



## UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE  
*College of Architecture & Urban Planning*

27 April 2002

Dr. John Slattery  
Associate Dean for Academic Programs  
Graduate School  
Box 3537700

Dear Dean Slattery:

Thank you for your letter and the accompanying Ten-Year Graduate School Review of the Department of Landscape Architecture report. We appreciate the opportunity to respond to the report.

The faculty, staff, students, and Chair thank the Review Team for their contribution to the Department of Landscape Architecture. The team's approach to the Review was thorough, thoughtful and diligent. We appreciate the care they took to understand the context and content of our work and the perfect blend of collegiality and challenge that pervaded all of their interactions with the department--we could not have asked for a better review team. We also thank the Graduate School's Dr. Heidi Tilghman for her assistance. The review process, which she oversaw, was conducted with unfailing consideration.

The Ten Year Review report was distributed to faculty and staff and made available to students through the ASLA Student Chapter. This letter reflects the Department's collective views.

The Report is fair and generous in its assessment of the Department of Landscape Architecture and our two programs. We particularly appreciate the committee's understanding of the unique circumstances pertaining at the time of the review--the fact that three new faculty began their appointments this year--one of whom was the unit's first tenure-track faculty from a discipline other than landscape architecture.

We start by confirming one of the Team's opening statements:

"First, Landscape Architecture at the University of Washington, *much more than most other units on campus*, is the right field in the right place at the right time." (emphasis added)

We augment this by suggesting that Landscape Architecture also comprises *the right people--faculty, staff and students--with the right Dean*. We look forward to discussing the Report with the Graduate School Council and the Graduate School Administration. We also look forward to working with the Administration to determine how, collectively, we might strengthen Landscape Architecture at the University of Washington and advance our important agenda.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to comment on the Graduate School's Ten-Year Assessment Report of the Department of Landscape Architecture.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Iain Robertson".

Iain M. Robertson  
Chair & Associate Professor  
Landscape Architecture

**DEPARTMENT OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE  
RESPONSE TO THE TEN-YEAR GRADUATE SCHOOL REVIEW REPORT  
27 April 2002**

Comments are broken into two categories, factual inaccuracies and discussion of the Issues of Concern and Recommendations

**FACTUAL INACCURACIES**

**B Areas of Strength**

**1. Students**

Our graduate degree is a professionally-accredited MLA not a MA degree. (p 3)

**C Issues of Concern**

**4. Faculty Development**

The Team reports (p8):

“Another concern stems from the small size of the Department and its relatively young faculty. Landscape Architecture in the very near future will depend upon Associate Professors to serve as Chair. But this demanding job will necessarily limit a person's scholarly or creative productivity. As a result, those Associate Professors who serve as Chair run the risk of inhibiting their own professional development and retarding their promotion to Professor. Can the Department and College find ways of protecting chairs, including the current one, from the toll that administrative duties take?”

This is a crucial issue and we are grateful that it is raised. The Team accurately assesses the impact that becoming Chair would have on the two current Associate Professor or on Assistant Professor Johnson, who is applying for promotion this year. Assumption of the duties of Chair would inevitably alter the academic trajectories of their extremely promising careers—careers which are at the heart of the Department's current and continuing success. However, the statement is misleading as the Department is currently chaired, not “in the very near future” chaired, by an Associate Professor, and has been for 18 of the last 24 years—12 year by Sally Schauman and 6 by Iain Robertson, individuals for whom the bell has also tolled with similar effects on their careers.

**DISCUSSION OF ISSUES OF CONCERN AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**VISIBILITY & SCHOLARSHIPS OF INTEGRATION AND APPLICATION (b, f)**

Visibility is an issue that pervades many of the Report's concerns and recommendations. We agree about its importance--within the UW community; with external agencies, foundations and our professional constituencies; and among the varied communities that comprise the public. However, we believe that Landscape Architecture pursues a different model of visibility from the typical UW department model where visibility results from focusing on a specific area or narrow issue. In our terms, we are one of the University's most interactive units yet we remain 'invisible' because our efforts are dispersed rather than concentrated. A model of visibility based on a narrowing of our range of activities would severely alter our approach to professional landscape architecture training.

Discounting academic papers and publications of Department faculty and our contributions to the larger university, we present a view of our dispersed visibility from the perspective of a department that effectively trains generalists rather than specialists. We pose the question: How many units of the size of Landscape Architecture --8 permanent faculty, 1 long-term lecturer, and less than 100 students (approximately 0.25% of UW faculty and students-- have a similar range of visibility as Landscape Architecture?

