the process!) and allow teams to review student work before the on-site visit. Preparation of a traditional team room generates a mountain of paper, most of which is printed from a digital source. The goals of moving the accreditation process to digital content are to avoid costly printing, time spent “designing” a team room, and, eventually, time spent organizing files. The transition to a team room of digital content will no doubt present challenges. The hope is that these guidelines will help programs avoid confusion in preparing and organizing digital content.

In the process of creating these guidelines, the task force interviewed several program administrators and team chairs who already have experience with the use of digital content in visits. These interviews not only helped the task force draft the guidelines but also brought to light a potential conundrum for a profession dedicated to good design: bare walls in a team room. Programs may, of course, print student work to hang on the walls, but if files are properly prepared, a fully digital team room will be perfectly acceptable to the NAAB, and our teams will be instructed as such. Physical models may be photographed or displayed in the team room. Besides saving time by not “designing” a team room, the NAAB hopes that a digital visit will also require a much smaller room, lessening the burden on the program to dedicate valuable teaching space for a visit.

File Type, Size, and Legibility

File type

Files must be accessible on multiple operating systems and should not be in an editable form. All static documents, including text and images, must be presented as PDFs. Videos must be a file type that can be viewed on any machine and operating system.

File size

Because digital media types and their subsequent size requirements change rapidly, a maximum file size is not required. Instead, programs must consider this simple concept: **speed of access is just as important as image quality**. Files and their embedded images should not be slow to load, and downsizing files and images should not be at the detriment of legibility.

Best practices for file size

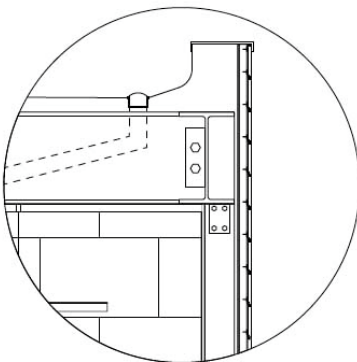
- Photoshop files should be flattened.
- Vector line files should not be rasterized for legibility sake.

Legibility

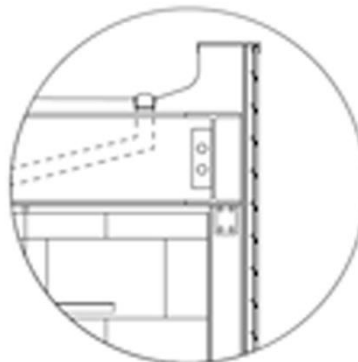
Image legibility and file size go hand in hand. As evidence for accreditation, it is imperative that all images, and enlarged detail images, are legible. Original file format plays a part in this. If an original file is formatted for 8 ½" x 11" paper, a reviewer won't need to zoom in and out as frequently as an original file formatted for 34" x 44". Viewing hardware is also important, as the same file on a small laptop screen will need to be zoomed in and out more often than if it is viewed on two large desktop monitors.

Best practices for legibility

- Can you see the parts and pieces of an image when its blown up on the screen?
- Are large drawings legible if zoomed to see the individual parts?



Vertigo wood plastic composite cladding
section assembly details
1/2" = 1'



Vertigo wood plastic composite cladding
section assembly details
1/2" = 1'

Figure 1. Examples of legible and illegible JPEG details

Organizing Digital Content

These guidelines include two options for organizing student evidence digitally—the “folder structure” and the “PDF-only structure.” Programs can choose either approach but should discuss their approach with the team chair.

