

School of Architecture at the University of Limerick

Frequently Asked Questions

...about the course

Is the course accredited by the Royal Institute of Architects in Ireland (RIAI)?

Established in 2005, Architecture at UL is a five-year course aiming for a BArch degree. Years One to Four of the course are provisionally accredited through a review process by the RIAI. The RIAI closely monitors the progress of the school, its curriculum and students. Their recent reports give us confidence that the entire programme is fully accredited in 2010.

How does the course at UL compare with other Irish courses in architecture?

It is the same type of Degree Course.

Design Studio is at the heart of architecture education at UL. It is the place where all 'subjects' are taught, from structural theory to architectural history. This happens in studio through individual design projects carried out by each student and is supplemented by seminars and lectures. All of this work in design studio is further supported by site visits, field trips, visiting lecturers and one study trip abroad per year.

What is 'Design Studio'?

As well as the physical place where all 'subjects' are taught, 'Design Studio' is a creative laboratory where learning is developed through experimentation and reflection. Woven into the design studio will be courses in structures and construction, history and theory, environmental science, cultural studies and professional practice. Training as an architect engages the student in a process of 'learning by doing' and problem-based learning with the course curriculum structured around the Design Studio.

How many students are in one class?

UL offers about 25 places to CAO applicants every year; additional places are available to mature applicants. Class sizes average 28 students with a reasonable balance between male and female students.

Do students spend much time in the architecture school?

The teaching day in Design Studio runs continuously from 9 to 6, five days a week. Students will also need to develop their project work outside of these hours.

Architecture is a highly challenging endeavour, and it requires a student to be creative as well as achieving a high academic standing. The study of architecture is rigorous and thus demands that students are firmly committed to the discipline.

Are there many exams at the end of each semester?

The architecture course is generally based on continuous assessment. The design studio project is assessed through a final presentation, with grades from mid-term and intermediate presentations adding to the score. Rather than on one exam at the end, every class is graded through its coursework - presentations, essays, tests, assignments etc. - to encourage persistent work.

Do I have to stay the whole five years?

A first professional degree will be awarded upon the successful completion of this five-year course. After third year there is an opportunity to gain professional experience, to travel and study abroad during a year-out or to transfer into another programme.

Does SAUL offer placements in architectural practices?

No, SAUL cannot offer formal placements in architectural practices. We encourage students to work in the profession – with architects, engineers, builders – and with many members of staff well rooted in the profession in Ireland we offer help and advice in finding suitable employment. Work experience prior to studying might be useful, yet is not required. The academic schedule allows for extended periods of work experience over the summer. A year out after third year is another option to gain the desired professional exposure, possibly through a combination of work and travel abroad.

...about admission**What are the minimum entry requirements for the architecture course?**

Applicants are required to hold at the time of enrolment the established Leaving Certificate (or an approved equivalent) with at least Grade C3 in two Higher Level subjects and Grade D3 in four Ordinary or Higher Level subjects (including Mathematics, Irish or another language, and English).

All applicants for the Architecture Degree must submit a portfolio of artistic work. For further information on the portfolio requirement, please refer to the portfolio guidelines (available for download on the ul.ie/architecture website).

Do I need to take Art in secondary school?

No, Art is not a required subject. Note, that the entry requirements to the course include a portfolio submission, the emphasis of which is art and design based. You will need to prove a degree of artistic sensibility in your portfolio. You may include works from your Art classes into your portfolio, but it's not limited to these. – Woodworking classes can provide skills useful for model making.

Do I have to take Maths or Physics in secondary school?

No, Maths or Physics are not required subjects. An intuitive understanding of art, maths and some science subjects is undeniably helpful. Structures classes as taught to architecture students at UL do not include extensive calculations, but require a clear understanding of the structural logic in a building. Science classes are a valuable preparation in logical reasoning and clarity of thought. – UL awards additional points for Higher Leaving Certificate paper in Mathematics (Honours Maths).

What are the required grade points? Are they likely to go up or down?

In recent years, the CAO points required for Architecture at UL have dropped. This may be due to a few more institutions offering architecture courses, yet while architecture remains an attractive subject the future development regarding grade points required is hard to predict.

Year...CAO points – 2005...525 / 2006...530 / 2007...510 / 2008...490 / 2009...460

No extra points are awarded for passing the portfolio review. However, a prospective student who has the required number of CAO points MUST also successfully pass the portfolio assessment.

Are CAD or Tech Drawing an advantage to students when doing the course?

