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DEPARTMENT OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE  
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COLLEGE OF BUILT ENVIRONMENTS

June 4, 2012

Gerald J. Baldasty  
Vice Provost and Dean  
The Graduate School, University of Washington

Dear Dean Baldasty,

On behalf of the Department of Landscape Architecture, I would like to first thank the Graduate School for facilitating the recent Academic Program Review. We thank the Review Committee for their hard work and professionalism. All the Committee members were highly engaged, and their assessments and recommendations have been most insightful and generous. We also appreciate the highly complimentary report from the Committee that recognizes specifically the following aspects of our department:

- Significant ties to the professional community in the region
- Productive and academically diverse faculty with national and international reputation
- Program focus on sustainable design, interdisciplinary innovations, and linkages with programs and communities internationally
- Innovative educational initiative through the Green Futures Lab, design/build capstones, international programs, and studio-based courses
- Relevancy of urban ecological design to the region, the nation, and the world, and prospects for leadership
- Focus on community work and service learning
- Commitment to issues of social equality and global health

Please see attached for our response to the Committee's findings and recommendations. We are also including a written response to the survey and focus group summary conducted and provided by GPSS. We want to underscore that the review has been a highly productive experience and a timely assessment. We look forward to further discussion on the report and working with the Graduate School and the College to further improve our program and support the mission of our University.

Sincerely,

Jeff Hou, PhD  
Associate Professor and Chair

## **RESPONSE TO THE TEN-YEAR REVIEW REPORT**

Department of Landscape Architecture, University of Washington  
June 4, 2012

### **1. FACTUAL CORRECTIONS**

The report stated, “The current process for admission to the BLA program results in a small number of applications (12-15 per year)...”

12-15 is historically the typical size of a class, but not the number of applications. The number of our BLA applications has been in a range of 25 to 40 from 2006 to 2010, resulting in a typical size of 15-18 students per incoming class. The process is still selective, and the numbers indicate the continued prospects of our program, as we seek to strengthen our recruitment effort to attract the best students and further improve the quality of our program.

### **2. OVERALL FINDINGS**

We find the overall findings to be encouraging and accurate. In particular, we share the committee’s concern regarding budget uncertainty for the department.

As stated in the report, the College is currently evaluating different models of budget allocation based on ABB. The four scenarios as presented to the Department Chairs include implementing ABB at the departmental level (“True ABB”), options of “True ABB” plus a certain percentage tax paid to the College to support interdisciplinary initiatives and activities at the College level, and continuing with the existing model of redistributing total College ABB revenue to the departments based on productivity (“ABB Surplus Distribution”).

In the most recent round of discussion, the Department Chairs have agreed to a hybrid model with redistribution of College ABB revenue based on departmental productivity while setting aside funds for College-wide interdisciplinary initiatives for the Academic Year 2012-2013. However, the future scenario beyond AY2012-2013 remains uncertain. Nevertheless, it is clear that College’s long-term goal is to implement a “True ABB” model plus tax to the College.

The department is currently preparing plans to significantly increase its productivity in terms of undergraduate SCH and graduate enrollment. Specifically, we are considering a proposal to increase the size of MLA II class to 14-15 (see below). Based on data provided by the College, this would increase our revenue by 43% (about 18% above the current level of expenses). In addition, by adding a new undergraduate major in Urban Ecological Design (see below), together with offering of more large undergraduate lecture courses, the total revenue would increase by 79% (about 48% above the current level of expenses). These proposed changes will ensure the long-term viability and growth of the program, and provide opportunities for improvement on curriculum, staffing, teaching load, student scholarships, and research support.

However, the proposed changes, especially a new undergraduate major, will take at least 3-4 years to fully implement and for the productivity to materialize in ABB revenue. It is therefore critical for the College to commit its support for the department during this period of transition. The department can grow

significantly but only with the support from the College and University in making the proposed changes and transition possible.

### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Exploring alternative scenarios for the future and an Urban Ecological Design Major (III.1 & 2)

We are encouraged by the endorsement of the review committee for our proposed approach to increase the size of our MLA II class and develop a new undergraduate major, titled Bachelor of Urban Ecological Design (BUED). Since the site visit, the faculty have proceeded to deliberate on different proposals and examine options for curriculum changes to support these new initiatives. Also, since the site visit, we have continued to revise and expand alternative scenarios with revenue implications (see table 1). We plan to conclude the discussion and take actions before the fall 2013 term in order to implement the changes in a timely manner.

