

Response to the *Department of Architecture, Masters of Science in Architecture Five year Program Review* report, dated February 29, 2008

The department wishes to thank the review committee for its efforts and careful assessment of our Masters of Science in Architecture program. Through all of our interactions with the committee, both in preparation for the visit and during the visit, we found its members to be well-prepared, open minded, and interested in the welfare of the program.

Overview:

As we understand it, the committee's report provides a positive endorsement of the M.S. in Architecture program, its importance to the department, and its viability over the long term. The report explicitly states that the necessity of the program is not in question, rather it provides advice about how the department might work to help the program evolve over the next ten years. At its conclusion the report enumerates six concrete recommendations for the department to implement. We find these recommendations to be positive and helpful; this note responds to each below.

Although we concur with many of the findings in the report, we do feel that there is some inconsistency between the committee's interpretation of the M.S. in Architecture program and our intentions for it. In the spirit of developing the program for long-term health, we would like to clarify our desires for the program, particularly where they differ from statements in the report.

Program Definition:

Section III of the report refers to the M.S. in Architecture as a "post-professional program". While we acknowledge that the M.S. in Architecture is a post-professional program for those students who already have an accredited architecture degree, we feel that this characterization does not fully address the mission of the program. Although the M.S. in Architecture should be intimately involved with issues germane to the professional practice of architecture, we feel that it is primarily an advanced research-oriented degree. In this regard its purpose is to explore aspects of the discipline of architecture broadly construed as a cultural and technological endeavor. The M.S. in Architecture is neither primarily a continuation of our professional offerings, nor a continuing education program for practicing architects.

This distinction is important because the department also offers a 1+year Master of Architecture (M.Arch.) explicitly designed as a "post-professional" degree program that more directly responds to current issues in the profession. The post-professional M.Arch. is not an advanced research degree. Rather, it offers design-oriented education for students who already have an accredited undergraduate or graduate degree in architecture. The department also offers a year-long certificate program, through UW Extension, to professional architects moving into senior management positions, the Design Firm Management and Leadership Certificate Program.

The report suggests in Section IV that the Design Computing stream, in particular, should respond to the needs of the profession, the impact of digital technologies on design process in professional practice, and "the integration of these practices with the various dimensions of building construction." Although research into these technologies is part of the mission of the Design Computing stream, we believe that the M.S. in Architecture program should be more concerned with exploring the possibilities inherent in these—and as yet un-developed—technologies, than with their investment in architecture as it is currently practiced. Research undertaken in the program should lead practice, rather than merely respond to it, through exploration of technologies that may not yet be found in architectural offices.

Although it may be true, as the report states in section IV.3, that "innovation in architectural design and in collaborative practices is increasingly centered in architectural firms rather than in architecture schools," we nevertheless believe that the M.S. in Architecture should push beyond the limits of architectural practice, in both the Design Computing and the History/Theory stream.

Student body:

The M.S. in Architecture is available to applicants who have neither professional accreditation in architecture, nor professional practice experience in the field. Although we will certainly have many applicants with these qualifications, we do not believe that either qualification should be a requirement for entry into the M.S. in Architecture program, which would be implied by its characterization as exclusively a post-professional degree.

Section IV.1 of the report suggests that the M.S. in Architecture program was created “to attract a critical mass of students interested in returning to or entering in to a more specialized and advanced sphere of professional practice.” While we see this as an important direction for many students in our program (and a number of its graduates have re-entered professional practice in this way) a primary mission of the program is to prepare students for Ph.D.s, advanced research, and academic careers in architecture. The report characterizes this group as “a small minority of enrolled students.” In fact, four of the eight graduates of the M.S. in Architecture program have enrolled in Ph.D. programs. The M.S. in Architecture curriculum is structured to prepare our students for advanced research, and has shown to be effective for students pursuing this path. With the recent addition of the stream in History/Theory, we expect the majority of students enrolled in the program to pursue more advanced degrees and/or academic careers.

The M.S. in Architecture curriculum:

In section IV.1 the report suggests changes the department should consider making to the M.S. in Architecture curriculum.

Section IV.1.a proposes that the department “enhance the individual mentoring of the current curriculum with a program of seminar/studio courses that would bring circa 5-10 students together in project-oriented collaborations.” This is the aim of Arch 588, Research Practice and Arch 597, Research Practicum, which are already established courses with close mentoring and collaboration opportunities. We would like to note also that the kind of collaborative work proposed is more practicable for students in the Design Computing stream than in the History/Theory stream.

Section IV.1.b proposes the creation of a “distinctive curriculum for the M.S. Arch. with advanced and specialized courses different from the M.Arch. courses and studios.” We feel it is important to reinforce here the idea of a “distinctive”, rather than a “distinct” set of courses for the M.S. in Architecture. Because the initial proposal for this program approved by the HEC Board did not include additional faculty resources, we have endeavored to develop an M.S. curriculum that allows M.S. students to focus appropriately, but which also makes courses available to M.Arch. students, who can use them to fulfill professional degree requirements. This allows us to increase course enrollments while also encouraging interaction between degree programs through the department’s course offerings.

The preceding addresses, to some extent, the committee’s suggestion in Section IV.2 of the report that “the Department consider the M.S.Arch curriculum as an innovative and transformative engine for the M.Arch. curriculum.” While we agree with the spirit of this suggestion, we would shift its emphasis somewhat: we do not expect the M.S. program to transform the professional M.Arch. curriculum, which is naturally and strongly driven by current demands of the profession of architecture; rather, we anticipate that interaction among M.Arch. and M.S. in Architecture students will “raise the bar” for M.Arch. students, by increasing their own expectations and enhancing the quality of work they produce.

Committee recommendations/suggestions:

Having addressed the points above, the department acknowledges that all of the suggestions of the committee as enumerated in section VII of the report are helpful and workable, although we believe some require qualification.

1. The department agrees that addition of more streams to the M.S. in Architecture program should wait until the current streams are more firmly established, but we feel that there should be no fixed timetable.

2. The department will develop a strategic plan for the M.S. in Architecture program and submit it for approval by the Department of Architecture faculty before the end of autumn quarter 2008.

3. The department will create an advisory committee for the M.S. in Architecture program as soon as practicable, and consult with it in the creation of a strategic plan.

4. Recommendations specific to the Design Computing stream are appropriate, and will be addressed directly in the strategic plan.

5. The department plans to improve marketing efforts in concert with other programs offered by the Department of Architecture, an issue addressed in the department's 2007 strategic plan.

6. The department will work with the new M.S. Arch. advisory committee and the College of Architecture and Urban Planning Development Office to seek additional resources for the M.S. in Architecture Program.

Conclusions:

We would again like to thank the committee for its careful evaluation and positive review of our M.S. in Architecture program. We submit our response in this positive spirit to articulate more clearly our understanding of the M.S. in Architecture program. We have developed this program as an advanced degree that provides leadership on important issues and services the needs of the architectural profession by probing beyond the limits of current technologies in design computing and by expanding scholarship in the history and theory of architecture. We believe strongly that pursuit of this mission is important for the Department of Architecture, and is consistent with the high standards for research and scholarship set by the College of Architecture and Urban Planning, the Graduate School, and the University of Washington.