

**Interdisciplinary PhD Program in
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Response to the Report of the Review of the
UW Interdisciplinary Urban Design and Planning Ph.D.
January 25, 2005

To: Betty Feetham
Acting Dean, The Graduate School

Bob Mugerauer
Dean, College of Architecture and Urban Planning

David C. Hodge
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

From: Marina Alberti, Interim Director
Interdisciplinary Urban Design and Planning Ph.D. Program

On the behalf of the *Interdisciplinary Ph.D. Program in Urban Design and Planning* I thank the Ph.D. Review Committee for their thoughtful comments and constructive input provided in the Review Report of December 7, 2004. This document reflects our response to the findings and recommendations of the Ph.D. Review Committee.

Program Strengths

We share the Review Committee's view that the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. Program in Urban Design and Planning has improved significantly over the past 5 years, and today is a program on the brink of becoming a top-tier program. We concur that these changes are primarily due to:

- Creating and maintaining a broad and truly interdisciplinary faculty and curriculum
- Significantly improving focus and intellectual sophistication
- Substantially increasing research activity
- Dramatically increasing external funding.

We are pleased to hear that according to the Review Committee we have responded to the concerns raised in 1998 and particularly:

- Clarified program goals, student requirements and general program policies
- Dramatically increased student funding
- Defined core and affiliate faculty based on level of involvement with the program
- Dramatically increased research activity through funded research
- Created a clear set of expectations for first-year students
- Worked with the Dean of the College of Architecture and Urban Planning to obtain space for the program and its students.

We believe that these changes have established the foundations to build an excellent program. Adopting a clear intellectual focus has strengthened the quality of the applicants and provided the program with a clear identity. The new curriculum and new course sequence more effectively provide students with the theoretical and methodological foundations of the planning discipline and prepare students to undertake original research. The new structure has also provided more certainty and allowed students to navigate more effectively through the program. Obtaining extramural research funding has made our program one of the most productive in research areas such as land use modeling, urban ecology, urban form, and growth management. It has also made the program more competitive by offering multi-year funding offers to top applicants. Redefining its governance has provided the program with the flexibility and resources to achieve its objectives more efficiently.

We share the Review Committee's view that our program's greatest strength is its interdisciplinarity. The program has pioneered pursuing interdisciplinary graduate education and research in the direction envisioned by the National Academy of Science Report recently released. We are thankful to our faculty, students and administration for the progress we have been able to accomplish in creating an intellectually vital community of scholars.

The program is today ready to engage in the next phase of long-term visioning and strategic planning. In line with the recommendations of the Review Committee we think that this effort should address four major aspects: 1) long term research priorities and program competitive advantages, 2) strategies for establishing stable and diversified funding, 3) incentives for maintaining an active participation of the faculty and involving more effectively junior faculty, and 4) more explicit mechanisms of governance.

We believe that the program's remarkable successes and great potential noted by the Committee makes this program a success for the UW community and a valuable resource for our national reputation.

Responses to Recommendations

1. Continuing Status, end of provisional

We welcome the recommendation that the program should be placed on "continuing" status.

2. Location

We share the view that the program's dual location – based in the Graduate School, with most day-to-day operation in the Department of Urban Design and Planning – is the best arrangement and a key to sustaining the interdisciplinary nature of the program.

3. Diversification of funding

We agree that the diversification of funding must be a priority to ensure the sustainability of the Program in the next future. We intend to pursue this through the strategic planning effort that we expect to begin next academic year. This should include several of the methods suggested by the review committee, including collaborating with participating UW units to achieve commitments from the Deans of Colleges and Chairs involved in the Program to commit RA/TAs to faculty actively participating in the program. We also aim to create a development plan for obtaining permanent endowment funds. We will work in collaboration with other Interdisciplinary efforts at the UW (i.e. the Earth Initiative) to pursue interdisciplinary faculty hires and the creation of other shared resources across UW units that share similar challenges in maintaining an interdisciplinary structure.

4. Incentives for faculty participation

In general, the problem of incentives for faculty, especially junior faculty, to participate in interdisciplinary programs is a UW wide challenge and requires UW wide responses. Currently the University structure for recognizing grants and responsibilities for courses are still unit-based and discourages interdisciplinary work. With respect to our program, we do share the concern that the junior faculty face greater barriers to participate in a program that is by nature voluntary. As noted by the Review Committee, the faculty involved in the program often do so on top of their Departmental commitments. This is not a viable option for the junior faculty. We plan on creating incentives for junior faculty by negotiating with the UW units involved in the Program to dedicate RA resources to junior faculty involved in the program and buying time from teaching in the program. We also plan on giving priority to junior faculty when assigning graduate school fellowships for graduate students.

We do agree that the annual symposium is an extremely valuable event that allows everyone involved in the program to interact and that it fosters interdisciplinary engagement. This year we are partnering with the Northwestern Center for Livable Communities and the Urban Ecology Program to hold a Symposium on "Rethinking Growth Management" by inviting a diverse panel of national academic speakers and practitioners from the region. We aim at producing a white paper as a result of the Symposium. We intend to expand the role of the Annual Symposium as an incentive for greater faculty participation and student-faculty interaction with the broader UW community.

5. More effective administration

We do think that one of the major obstacles to effective administration has primarily been the transitional nature of the program. This necessary program transition to new requirements and structure has placed some stress on the program administration and created some burden for the students. We do plan on improving administration in three ways:

- Creating more explicit documentation about requirements and providing protocols and lists of course substitutions that will facilitate expeditious and timely decisions. We will add administrative support to help create such documentation and make it available on-line.
- Starting immediately, we will hold a monthly hour every first Friday of the month (called Friday Feedback) where the Program Director and administrative assistant will be available to discuss issues and ideas that the students wish to bring to the attention of the Program.
- We will organize orientations for faculty, in addition to the students orientations, to ensure that faculty advisors are knowledgeable about program requirements and procedures.