Scenarios	Revenue	Balance	% Change
Current	\$895,500	-\$208,183	-19%
Full MLA II enrollment	\$1,302,100	\$198,417	18%
More large lectures	\$1,036,300	-\$67,383	-6%
Increase MLA + large lectures	\$1,193,100	\$89,417	8%
Increase MLA + large lectures + BUED	\$1,419,100	\$315,417	29%
Full MLA II + large lectures + BUED	\$1,628,100	\$524,417	48%

**Table 1.** Program Development Scenarios

#### Exploring Changes in Admissions and the Degree Structure of the Bachelor of Landscape Architecture Program (III. 3)

The report recommends exploration and deliberation of freshman admission and degree structure of BLA from 5 years to 4 years for the purpose of recruitment and opportunity to increase the number and quality of undergraduate LA students. In response to the recommendation, the faculty have been examining different approaches to achieve the same goal. Specifically, we have been exploring a new four-year model that incorporates a summer quarter between the junior and senior years. This would result in greater efficiency without compromising the rigor of our program.

#### Strengthening the Curricula (III.4)

The report make two specific recommendations concerning the curriculum: (1) strengthening of media and digital technology courses and introduction of independent undergraduate studio and more distinct graduate studio, and (2) more seminar courses for graduate student to engage in advanced studies in theory and history.

The department is offering a summer pre-orientation session on digital and hand media to strengthen the media and technology sequence this year. Similar offerings can be found in our peer schools around the country. In our pre-orientation session, incoming students will be introduced to basics of digital and hand

media. This is expected to free up space in the regular courses for more practice and room to introduce advanced techniques. In addition, we consider adding a GIS/advanced media requirement to BLA and MLA curriculum. Also, under the proposed curriculum changes being considered by the faculty, we plan to add an additional graduate studio into the MLA curriculum. To support the increase in MLA II students, we plan to offer studio options that provide more choices for students.

In terms of offering more seminar and advanced courses for the graduate students, the proposed changes will allow students to take selective courses instead of specific required lecture courses. Students may still opt to take the regular lecture courses, but they will also have the options to take other seminar courses within or outside the department to fulfill their requirements. This is expected to accommodate students at the graduate level to pursue specific interests.

### **Modest investments will yield high returns (III.5)**

We appreciate the committee's recommended support for lecturers, TAs and graduate assistants, BE Labs, staff and equipment. If the faculty agrees to move forward with the proposed changes, the department shall be able to increase its ABB revenue to provide the additional support. These supports are critical to ensure the long-term health and viability of the department. However, as stated before, we will need the support and investment from the College and University during this period of transition. We hope to engage the College in following up on the committee's recommendation in the coming months.

### **Fundraising is noteworthy but could be more ambitious (III.6)**

The committee recommends that funds be raised for graduate student support, student participation in international programs, faculty participation at national and international conferences, and department publications. While increasing revenue through program restructuring is paramount, the department has also been working closely with our Professional Advisory Council (PAC) and the College's Advancement Office in taking the steps necessary for a sustained fundraising effort.

In 2009, the department hosted a gala to celebrate fifty years of landscape architecture practice and education in the Pacific Northwest. With the advice from the College's Advancement Office, the gala was conceived as a "friend-raising" event. The event has helped us connect and reconnect with the alumni and professional community in the region. Around the same time, the department received a large donation from the Class of 1959 to establish the Class of 1959 Endowed Scholarship for Landscape Architecture. Currently, because actual donations are short of the targeted \$150,000 to receive the full 50% match by the University, the department is working closely with the PAC to raise the remaining \$50,000. We are currently at about 50% in reaching the goal. In addition to the individual connections of the PAC members, we are working with the PAC in identifying class leaders who can help lead the fundraising effort and potentially creating additional scholarships and/or long-term commitment for individual donations to support the department. A reunion gathering was recently held in May for graduates of 1984-1985 with several graduates flying in from out of town. Building on the success of the current efforts, we plan to build more ambitious campaigns for fundraising.