Sketching, architectural drawing and technical drafting is taught immediately in first year, CAD will be introduced in third year. Students will concentrate on developing their capacity to make good *architectural* drawings – this is a specific skill, and is neither ‘tech drawing’ nor CAD.

Can you transfer into the course?

There is a chance to transfer from other architectural programmes, preferably after third year. These architectural programmes must be Bachelor (Honours) Degree at Level 8 in the National Qualification framework. All applications will be assessed on an individual basis. Please follow the transfer application procedures as stated on our website.

There are no automatic transfers from courses other than as outlined above – all prospective applicants must apply and go through a selection procedure as mature or CAO applicants.

What is required for mature applicants?

Applications are particularly welcome from mature candidates (at least 23 years of age on 1st January of the year of enrolment). Application forms are available from UL’s Admissions Office and the closing date for receipt of completed applications is 2nd April. Mature Students may be invited for an interview and will be required to bring their portfolio and statement to the interview once they have been invited.

...about the portfolio**What is a portfolio?**

The portfolio is your opportunity to showcase your artistic sensibility, your ability to observe and record, a degree of creativity as well as the scope of your interests, which may span from the domestic to the monumental, from small-scale to large-scale, from the realistic to the abstract, from the analytical to the imaginary. A themed approach can choose to highlight just one subject, yet in a number of aspects. Genres might include buildings and details, landscape and travel sketches, still life or portrait. The portfolio is also proof of your inquisitiveness and the variety of media used to record your observations. Techniques may span from pencil drawing and charcoal to pen, from watercolour and oil painting to print or collage.

A portfolio usually takes the shape of a protective folder that safely holds a series of same-sized sheets with one or a number of works mounted on them. Portfolio must not be larger than A1 in size. Please do not submit rolled-up sheets as they are difficult to review.

Shall I take a portfolio preparation course?

A portfolio preparation class may be beneficial, but is neither required nor recommended. It may help to discipline oneself in building a body of work over time rather than producing a portfolio in a rush just prior to the submission deadline. The method of such classes transpires in the work, while you should seek every opportunity to pursue your individual approach. A portfolio from a preparation class is not guaranteed to be successful when applying to SAUL.

What is the statement all about?

The statement is yet another opportunity to prove your sensitivity, your skill to observe and to record your findings in a given medium. Make it a personal account of what you are interested in, not a general statement on architecture. A good text is structured not unlike a piece of architecture.

What may I include in the portfolio?

Feel free to include what you think is apt to demonstrate your interest and ability in addressing the built environment. Be selective about what you include – quality matters, not quantity. The portfolio is not limited to drawings, watercolours and paintings. Photographs, prints and collages may be part of it.

Please refrain from submitting three-dimensional objects. If you want to show sculptures, pottery, models, installations, furniture etc. include drawings and photographs of these objects. Digital media (CD, DVD) must not be submitted either, since the review process cannot accommodate their assessment.

May I submit my sketchbooks?

A collection of sketches is a valuable addition to a portfolio. We rely heavily on reviewing original sketchbooks to discern drawing or reflective qualities. Please refrain from submitting printed scans or a 'selection of best sketches'.

Why are technical drawings excluded from the portfolio?

In the portfolio we look for artistic abilities, not drafting proficiency. While drafting skills may be beneficial, these skills can and will be learnt in the course. The same applies to computer-generated drawings. Technical drawings, especially CAD drawings when done under the supervision of a professional, are often tainted by the requirements of that specific assignment and do not lend themselves to demonstrate individual ability or the visual sensibility and craft skills required for architectural studies.

...about career and profession**Are you a fully qualified architect after 5 years?**

You are a qualified architect if you have successfully completed 5 years of a degree course in architecture.

However, you are not yet professionally registered after any degree course of study in any university. In all cases, a further professional qualification is required to admit entry into the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland (RIAI). This is an exam/interview/case study and will be taken after a minimum of two/three years of professional experience in an architectural practice. Contact the RIAI for further detail.

With the building industry in Ireland slowing down will you need that many architects?

While employment options are limited in Ireland at the moment, architecture is more than an industry-driven profession. The architectural education at SAUL equips students with knowledge and abilities widely recognised. This enables students to practice in the profession of architecture or even in related fields nationally and internationally as many architects have done successfully in the past.

What jobs can students get after having completed the course?

A graduate will of course be in a position to start working in an architect's office. This is the path followed by most graduates. However, architecture studies are broad, encompassing technical skills, design, art, history and presentation skills and some graduates do move into other areas including policy making or public administration, business or urban design, photography or other arts, furniture or model making, research and writing, or pursue further studies.