Although we recognize and agree with the intent of the recommendation of the review committee to propose appointing a Deputy Director to assist in managing the program, we believe that due to the small size of the program there are more effective and sustainable ways to accomplish the intent of the recommendation. Much of the burden alluded to in the review committee report arises from the need of students to request course waivers and substitutions, often on very short notice before registration ends. We propose to clarify and streamline program procedures, especially with regard to reviewing courses for waiver or substitution, and to schedule hours for the Program Coordinator in Gould Hall, to be more directly available to students. In addition, we propose to lay out clearer deadlines for requesting course waivers and substitutions, so that these requests can be handled within the available time constraints.

6. Governance

We do agree that Governance is perhaps the area where important changes can be made now that the program has achieved a more flexible structure by defining explicit criteria for participation in the core and affiliate faculty groups. We intend to formalize some of the mechanisms for more direct and broad involvement of the faculty and students in important Program decisions. In particular we intend to involve the core faculty to:

- nominate and approve members of the steering committee
- be involved in key decisions such as admissions, curriculum revisions, and strategic planning.

We share the confidence of the Review Committee in the leadership of the program, and agree that Paul Waddell should continue as Program Director if he desires to do so. On the other hand, we acknowledge the request of Professor Waddell to initiate a process to transition his Directorship (See attached e-mail to the Steering Committee) and will start a process for

nominating the new Program Director to a term of 3-4 years aiming to have a new Program Director appointment made by the Graduate School Dean by the beginning of summer.

7. Vision and Strategic plan

We plan to engage in a strategic planning process starting early next year to answer some of key questions on the future of the field in light of the new report of the National Academy of Science on facilitating Interdisciplinary Research. We anticipate defining a strategic planning process early this Spring in collaboration with the Core faculty and students to lay out goals and a strategy to accomplish by the end of the 2005-06 academic year. This process will address both substantive questions on the future of the field and issues of governance. We will shape this process to answer the questions posed by the Review Committee, and in particular:

- Where is the field going and where does the interdisciplinary program fit within the field?
- Where does the interdisciplinary program have a competitive advantage? How will it maintain it?
- What areas should the program develop? What will be its niche?
- What are the program's goals for its graduates? What mentorship activities are needed? How can faculty appointments and curriculum development help students prepare for careers that are both innovative and responsive to available positions?
- What are the relationships between the interdisciplinary program, programs in urban ecology and the Ph.D. in the Built Environment?
- What resources does the program need and what are its strategies for obtaining them?
- How can the program sustain the current level of student activity and collegiality?

As part of our strategic planning exercise it is among our priorities to clearly define the niche for our program and establish how the program can nurture core concerns in planning and urban design that are not currently highly funded or represented by faculty or student intellectual focus.

We welcome the recommendation of publishing a regular program report to record important accomplishments and to monitor its progress towards stated goals and intend to accomplish this on a bi-annual basis.

8. Critical mass

We do agree that achieving a critical mass of faculty is important for achieving national and international prominence of the program and should be pursued through all the possible venues indicated by the Review Committee. The addition of a minimum of 2 or 3 faculty positions is a priority, but clearly difficult in the current state budget environment. We plan to negotiate with the UW units engaged in the program to develop a strategy for joint hires and buying faculty time (especially for junior faculty) to be dedicated to the program. We also plan on negotiating with the various units involved to create incentives to achieve more active engagement with other faculty and particularly junior faculty. We intend to explore the opportunities to share resources with the Built Environment Ph.D. program and UW units to develop interdisciplinary research design and method courses that could be co-taught across multiple units on campus. As

was mentioned in the report, the Graduate School has previously considered the idea of faculty appointments that would be at least partially university appointments, as a means of supporting interdisciplinary activity. Central administration support for interdisciplinary faculty is potentially the only viable means to obtain funding for adding interdisciplinary faculty lines or buying out parts of existing faculty lines in order to create a foundation for excellent interdisciplinary programs.

Subject:

Directorship of the Interdisciplinary PhD

From:

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Jean Rogers <jeanp@u.washington.edu>, Paul Waddell <pwaddell@u.washington.edu>

Dear Steering Committee Members

I am writing to propose transitioning the Directorship of the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. Program in Urban Design and Planning. First, I want to thank Marina Alberti and all of you for making the review process a great success. We have come a long way over the past several years, and the results of our combined efforts are apparent to us and our students, and were well recognized in the review committee report.

The review committee indicated that the program is ready to move to continuing status, and laid out some solid ideas on how to move the program solidly into the top tier in the nation. They indicated that they had confidence in the leadership of the program, and that I should continue as Program Director if I desired to do so, but they also indicated that the governance should be more open, with clear procedures for appointment and terms, and should seek to involve more junior participants. An additional consideration is that I have directed the program for four years, and am on sabbatical this year. I think this is the right time to have the Steering Committee and the Core faculty in the program undertake a process of selecting a new Program Director and increasing the involvement of Core faculty in the program, especially junior faculty. I propose that the process of nominating a Program Director to a term of 3-4 years should be undertaken this winter and spring, so that the process could take place on a comfortable schedule and result in an appointment by the Graduate School Dean by the beginning of summer.

I am pleased with what we have accomplished together, and am prepared to continue contributing to the advancement of the program in any capacity that seems useful, including Steering Committee membership. This is a good time for someone else to take the role of Program Director and to bring to it a fresh perspective and new energy for the next stage of the development of the program. The program is healthy, and poised to accomplish even more in the next several years.

Regards,

Paul Waddell