## **ADDENDUM. RESPONSE TO GPSS REPORT**

We appreciate and value the work of GPSS in conducting the questionnaire survey and the focus group interview. From the survey in particular, we are pleased to know that the majority (80%) of the respondents considered the Department of Landscape Architecture's academic standards to be very good. At the same time, we are disappointed by the attendance rate for the focus group interview and believe that a better attendance would enable the interview to reflect broader student experience and perspectives toward the program. The following is meant to provide clarification or additional information to a number of concerns as expressed in the GPSS reports.

### **1. Academic program: ability of pursuing coursework outside the department**

The department's BLA and MLA program are both professionally accredited by LAAB (Landscape Architecture Accreditation Board). To be accredited, the programs are required to cover a wide set of subject areas ranging from public policy and regulation to plants and ecosystems. As a result, there is a high number of required courses, which limits the ability of students to pursue coursework outside the department. In recent years, however, the department has been a key player in the College's BE Lab (Built Environments Interdisciplinary Labs) initiatives that enable both BLA and MLA students to pursue interdisciplinary work outside the department. In the proposed MLA curriculum changes currently being considered by the faculty, we are planning to change from the model of required courses to that of required selectives that allow students, especially those at a more advanced level, to pursue coursework outside the department.

### **2. Research experience**

As professional programs, our pedagogical focus is on professional training and practice. While research is highly relevant to the field of landscape architecture, it plays a less central role in our curriculum as compared with Science programs for example. Nevertheless, our programs especially MLA do provide courses for students interested in pursuing a more research-oriented path. Many of faculty members also have sponsored research projects that provide opportunities for student involvement. We suggest a survey instrument be developed that addresses the distinct student experiences in a professional program to more accurately assess student learning and experience.

### **3. Career counseling/job search**

As a small department, we do not have dedicated staff support for career counseling or formalized counseling service that the survey question implies. Instead, as a small, professional program, career counseling takes on a variety of forms, including a dedicated and required Professional Practice course that introduces students to different career paths and opportunities in landscape architecture. On a weekly basis, students have opportunities to hear and interact directly with invited professionals on a variety of topics ranging from practicing in multidisciplinary firms to working in governments and the non-profit sector. In addition to the required course, the department's PAC has organized portfolio workshops, exhibition of professional work, and professional reception as part of the new student orientation, in which students have opportunities to meet face-to-face with professionals in the region.

The department also regularly hosts lectures and brown bags through which outside professionals are invited to present their work. Practicing professionals are also a regular part of our studio final reviews at the end of each quarter. In addition, the student chapter of Washington Chapter of American Society of Landscape Architects (WASLA) has organized a mentorship program that matches students with outside professionals and alumni. Students are also welcome to meet with and do seek out faculty members to discuss career options and opportunities. Finally, the department has developed a searchable online database for job announcements and also uses LinkedIn and student listserv to send out announcement for jobs and internship. Discussion has also begun recently with PAC to develop an internship program. We believe these options together provide students with abundant opportunities for career counseling.

#### **4. Advising**

Many of the questions in this section are not relevant to our program, which may explain the low response rate. For example, our thesis process does not entail oral exams, written exams, and defense. Instead, the department follows the protocols of most professional design programs with mid-term and final reviews and regular pin-ups, coupled with committee meetings to provide advice to students. Again, we suggest a survey instrument be developed that addresses the student experiences in a professional program.

#### **5. Departmental community**

It is the department's tradition for all faculty to be present the quarterly final review. The students are also encouraged to do so. The faculty also holds a weekly faculty meeting in which elected student representatives also attend. There are also many informal opportunities for student-faculty interactions such as receptions to exhibitions and lectures, which have become a regular part of the department events. As a small department, most faculty know all students and interact with them regularly in and outside the classroom.

#### **6. Funding**

The department is preparing to make program and curriculum changes to enroll more students and thereby increase revenue in order to increase scholarships and provide more TA and student assistant opportunities for students. In addition to a more organized effort in outside fundraising, the department has use funds from College to leverage resources within the University, including Top Scholars awards, GO-MAP scholarships, and Provost's international tuition waiver to recruit graduate students. In recent years, increase in faculty grants has also provided additional support for students in terms of research assistantships. Positions for TA and student assistants are advertised openly through student listserv and the Catalyst website in the spring quarter of each year for the following academic year.