- We maintain ongoing relationships and work on projects with several divisions of the National Park Service and a number of Native American Tribes; we have worked in recent years with the State Department of Ecology; we have current activities with City of Seattle Departments of Design, Construction & Land Use; Parks & Recreation; Neighborhoods; and Seattle Public Utility.
- During the current academic year we have conducted outreach/service/teaching projects (studios) with the Tulalip Tribe; The Elevated Transit Company; Seattle Public Utility/Thorton Creek Watershed neighborhood; the International District Community Council; and are leading an interdisciplinary Public Art team to construct a project in the University District, funded by the City of Seattle.
- During this year we have participated with other CAUP departments in an interdisciplinary College Charrette focused on the old Colman School in Rainier Valley; co-lead a charrette for the New School Foundation in Rainier Valley; and participated in Architecture's interdisciplinary design-build studio in Auroville, India.
- This year we are conducting a funded independent study for the Russell Family Foundation's new headquarters in Gig Harbor; have worked with the Frank Family Foundation on Cranberry Lake, Mason County; continue to maintain contacts with the Puget Sound Environmental Learning Center which we worked with during the design stage; and lead an interdisciplinary undergraduate project funded by Friday Harbor Labs for the laboratory's property and for the Cedar Rock Biological Preserve.
- In addition to studios and independent studies, graduate students are conducting theses investigations that entail interaction with a variety of agencies and community groups. A small group of students designed and installed an educational exhibit at this year's Northwest Flower & Garden Show--80,000 visitors. Despite the fact that this monumental effort received almost no UW funding it won the show's top award, the Founders Cup.
- Since the Review Visit we have received funding, through the Office of Undergraduate Education, for a Global Classroom Project for next year.

Dispersed visibility results from a successful model for design education that may be characterized using the Carnegie Foundation's terms "the scholarships of integration and application." Integration and application are the *modus operandi* of our teaching, research, and service, or, as the Report notes, "landscape architecture is inherently interdisciplinary." Despite efforts by many UW administrators, problems with implementing interdisciplinary teaching collaborations remain endemic to the institution. We continue to look for ways to collaborate across disciplinary lines. It is important to note that overcoming structural and disciplinary boundaries requires a great deal more effort and flexibility from faculty and students than is necessary if one confines oneself to disciplinary boundaries. If interdisciplinary education is to flourish it is important that the efforts of faculty, students and units who work in interdisciplinary ways be adequately acknowledged—made visible, and rewarded.

Landscape Architecture faculty are eager to utilize our skills, methods, and expertise in studio instruction (interdisciplinary team instruction, experiential education, project-based learning, integrating teaching with service learning, etc.) to serve the UW more widely. We request that the Graduate School work with us to identify opportunities to do so, for example, by supporting efforts to

integrate the Program on the Environment's capstone courses with selected Landscape Architecture studios.

#### **ACHIEVING DIVERSITY & CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WIDER UW (c, d)**

The Report recommends that, for two reasons, the Department "aggressively increase the number of undergraduate courses that attract sizeable enrollments"--to increase the number of program applicants and to recruit underrepresented groups into the Department.

We acknowledge that our Department is not as diverse as we would like it to be and are eager to rectify this situation. But, taking our size into account, we believe that we comprise a typical sample of 0.25% of the UW student population. Thus we question whether increasing undergraduate course offerings would achieve the goal of greater diversity in the BLA program.

We also question the desirability of increasing the number of BLA program applicants. We typically receive more than two applications for each space. While this may seem a small ratio, the work necessary to successfully prepare a portfolio is considerable and deters all but the most determined. This year, like most others, we turned away applicants who possess the potential to be successful landscape architects. In interviews with the Chair, many of them expressed their determination to apply again next year. Increasing the number of BLA program applicants would have little, if any, effect on applicant quality and would entail even more heartbreak. (Increasing the diversity of students applying to and admitted to our graduate program requires different strategies. The Department has expended considerable effort to build our web site to attract program applicants and this effort has been remarkably successful. However, we possess extremely limited funds to maintain the web site and have no scholarships to attract students.)

There are, however, compelling benefits to be derived from increasing the number and size of undergraduate courses offered by landscape architecture. Faculty have discussed several courses we would like to offer. The Report mentions a large survey course in Environmental Psychology--which would fill a conspicuous gap in the UW's course offerings. In addition, we have considered offering courses that explore creativity; the designer's integrative perspective of the world; and the department's focus on urban ecological design; etc. These would be innovative contributions to the UW's course offerings. Two factors crimp our progress in offering new courses, 1. the balance between faculty time spent on service courses and on core professional courses, and, 2. TA support.

We believe that the Department is currently contributing very significantly to undergraduate education at UW: Professor Streatfield's very popular history courses (four courses open to non-majors); Professor Robertson's Introduction to Planting Design (enrollment +/- 80 students--and possibly the only CAUP course for non-majors that specifically focuses on the processes and practice of contemporary design thinking); and one or two other theory classes that attract smaller numbers of non-majors. To increase our contribution without compensating resources would seriously impact our ability to offer top quality professional degree programs.

TA support is an even greater problem. Depending on how impending budget cuts are allocated at the UW and CAUP levels, the Department's small TA budget may be entirely eliminated. Reduction or elimination of the TA budget would require us to curtail rather than increase course offerings for non-majors. One of the two most critical needs of the Department, if it is to make teaching contributions beyond its programs, is budget support for TAs and lecturers.