A. Digital Folder Structure for Accreditation Visits

1. A “base folder” titled “SPC” will contain all evidence in support of the Student Performance Criteria (figure 2).
2. The SPC Matrix will be provided as a PDF in the base folder.
3. The Architecture Program Report (APR) will be provided as a PDF in the base folder as well.
4. The base folder will contain one folder for each SPC.
5. Individual SPC folders will have three folders inside, labeled as follows:
 - a. First_Course Number_Course Title
 - b. Second_Course Number_Course Title
 - c. Third_Course Number_Course Title
 - The “First” folder will contain course material with the best evidence to demonstrate the SPC; “Second” and “Third” course evidence is provided as needed.
 - If the team does not find evidence in three supported courses, the team chair will ask for additional work.
6. Label supporting files in each “Course Number_Course Title” folder as follows:
 - a. Semester_High Pass_# (e.g., Spring 2016_High Pass_1)
 - b. Semester_Minimum Pass_# (e.g., Fall 2017_Minimum Pass_3)
 - c. If multiple PDFs are required for individual high- or minimum-pass work, folders shall be provided with the high-pass/minimum-pass designation, with PDFs located in those folders.
7. Loose PDFs in the folders should be labeled “Semester_High Pass_1_Identifying keyword” (e.g., Spring 2016_High Pass_1_structural study).

The program administrator and the team chair should mutually agree on how the content for review will be provided to the visiting team. Several options are available:

- Dropbox, Google Drive, or other third-party equivalent with a downloadable desktop app, so that files are accessible through Apple Finder or Windows Explorer
- Password-protected school-administered server (i.e., accessible via local area network [LAN] connection or privately hosted online and accessible through a web browser)
- External hard drives, formatted for all operating systems

