



January 8, 2015

To: David L. Eaton, Vice Provost and Dean

From: Judith Howard, Divisional Dean, Social Sciences  
College of Arts and Sciences

RE: Interdisciplinary Urban Design and Planning 2013-2014 Review

As you recall, I served as the proxy Dean for the Interdisciplinary Urban Design and Planning Ph.D. review that occurred in the 2013-2014 academic year. This memorandum outlines the recommendations from the review of the Ph.D. Program. Detailed comments can be found in the documents that were a part of the following formal review proceedings:

- Charge meeting between review committee, program, and administrators (December 10, 2013)
- Program self-study (January 6, 2013)
- Site visit (February 6-7, 2014)
- Review committee report (March 11, 2014)
- Faculty response to the review committee report (July 24, 2014)
- Graduate School Council consideration of review (November 6, 2014)

The review committee consisted of:

Ben Fitzhugh, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology,  
Director, Quaternary Research Center (Committee Chair)  
Michael Yost, Professor and Associate Chair, Department of Environmental  
and Occupational Health Sciences  
John Peponis, Professor, School of Architecture, Georgia Institute of  
Technology Atlanta, GA  
Ruth Steiner, Professor, Department of Urban and Regional Planning,  
University of Florida, Gainesville, FL

A subcommittee of the Graduate School Council presented findings and recommendations to the full Council at its meeting on November 4, 2014. Specific comments and recommendations regarding the degree program include the following:

Arts

Art  
Dance  
Drama  
DXARTS  
Music

Humanities

Asian Languages & Literature  
Classics  
Comparative History  
of Ideas  
Comparative Literature  
English  
French & Italian Studies  
Germanics  
Linguistics  
Near Eastern Languages &  
Civilization  
Scandinavian Studies  
Slavic Languages & Literatures  
Spanish & Portuguese Studies

Natural Sciences

Applied Mathematics  
Astronomy  
Biology  
Chemistry  
Mathematics  
Physics  
Psychology  
Speech & Hearing Sciences  
Statistics

Social Sciences

American Ethnic Studies  
American Indian Studies  
Anthropology  
Communication  
Economics  
Gender, Women &  
Sexuality Studies  
Geography  
History  
Jackson School of  
International Studies  
Law, Societies & Justice  
Philosophy  
Political Science  
Sociology

Burke Museum of  
Natural History & Culture

Henry Art Gallery

Simpson Center for  
the Humanities

UW World Series

### **Program Strengths**

- **Strong research** – The Urban Design and Planning faculty contribute to high quality research. The program is internationally known for its strength in urban ecology and the public health dimensions of urban design and planning. There is also a research focus on some subspecialty areas involving East Asia, food systems, and infrastructure finance.
- **Faculty and administration** – Excellent leadership is provided by Marina Alberti, program Director and her part-time administrative support staff member. A steering committee of dedicated faculty from various disciplines provides continuing guidance from diverse perspectives.
- **Students and alumni** – The students are high quality and the number of applicants has increased over time. Acceptance rates are approximately 10%. Student backgrounds are quite diverse –some are from physical sciences; other students are from social sciences and humanities. Forty-three of the last 47 graduates have secured academic or professional employment, and some are now leaders in the field.
- **Balance between depth and breadth** – The program ensures that graduates have depth of knowledge in urban planning and design. Students also achieve an intellectual breadth that enables them to work with others in a variety of disciplines.

### **Challenges & Risks**

- **Funding for Students and Program Engagement** – The program suffers from low and erratic funding for students. It cannot make multiyear offers of assistance that competing programs do. About half of student assistance comes from unpredictable faculty research grants. Furthermore, this means that students who do not connect with a grant are often in trouble. The lack of consistent funding prevents the program from expanding, which is essential to achieve the goal of being one of the top three rated programs. Increasing annual student enrollment from 3-4 per year to 6-8 per year is thought to be important to improve all aspects of the program. A lack of funding prevents the program from incentivizing faculty from across campus to be more deeply engaged.
- **Activity Based Budgeting** – Some feel that ABB imperils the current program funding.
- **Curriculum** – Students from backgrounds other than urban planning find it difficult and time-consuming to complete core requirements and would like more flexibility. Combined with the greater difficulty that students with social science and humanities backgrounds have in securing lab RAs, this sets some students up as second-class citizens.
- **Administrative situation** – Currently, the administration is doing fine. But Program Director Alberti will not be in the job forever, and there appears to be no identified successor. Furthermore, the part-time staff support may not be enough.
- **New Ph.D. Program in Built Environment** – This new program has an uncertain effect on the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. Program. There could be gains from the new program through common classes and economies that arise thereof, but there could be reductions in interest and outside resources being directed to the program.

### **Areas of Concurrence and/or Disagreement**

The program faculty is in general agreement with the Review Committee recommendations. It strongly supports efforts to increase funding. The only area of direct disagreement is with the suggestion that an associate director be hired. The program faculty instead suggested that a post-doctoral fellow be hired, with University support, to help with administration of the program.

A proposed future faculty initiative is to develop a “UW Urban Cluster”, where all Ph.D. programs with a focus on urban issues would share pedagogy and resources. The post-doctoral fellow mentioned above would assist with implementation of the cluster. The faculty believes this initiative can help reduce costs in a variety of ways. It could enhance the program’s ability to receive funding from both external and internal sources.

### **Graduate School Council Recommendations**

The Council concurred with the Review Committee recommendation that the next review of the Ph.D. program occur in ten years, specifically in the 2023-2024 academic year, and that an interim report would not be required.

The review committee recommendations to the program faculty also included the following.

- Work to secure more and consistent funding for students.
- Continue ongoing assessment of the program structure, curriculum, and student needs with strategic planning, annual student reviews, and similar mechanisms.
- Maintain and expand efforts to cultivate a common culture among students through various strategies they identified.
- Continue exploring opportunities to expand the size of incoming cohorts to 6-8 students per year, a doubling of the size of the program.
- Clarify the brand identity of the Ph.D. program with new, intellectually compelling and professionally applicable, definitions of “urban design” and “urban planning”.
- As part of the strategic planning process, model trajectories of success and potential for future development.

I concur with the Council’s comments and recommendations.

c:     Martina Alberti, Professor and Chair, Department of Psychology  
        Rebecca Aanerud, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Planning,  
                The Graduate School  
        Members of the Urban Design and Planning Review Committee  
        Members of the Graduate School Council  
        Augustine McCaffery, Senior Academic Program Specialist, The Graduate School