

Architecture Degree Overview

Any architecture degree will help prepare students for a future career in the wide world of architecture, but there are many other fields it can pave the way for you to enter, too!

Architectural studies impart several multidisciplinary skills and competencies related to a number of fields, including art and design, civil engineering, teaching, and even government work. Thus, students will be exposed to a range of topics with applications that extend beyond the field of architecture alone. In other words, keep an open mind because this degree type can open doors to plenty of job opportunities!

Types of Architecture Classes

The best architecture schools follow their own traditions, which is why every architecture program features its own unique curriculum. However, there are certain basic classes that most share in common. Below are a few of the standard classes for undergraduate and graduate students.

Undergraduate level

- Architectural design history
- Architecture studio
- Building design and technology
- Computer-aided design and drafting (CADD)
- Construction methods
- Environmental issues
- Graphic design
- Mathematics
- Physical sciences
- Professional practices
- Structural systems
- Visual representation

Note, bachelor's students may also complete internships while still in school.

Graduate level

- Architectural engineering
- Design studio experience
- Design theory

Graduate programs may include an internship while in school. They often specialize in a particular area, such as urban architecture, architectural technology, real estate development, sustainable architecture, or historic preservation. Core and elective classes will depend on the area of specialization.

Architecture Degree Specializations

As mentioned, architecture students can often select areas of specialization (though not every program features every specialization option). When trying to decide which school to apply to, it's a good idea to know which (if any) specialization you want, so you can see if they offer it or not.

Some popular architecture specializations include:

- Architectural design
- Architectural engineering
- Architectural technology
- Commercial
- Green building design
- Industrial architecture
- Interior architecture
- Landscape architecture
- Residential
- Urban design

Skills Learned in an Architecture Major

The skills you pick up from completing an architecture degree will depend on the program, area of specialization, and level (bachelor's, master's, etc.). Common skills learned include:

- Aesthetic theory
- Analog and digital drawing and modeling
- Architectural design skills and application
- Architectural detailing
- Contract administration
- Familiarity with building and construction processes and methods
- Familiarity with construction materials and durability
- How to tackle design projects
- How to use CADD, Revit, and building information modeling programs
- How to use software such as Photoshop and InDesign
- Knowledge of project financial considerations
- Knowledge of structures, plumbing, mechanical systems, and electrical systems
- Legal and ethical topics
- Research methods

Soft skills, such as:

- Analytical thinking
- Communication skills
- Customer service
- Deductive reasoning

- Presentation
- Problem-solving

Employers need job applicants with the necessary hard and soft skills to qualify them for positions. Graduate programs also consider an applicant's skills to ensure they are well-prepared to succeed in a rigorous master's or PhD program.

How Long Does it Take to Get an Architecture Degree?

How long it takes to finish an architecture degree depends on many variables. Among them are:

- Which degree type are you going for?
- How much (if any) college you've already completed?
- Whether or not you'll attend full- or part-time?

Other factors that can impact the length of time it takes include whether you sign up for an online or accelerated program. Architecture majors are conducive to both in-person and online learning, so if your schedule doesn't allow for full on-campus attendance, a flexible online or hybrid program could be better. An online program can save time in some cases, and at a minimum it'll save you from a commute back and forth!

Next Steps To Getting An Architecture Degree

For High School Students:

If you're in high school, you can set yourself up for success as an architecture major in college by doing the following...

Step 1: Take Architecture Prep Classes

If you have enough time left in high school, you can lay the groundwork for a college major in architecture by loading up on science, physics, and [math](#). In particular, math classes like geometry, algebra, and calculus are helpful.

You'll also want to take art (drawing, painting), computer-aided design and drafting (if available), and business. Architects need strong soft skills, too, so sign up for extracurricular activities that help you with communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and project management.

Step 2: Join an Art Club

Architecture is a blend of art, science, [engineering](#), and math—but arguably the most fun of those subjects is art! Art clubs can provide an outlet to explore your creativity while honing your practical skills. They can keep you motivated as you learn by doing. In addition, garnering feedback and learning to accept constructive criticism will be invaluable later on.

Step 3: Teach Yourself

All too often, students lack access at school to coursework needed to be successful in a college environment. Luckily there's an enormous amount of free and relatively inexpensive online self-study material available for you to get ahead in your education.

For High School Graduates:

Step 1: Apply to College Programs

It's important for high school juniors and seniors to research and make a list of the colleges they're interested in and to start applying before the application deadlines. Some students begin the research process prior to their senior year, so they're ready to apply during senior fall term.