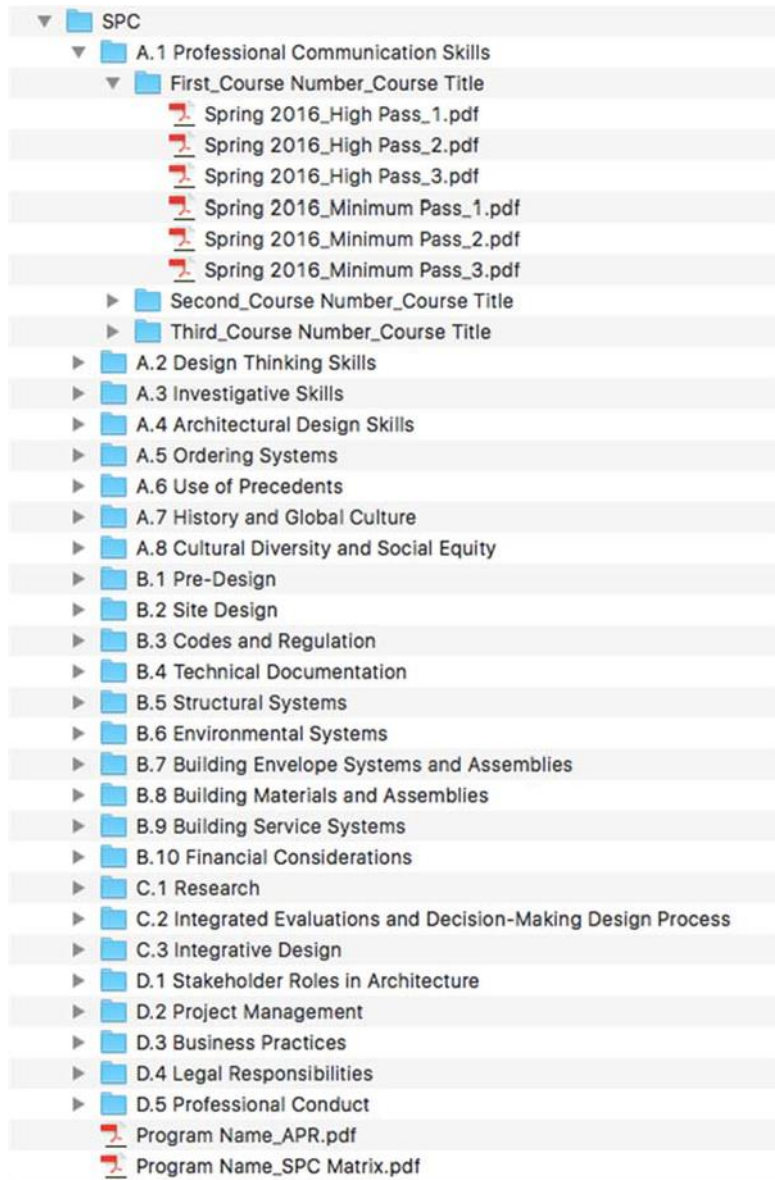


Figure 2. Digital folder structure for an accreditation visit

B. Digital PDF-Only Structure for Accreditation Visits

1. A base folder titled “SPC Evidence” will contain all evidence in support of the Student Performance Criteria (figure 2).
2. The SPC Matrix will be provided as a PDF in the base folder.
3. The Architecture Program Report (APR) will be provided as a PDF in the base folder as well.
4. A folder titled “Courses” will contain PDFs of every course’s high-pass and minimum-pass evidence. Correct nomenclature is essential to the team’s ability to successfully navigate this structure.
5. Each PDF should have the following naming convention:
 - a. High-pass work: “**Course Number_Course Title_Semester_HP#_SPC-SPC-SPC, etc**”
 - b. Minimum-pass work: “**Course Number_Course Title_Semester_MP#_SPC-SPC-SPC, etc**”
 - c. Every SPC that a course demonstrates must be part of the PDF name so the team can accurately search by SPC.
 - d. If multiple PDFs are required for individual high- or minimum-pass work, a folder shall be provided with the same high-pass/minimum-pass designation, with PDFs located in those folders.
 - e. Loose PDFs in the folders should be labeled by identifying keywords, or as “**identifying keyword-SPC-SPC-etc.**” if different files contain different SPC evidence.