We request that the Graduate School work with us to obtain TA support so that we can offer innovative environmental courses, such as the survey of Environmental Psychology, to undergraduate students.

We also suggest that it might be valuable to consider developing 'hybrid' degree programs with other units including PoE, CUH, Engineering, Education, etc. and would be happy to discuss such programs.

#### **DIVERSITY & MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION (d)**

The Report recommends that the Department broaden its approach to diversity and multi-cultural education. This is valuable advice. The addition of Dr. Jeffrey Hou to the faculty has already begun to address this issue. As noted, he is conducting a studio in Seattle's International District, (and has submitted a royalty Research Fund proposal with other faculty to further this work) and has received a Global Classroom Project grant which will enable him to work with students in Japan, Taiwan or Hong Kong. Other faculty also contribute to multicultural education. Professor Streatfield leads Field Studies courses to Italy and, in the last few years, landscape architecture students have worked on Architecture design-build projects on Native American reservations in Montana and South Dakota and on projects in India, Mexico, and Cuba. Landscape Architecture has also offered its own design-build classes that have dealt with diverse communities in Mexico and New York City where students designed and built a garden and play space for a Foster Home for children with AIDS.

However, over the last decade the Department's most consistent and sustained multicultural effort has been Lecturer Roxanne Hamilton's work with Native American tribes around Puget Sound. The success of this program in exposing students to other cultures has been dramatic and profound. It has also provided tribes with valuable planning and design ideas that help them manage or develop tribal lands and resources. For the last three years this program has been supported by a Tools for Transformation grant.

The fact that tribes seek out Ms. Hamilton for assistance is testimony to her effectiveness as a link between UW and some of the most poorly represented populations in higher education in Washington state. This year Ms. Hamilton's class brought 75 sixth to twelfth grade students from the Tulalip's Heritage School to the UW to participate in a studio. This was the first time most students had visited UW. With the expiration of the Tools Grant this program is in danger of being curtailed. It represents a link to Native American tribes that has benefits for UW far beyond landscape architecture.

We request that the Graduate School work with us to identify ways to continue this program. Our goal is to make these studios open to students who will participate in interdisciplinary teams on specific projects identified by the client tribe. Funding to continue this program and make it available to the wider UW community is one of our two top priorities.

#### **TENURE & PROMOTION GUIDELINES (e)**

We are in the process of developing guidelines.

#### **TECHNOLOGY (g)**

We are constantly amazed by the real pain that virtual reality inflicts.

The appointment of Mark Baratta as Director of Computing for CAUP has resulted in significant improvements in computing throughout the College. Following the Team's visit we received word that all Student Technology Fee grant proposals submitted by the College this year have been approved, amounting to \$396,000. Landscape architecture faculty participated in the

development of several of these proposals and our students will benefit directly, and indirectly through hand-me-downs, from them. We will continue to participate in and initiate Student Technology Fee grant proposals with Mark Baratta to upgrade computing facilities for landscape architecture students.

The Report suggests that the Department consider wiring the studio and requiring students to use their own laptop computers.

**We would like to work with the UW Administration to determine whether it would be better to wire the Landscape Studio or use wireless technology to provide the necessary infrastructure for a laptop environment.**

#### **DEPARTMENTAL RANKING & QUALITY (h)**

Sixty-six North American institutions offer professional Landscape Architecture training. Sixteen, including UW, offer both undergraduate and graduate degrees. These small numbers call into question the validity of attempting to rank landscape architecture programs. We recognize the need and value of learning from our peers and look for ways to do so. The issue of quality is however more complex than the issue of ranking.

Unlike UW, some successful programs--e.g. Virginia, Cornell, Illinois, Michigan--are located in towns with very small professional landscape architecture communities. As a result, their graduates disperse across the country. By contrast, UW is surrounded by a diverse and vibrant professional community. That, and the region's seductive character, make our graduates reluctant to move, with impacts on the national visibility of our programs.

In recent years, UW graduates who have chosen to work beyond Puget Sound have found themselves very competitive in intense design markets such as New York, Denver and San Francisco. Last year a recent MLA graduate obtained a tenure-track appointment at Rutgers. These successes suggest that measures of respective excellence of graduates may have less to do with the relative quality of programs and more to do with the paucity of UW graduates throughout the country.

We believe that our approach of identifying a focus that differentiates us from other programs; that builds upon the region's strengths; and that seizes what we believe is the emerging focus of the profession as a whole, is a wiser long-term strategy for overcoming inherent problems resulting from our location, our impoverished funding situation, and the distribution patterns of our graduates than the approach of focusing on putative program rankings.

**We are eager to work with the Graduate School to identify ways to raise the profile of Landscape Architecture at UW, and to promote our distinctive focus in the national marketplace possibly through hosting a national conference.**

#### **SABBATICAL LEAVE FOR CHAIR (i)**

Iain Robertson acknowledges with gratitude the Team's generous recommendation that he be awarded sabbatical leave in the near future. He is already dreaming of distant horizons, and creative writing projects--other than self-evaluation reports.