Of course, not everyone wants to go straight to college after high school. Some people want to travel a bit first or work for a while before going back to school. Still, it's wise to plan ahead and follow a timeline that fits your work and educational goals. It is also a good idea to decide as soon as possible what area you want to specialize in, so you can tailor your degree electives accordingly.

Step 2: Earn Your College Degree

Once you've finished high school or earned a GED, and you've been accepted into an architecture college program, you're on your way to getting that bachelor's degree!

[National Architectural Accrediting Board](#)-accredited Bachelor of Architecture (B.Arch) degrees take about 5 years, but graduates can then apply to an internship and start working towards professional licensure. On the other hand, students who want to work in other careers or who plan on doing a master's might do a 4-year bachelor of science (BS.Arch) or a 4-year bachelor of arts (BA.Arch) instead of the B.Arch.

Step 3: Internship (if working towards an architect professional license)

Many architecture programs allow students to do an internship as part of their educational experience. If you're doing a B.Arch, you're going to have to do a ~3-year internship after you graduate anyway, if you plan to get licensed. So, why not try to knock some of that out while still in school?

For Bachelor's Degree Holders:

Your options after finishing your bachelor's depend on which type of bachelor's you did (B.Arch or BS.Arch/BA.Arch), and whether or not you are pursuing a career as a licensed architect.

Step 1: Internship (if working towards an architect professional license)

Step 2: Take the Architect Registration Examination

After finishing college and an internship, it's time to take the [Architect Registration Examination](#) (ARE). ARE 5.0 consists of six "divisions":

1. Practice Management
2. Project Management
3. Programming & Analysis
4. Project Planning & Design
5. Project Development & Documentation
6. Construction & Evaluation

Step 3: Get Licensed

All states require would-be professional architects to obtain a state license prior to working (other than as an intern). In addition to having a degree from a [National Architectural Accrediting Board](#)-accredited B.Arch (or a Master of Architecture, if you did a BS or BA degree versus a B.Arch), completing a postgraduate internship, and passing the ARE, you'll need to pass a thorough background check to get a state license.

Certain convictions can bar an applicant from getting licensed, but again, every state is different. Some take a "discretionary approach" and weigh all the factors surrounding the conviction. Others don't, and a particular conviction can disqualify you regardless of the circumstances.

The [National Council of Architectural Registration Boards](#) features details on individual state requirements.

Step 4 (Optional): Complete a Certification

There are a large number of optional certifications from non-academic organizations like [Green Advantage](#) or the [National Association of Home Builders](#) that can help bolster your credentials. Check out [O*Net Online](#) for a full listing. Requirements and fees vary.

Step 5 (Optional): Complete a College Certificate

Want to beef up your academic credentials in an area of specialization? Consider doing a certificate program at a college! A college certificate is not the same as a third-party certification. Certifications are done by studying material and then passing an exam. College certificates are basically miniature degrees that require ~12-18 credits' worth of classes. This is a great way to learn, expand upon, or refresh skills without doing an entire second degree.

Step 6 (Optional): Complete a Graduate Degree

There are many circumstances in which you might want to go for a master's or PhD degree.

Students who completed a BS.Arch or BA.Arch instead of a 5-year B.Arch degree will likely need to do a Master of Architecture if they want to qualify for a professional license to work.

And no matter what your undergrad degree type, a graduate degree from one of the best architecture schools can significantly boost your professional credentials and help qualify you for higher levels of responsibility and pay!

Admissions Requirements for Architecture Degree Programs

Admissions requirements vary depending on whether you're applying to a bachelor's or graduate program, but let's do a quick review of the most common ones!

- **Transcripts** - from high school, plus any colleges/universities attended
- **Minimum GPA** - differs from school to school, and just meeting the minimum doesn't mean you'll get in if it is a competitive year with lots of applicants
- **Minimum grades in specific classes** - regardless of your overall GPA, a program may require you to have a minimum grade in certain foundational courses
- **Class rank** - some schools want to see how well you fared against your peers
- **Personal statement** - the school will list what they want to see on this
- **Statement of purpose** - many programs, especially at the graduate level, request a statement of purpose explaining in your own words why you want to study architecture at their school. An essay prompt may or may not be provided.
- **Letters of recommendation** - usually from people familiar with your work or academic background related to architecture or to study habits in general. Can be from previous teachers, supervisors, school advisors, or coworkers
- **Resume (or CV)** - graduate programs often want to see a resume (or CV) outlining your work history and accomplishments
- **GRE** - Many graduate programs require a GRE score, but this can be waived in some cases
- **Bachelor's degree** - obviously, grad students need to have first completed a bachelor's, preferably in architecture! Applicants who don't have the necessary undergrad prerequisite credits will need to sign up for those classes but may be granted conditional acceptance until those are done

Bachelor's Degree in Architecture

All bachelor's programs consist of general ed classes, core major classes, and electives you'll have to complete. Some schools offer a minor or area of specialization or emphasis, though these won't necessarily increase the amount of time it takes to graduate.

