



UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

The Graduate School

G-1 Communications

Box 3537700

Seattle, Washington 98195

Telephone: (206)685-3519

Fax: (206)685-3234

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To: Lee Huntsman
Provost

From: Marsha Landolt 
Dean and Vice Provost

Re: Department of Architecture Program Review

Summary and recommended action

At its meeting on January 10, 2002, the Graduate School Council met with members of the Department of Architecture review team, the chair of the Department, and the Dean of the College of Architecture and Urban Planning. The Graduate School Council recommended continuation of all degree programs in the Department, with its next review scheduled in ten years (2011). The committee and Council were impressed by improvement both in the quality of the program and in its standing within the Seattle community—this in spite of a significant contraction in the number of faculty positions over the past 20 years. On the other hand, the committee and the Council noted that the Department has avoided making critical strategic choices that it must make in order to define its future.

I concur with the Council's recommendations. The self-study, the report of the review committee, and the Department's response are attached.

Background

The Department of Architecture was constituted in 1914. In 1957 it became the core department in the new College of Architecture and Urban Planning. The Department currently enrolls 50 junior and 50 senior majors in its B.A in Architectural Studies, and graduates on average 17 students per quarter in the Master of Architecture program (the Department's accredited degree program). Students complimented the accessibility of the faculty, the breadth of the education offered, and the active involvement of local architects. The local architectural community feels that in the past decade the Department has made a substantial local impact through new faculty hires. Recent hires have also enhanced the national reputation of the Department. Graduates of the program are highly thought of by the professional community.

The external reviewers viewed this as one of the top architecture programs in the country, enrolling bright students who benefit from excellent foreign study opportunities, long-standing strengths in lighting design and design/build. Substantial investment from the University

has allowed the Department to develop a design computing group whose abundant energy and activity were noted by the external reviewers. This addition to previously existing strengths has allowed the Department to launch a new research-oriented M.S. in Architecture and promoted possible participation in a College-wide Ph.D. program. These achievements have been accomplished despite a sharp decline in the number of faculty, from 40 to 25, in the past 20 years. The review team specifically complimented the "ethic of consensus" that exists among the faculty and the success of the chair, Jeffrey Ochsner, in maintaining a collegial climate within a department that is intellectually and professionally very diverse. The committee encouraged the Department to extend its interdisciplinary collegiality to units such as the Department of Construction Management with which it must successfully partner in order to offer highly-sought interdisciplinary programs.

The recent changes reflect a broadening of the Department's (and College's) historic focus on professional practice to include a greater emphasis on funded research and scholarship. The review team complimented the change in vision and made several specific observations that should help the Department in this transition. Particularly relevant was the observation that the Department relies upon professional accreditation standards to define success rather than choosing criteria that will define the Department for the future and guide its growth. The external members of the review team felt that, given the Department's national standing, it should simply assume continued professional accreditation and focus on defining what, in addition to the home of an outstanding professional architecture program, it will be.

To do this, the Department must address a critical weakness cited by the review committee, namely "the inability to make crucial decisions regarding the department's future, as is evidenced by the strategic plan which mirrors the faculty's otherwise admirable disciplinary diversity and does not identify specific areas necessary for development in a changing field at a time of restricted budgets." Reluctance to make difficult choices has required the faculty to shoulder burdens that cannot be sustained. Both the review team and the Graduate School Council recognized a critical need for the Department to make decisions among "competing goods" by developing a strategic plan with specific objectives, timelines and definitions of success. This will require the Department to select those areas in which faculty time can *best* be spent and abandon those activities of less value regardless of their attractiveness or past role in the program. Among the decisions to be made, the Department must carefully consider the time required to offer a thesis track in the MArch program and ways to streamline its admission process. It also needs to decide whether the lighting laboratory is to be maintained (and how this can be accomplished), and it must prioritize opportunities for growth and consider how choices will be supported by a mix of current and new funding sources.

The review team recognized the efforts of Jeffrey Ochsner in pursuing external funds and recommended that the Department as a whole be more aggressive and entrepreneurial in seeking private and grant funds in the future. Given low entry-level salaries in the field of architecture, the committee did not consider a flexible tuition program a viable answer to diminishing budgets. The review team and the Graduate School council noted that additional University funded faculty lines are needed, but any such investment can only be effective if the Department successfully completes a planning process.

The Chair and faculty have done much in the past 10 years to enhance the quality of the Department and its graduates, resulting in greater recognition in the local and national community. More recently, it has embarked on an ambitious new direction, design computing, which will be increasingly important to its future. The Department is complemented for its willingness to take on such new projects. Now, however, it has to decide what elements in its past are essential to its future. As it works through this issue, and as it pursues outside sources of funding, there may be justification for additional University assistance.

Enclosures

c: Richard McCormick, President
Robert Mugerauer, Dean, College of Architecture and Urban Planning
Debra Friedman, Associate Provost for Academic Planning
John Slattery, Associate Dean for Academic Programs
Members of the review committee:
James Clauss, Department of Classics (Chair); Judy Anderson, School of Art;
John Stanton, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering; Alan Plattus,
School of Architecture, Yale University; Susam Ubbelohde, Department of
Architecture, University of California, Berkeley
Jeffrey Ochsner, Chair, Department of Architecture
Graduate School Council
Augustine McCaffery, Assistant to the Dean
Heidi Tilghman, Assistant to the Dean