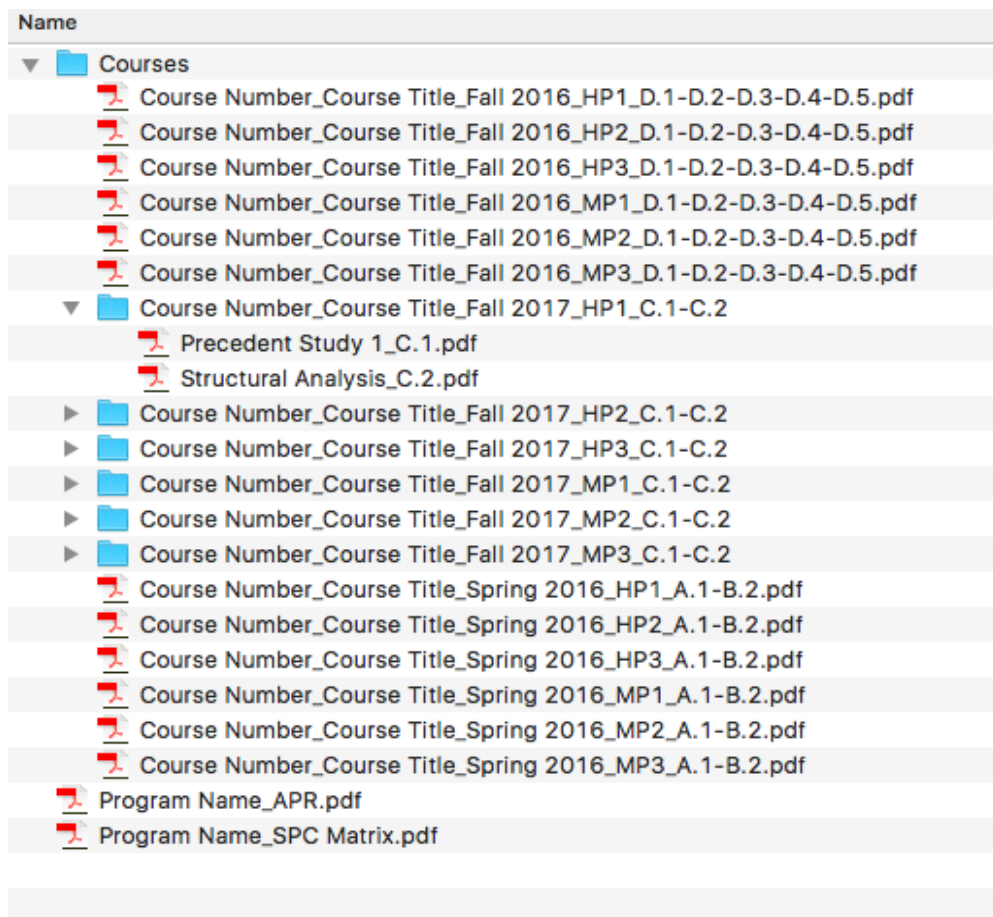


Figure 3. Digital PDF-only structure for accreditation visits

Organizing Course Notebooks and Flagging Content

Course notebooks containing student papers, exams, and other assignments can be created digitally using Adobe Acrobat Pro or an equivalent software. In addition, specific evidence of how this student work meets an SPC can be flagged so that a visiting team member can quickly and efficiently identify the evidence and assess its contribution to meeting the SPC.

How to Assemble a PDF Notebook with Flags to Specific Content (using Adobe Acrobat DC)

1. Assemble all documents into a single PDF binder that has the course number and name as the file's nomenclature. Binders can be created using the "Combine File" tool in Adobe Acrobat Pro. Avoid creating a "PDF Portfolio."

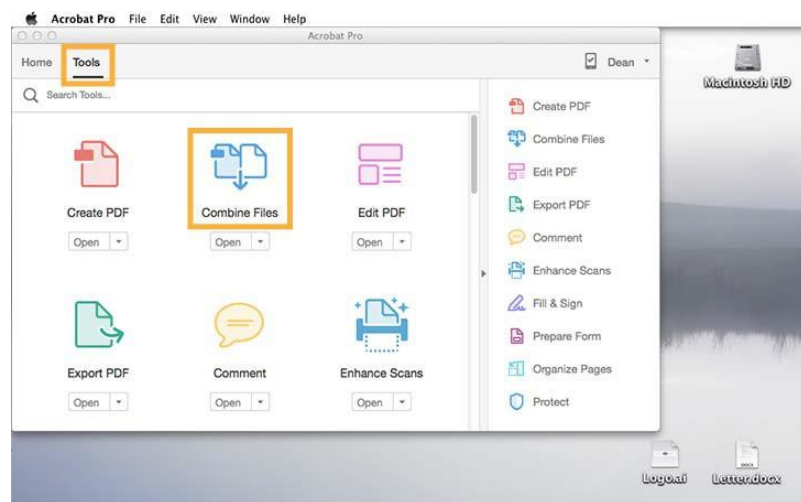


Figure 4. Combine tool, Adobe Acrobat DC

2. The binder should be bookmarked into sections with the following titles (figure 4):
 - a. Syllabus (if multiple semester syllabi are presented, they should be listed sequentially with the most recent first)
 - b. Student handouts provided by the Instructor
 - c. Student work products (exams, quizzes, student papers, student projects, student presentations, etc.)
 - d. Appendix
3. For each student work product used to present evidence of meeting an SPC, the faculty member preparing the binder should
 - a. Highlight the area of text or question and answer that demonstrates accomplishment of the SPC. The highlighting pen is located in Adobe Acrobat's Comment tool.
 - b. Once the selection is highlighted, the author should place a comment using the Comment bubble. Write the SPC # in the comment dialog box, followed by a colon and the SPC title and ending with a parenthetical notation for high pass (HP) or minimum pass (MP). For example: **"SPC A1: Professional Communication Skills (MP)."** (figure 5)
 - c. This should be done for each specific content area that relates to an SPC. Since some courses meet more than one SPC and an individual's exam or work product might provide evidence of ability or understanding for more than one SPC, it will be necessary to highlight the appropriate text and assign a Comment balloon for every content area within one document in the binder.