Undergraduate architecture students may have the option to do either a 5-year Bachelor of Architecture (B.Arch), a 4-year bachelor of science (BS.Arch), or a 4-year bachelor of arts (BA.Arch). There are also graduate programs such as the M.Arch, M.Arch/MLA, and PhD.

Bachelor of Architecture (B.Arch)

Most of the institutions on our list of the best architecture schools offer a Bachelor of Architecture, which is different from a Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Arts degree. A Bachelor of Architecture, also known as B.Arch, are the most popular and practical for students who want to become licensed architects.

These programs are accredited by the [National Architectural Accrediting Board](#) and lead to a professional degree. They require 150 semester credit hours (or quarter system equivalent), consisting of 45 semester hours of general studies.

A B.Arch degree takes roughly five years to finish if attending full-time (or up to twice as long if going part-time, depending on course load. If planning to go part-time, it's important to ask the school what the maximum time limit is to complete degree requirements).

Note, most states do require architects to complete a NAAB-accredited B.Arch program to get licensed. For details on state licensure, check out the [National Council of Architectural Registration Boards](#).

B.Arch Internships via AXP

Another pre-licensure step for B.Arch graduates is to work as a paid intern for ~3 years to gain practical experience (note, any applicable intern experience completed while in school can count towards the post-graduate internship time). Grads can find qualifying internship opportunities through the [Architectural Experience Program](#) (AXP).

Pre-Licensure ARE Testing

Once all internship requirements are met, B.Arch graduates can then sit for the multi-part [Architect Registration Examination](#) (ARE). The ARE version 5.0 consists of six “divisions”:

- Practice Management
- Project Management
- Programming & Analysis
- Project Planning & Design
- Project Development & Documentation
- Construction & Evaluation

The entire exam is very challenging, and the [pass rates](#) for each division range from 47% - 63% (as of 2021).

Bachelor of Science (BS.Arch) or a Bachelor of Arts (BA.Arch) in Architecture

Not everyone who studies architecture plans on working as an architect right away, if ever. BS.Arch and BA.Arch degrees are good options in such cases.

These are considered pre-professional degrees and usually take as long as other bachelor's programs—four years, if attending full-time. However, these degrees do not qualify students for professional license testing (through the [Architect Registration Examination](#)).

This means that BS.Arch and BA.Arch students who later want to become architects may need to complete a Master of Architecture (M.Arch) since they did not do a 5-year B.Arch.

Master's Degree in Architecture

Master of Architecture (M.Arch)

A master's program can take 1-3 years for a full-time student, depending on their undergrad coursework. For example, students who don't meet the grad program prerequisites will need to take those classes, as well, thus adding to the length of time it'll take to finish.

Some programs combine a traditional M.Arch with another area of study to make a dual or combined degree. An example of this is the popular Master of Architecture/Master of Landscape Architecture (M.Arch/MLA). A dual degree can take longer, but will save time compared to doing two master's degrees! Having a dual master's isn't necessary for everyone, but it can help qualify you for more positions.

Doctoral Degree in Architecture

PhD in Architecture

PhD programs in Architecture can be a little harder to find, but they're out there. A doctorate degree may focus more on a specific area of concentration, along with a minor (or two). PhDs can be very research-intensive, and can take four to seven years, depending on our previous academics. A large chunk of this degree centers on a lengthy dissertation which must be defended in writing and usually via a presentation before a committee, as well.

What Can I Do with a Degree in Architecture?

Many if not most architecture students intend to pursue a career as a licensed architect. But not everyone does! In fact, the knowledge and skills you'll learn at the best architecture schools can readily apply to several exciting, well-paid career fields. Below are just a few of them:

- Architectural drafter
- Architectural historian
- Archivist
- CAD designer
- College professor
- Framer
- Graphic designer
- Industrial designer
- Interior designer
- Landscape architect
- Lighting consultant
- Project coordinator
- Restoration manager
- Structural designer
- Urban planner

Source:

[Best Architecture Degree Colleges in the U.S. | 2023 \(universities.com\)](https://www.universities.com/best-architecture-degree-colleges-in-the-u-s-2023)