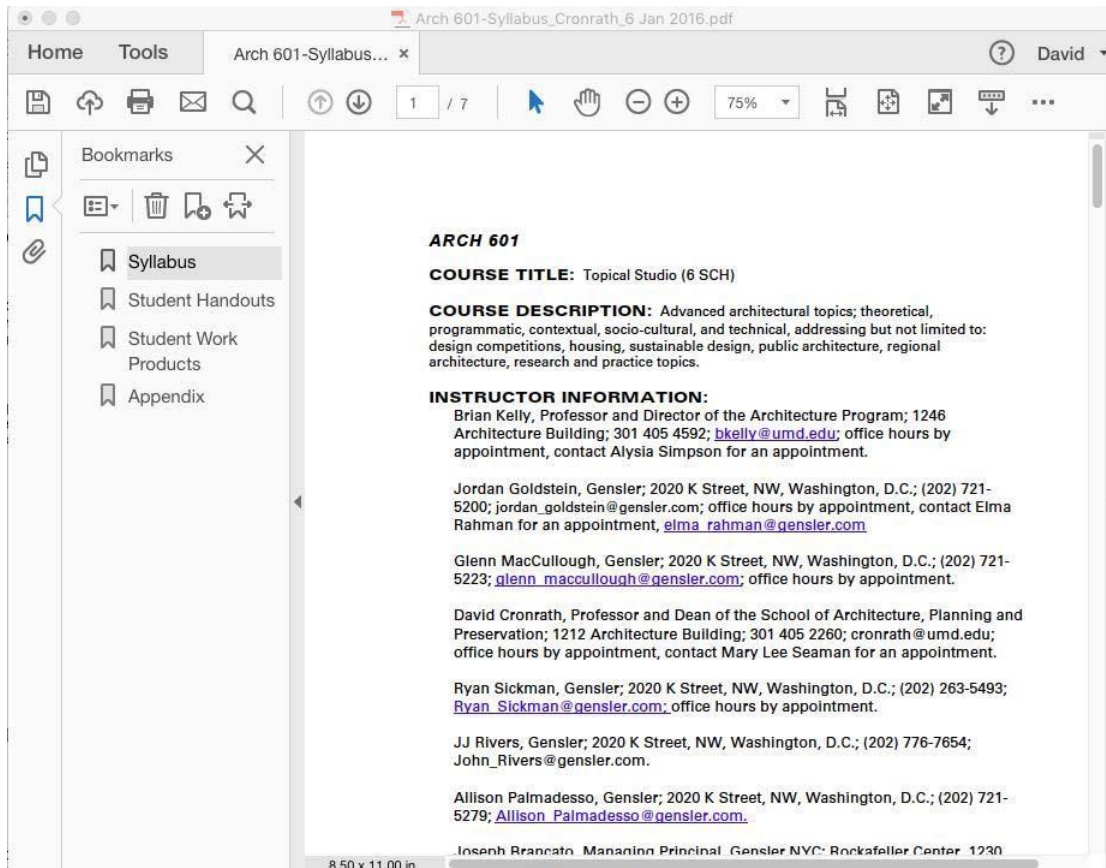


Figure 5. Bookmarks for a binder

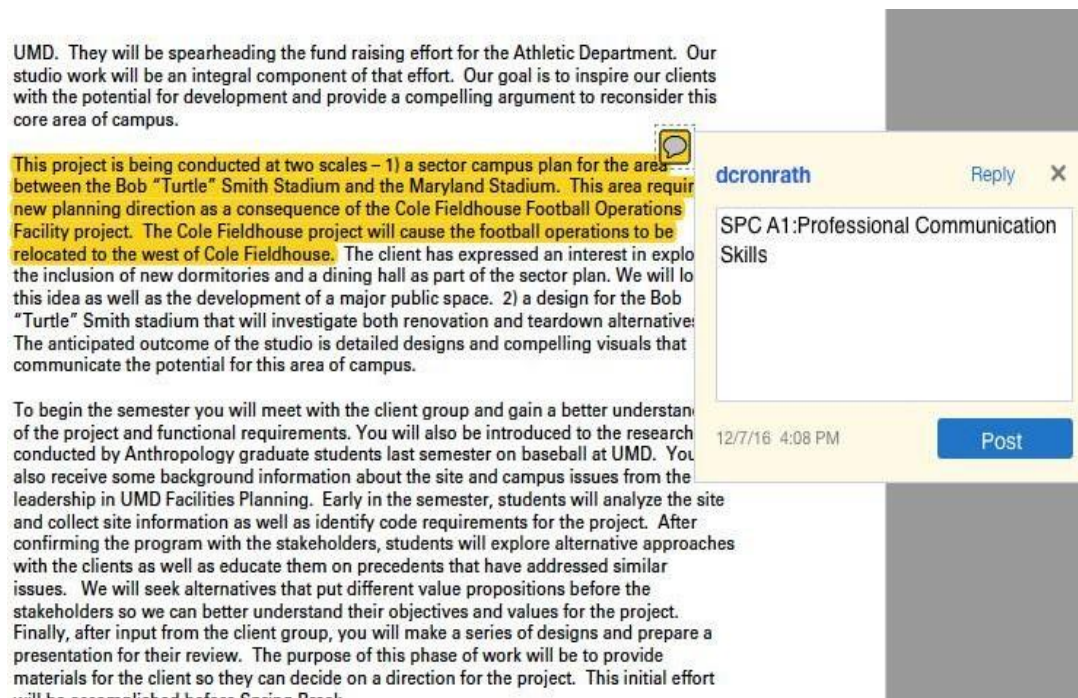


Figure 6. Highlighting SPC in student work product submission

4. To find evidence of a marked SPC as described above, all the reader need do is open the “Edit” drop-down window and select “Advanced Search” (figure 6). In the dialog box that is revealed, check “Bookmarks” and “Comments.” The reader can then type in the desired SPC and a list of comments will appear where that SPC has been tagged (figure 7).

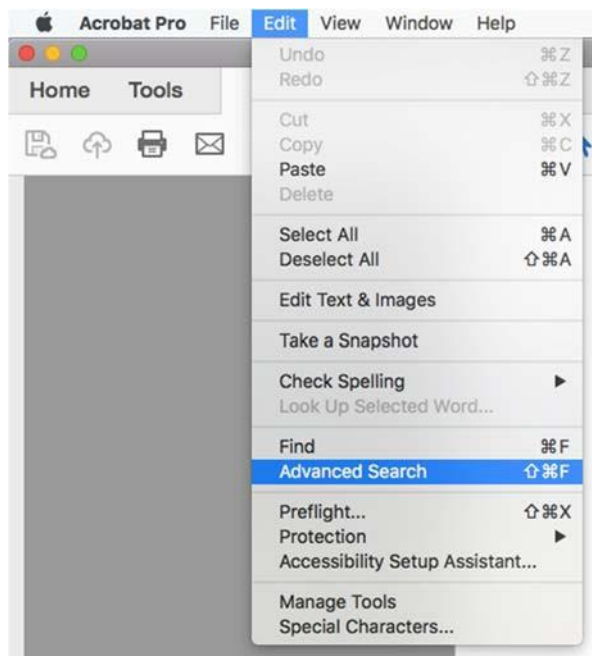


Figure 7. Advanced search

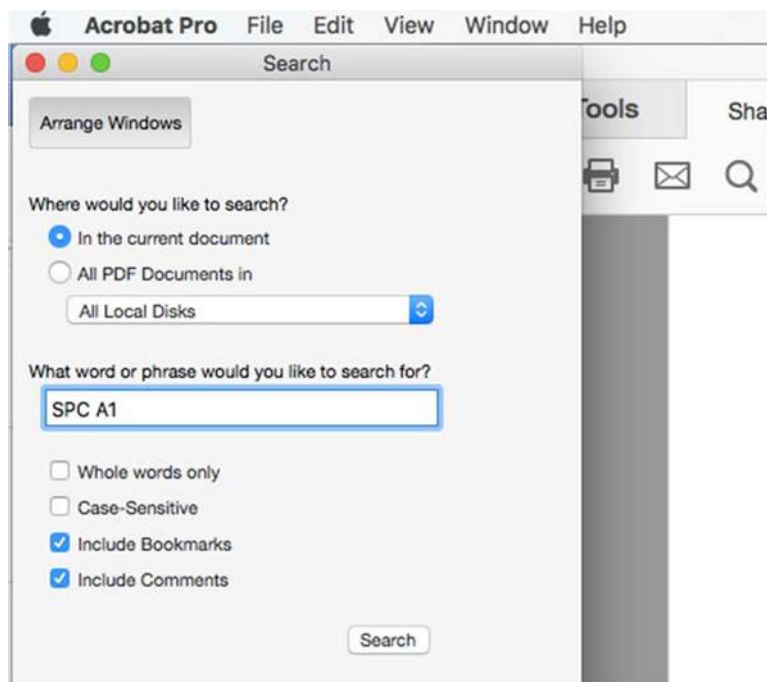


Figure 8. Search window

1. PowerPoint evidence should be converted to a PDF so it can be incorporated into the binder under the appropriate bookmark and in the correct sequence. After the conversion, follow the same process as described above for flagging content, using the Comment tool.
2. To indicate evidence of an SPC from student work in a studio course, follow the process described above of identifying an SPC through a Comment bubble. Place the bubble on the drawing to show the reviewer where to look for evidence (figure 8).



Figure 9. Notation on student design drawing from PDF presentation.

Team Room Requirements

Connectivity and access

Internet connectivity—through a secure network—is required for all team member computers. The program should provide a printout of all logins and passwords needed for the team.

Hardware

Each team member will need a laptop or desktop station. The team chair and program administrator should discuss whether team members will use their own computers for the visit or whether the program will provide them. It is not necessary for the program to purchase computers specifically for the NAAB visit.

The team chair should be aware of team members' fluency in iOS and Windows operating systems or Mac and PC machines. In addition, to ensure that PDFs load relatively quickly and efficiently, an evaluation of the computer's capability (RAM and graphics card) is recommended.

All hardware provided by the program should be logged out of all accounts and have a clean desktop, downloads folder, search history, and browser history. A new user login is recommended for each station.

A second monitor shall be provided for each team member, along with sufficient ports if providing computers and necessary cords.

- Suggested ports: USB (two), HDMI, VGA, etc.
- Suggested cords: standard Apple dongles, HDMI, VGA, Ethernet, etc.

A color printer should be provided for team use, with 11x17 capability preferred but not required. A single projector with a projection surface or large screen display for group viewing with all team members is recommended in addition to personal computer stations and monitors.

Software

The following programs are required:

- Adobe Acrobat Pro, or other equivalent software
- Microsoft Office Suite, Google Docs, or other equivalent software

Previsit digital checklist for team chairs

- Identify what hardware the school can provide for the team room, including computers, laptops, and monitors without undue burden to the program.
- Confirm team members' basic computer proficiency.
- Identify which team members can bring adequate personal computers for use.
- Confirm team member access to software used in review and reporting.
- Identify how the program will provide digital access to evidence and course work.

Acknowledgments

Members of the Digital Accreditation Advisory Task Force

David Golden, Assoc. AIA, chair

David Cronrath, AIA

Sarah Killingsworth, Assoc. AIA

Wendy Ornelas, FAIA

Steve Parker, FAIA

Amy Perenchio, AIA

Janet Rumbarger, staff liaison