



Response to the Report of the Review of the
UW Interdisciplinary Urban Design and Planning Ph.D.
July 24, 2014

To: David Eaton
Dean, Graduate School

Rebecca Aanerud
Associate Dean, Graduate School

John Schaufelberger
Dean, College of Built Environment

Judith Howard
Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

From: Marina Alberti, 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 Review Committee for their thoughtful comments and constructive input provided in the Review Report of March 11, 2014. This document reflects our response to the findings and recommendations of the Ph.D. Review Committee.

Program Successes

We share the Review Committee's view that the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. Program in Urban Design and Planning is "healthy and successful" and an asset to its students, the Graduate School, CBE, UW, and the discipline of urban planning as a result of its:

- strong research leadership by faculty from UDP and other units
- signature research areas. The UW program faculty and students are internationally known for their strengths especially in the areas of
 - urban ecology
 - public health dimensions of urban design and planning
 - range of additional research foci that enrich the breadth of training in the Ph.D. program, such as, East Asian urbanization research, food systems planning and broader issues of infrastructure finance (including transportation, water, and electricity)
- successful model of interdisciplinary training that ensures students graduate with depth in urban planning and the intellectual breadth and skills to work across disciplinary boundaries
- administration by a steering committee and core faculty drawn from a range of disciplines, perpetuating the interdisciplinary culture to the Ph.D. program
- dedicated faculty, administration and staffing that have ensured the vitality and continued success of the Ph.D. program
- a student body of diverse intellectual backgrounds and interests chosen annually from deep applicant pools
- successful students, who obtain jobs in urban planning and other disciplines.
Notably, 43 of the past 47 graduates have achieved employment in

professional/ academic positions, and many have become leaders in the field.

We also share the Review Committee's view that our program's greatest strength is having established a "successful model of interdisciplinary training" and the significant engagement of dedicated and energetic faculty from within and beyond UDP. The high quality and diversity of the student body has been a key ingredient to the program intellectual vitality.

At the same time a Program with such interdisciplinary structure poses significant pedagogic and institutional challenges. As noted by the Committee the program "remains vibrant and active" despite several challenges and constraints that would seem to work against the ongoing effectiveness of the program including: 1) the limited availability or predictability of student funding opportunities and the consequent difficulty in recruiting and supporting top students and sufficiently large cohorts; 2) the limited incentives for faculty involvement in an interdisciplinary program from multiple units which already have their disciplinary Ph.D. programs; 3) the difficulties in maintaining a curriculum structure that meets the needs of students entering with different backgrounds; and 4) the complexity of administration of an interdisciplinary Ph.D. program under multiple chains of authority.

Despite these challenges, we think that the interdisciplinary nature of our Program provides us with a strategic advantage in addressing the emerging societal challenges. The growing interest in urban research in many UW departments and colleges provides us with a unique opportunity for advancing interdisciplinary scholarship and education. As part of our current strategic planning initiatives, the Program is exploring the opportunities to create a cluster of independent UW Ph.D. Programs that have a focus on urban issues, which could expand their sustainability by sharing pedagogy and resources. A significant step in this direction was achieved with this year Ph.D. Annual Symposium, which focused on the emergence of the urban centrality and the challenges and opportunities for Ph.D. Interdisciplinary Education. The Symposium attracted great attention from UW and beyond and established initial collaborations across several units including the College of Public Health, the College of the Environment, UW E-Science, and the UW Center for Advanced Computing.

Response to the Recommendations

We welcome the overall recommendations that the Program have continuing status with the next full review in ten years and that we provide an interim report in five years. As stated in the self-study we intend to embark on a new strategic planning effort following the Strategic Plan of 2008-2013, in which we will be addressing the specific recommendations of the Review Committee in more detail, including the following.

Funding

1. Secure more and consistent funding for students. As stated in the Review Committee Report, "At a minimum, it is imperative that the program be able to maintain current cohort sizes in the face of reductions in financial support." As funding for students derives primarily from faculty grant support and funding from the Graduate School has decreased, it is imperative that we receive more secure, predictable, and consistent funds to offer incoming students. We need a doubling of resources in order to offer incoming students competitive offers, secure top applicants and maintain the current cohort size. As the

Urban Cluster idea develops, we will continue to explore the opportunities to expand the incoming class size. But student funding is crucial to doing that.

2. Regarding developing new undergraduate courses that will appeal to a larger number of students to generate additional TA-ships, the Department of Urban Design and Planning is already involved in this and has indicated a strong commitment to continue doing so.

Monitoring

3. Continue efforts of ongoing assessment of program structure, curriculum, and student needs. We will continue to evolve the core curriculum, as we engage in strategic planning and explore the Urban Cluster formation.

Shared resources

4. Maintain and expand efforts to cultivate effectiveness of the shared student work space. We will continue to explore ideas of more effectively using the student space, so that more students find it useful. And to expand opportunities for more integrative activities among students, students will continue to meet bi-weekly for student colloquium where they read and discuss papers, and mentor peers regarding issues of course availability and content, conferences, campus and professional organizations, funding, etc. Research seminar presentations (student presentations open to the entire program) will continue every other week, and we will explore the ideas of expanding opportunities for social and intellectual interactions with the students in the Ph.D. Program in the Built Environment. Some of the shared activities we already have in place include: the annual social introduction gathering at the program orientation/welcome back meetings, occasional shared research seminars, and over-lapping interest area reading groups and blogs. Some new opportunities will arise as with the development of the Urban Cluster. Others might include: more regular coordination of research seminar presentations and shared symposia. We do of course recognize that these ideas are contingent on the willingness and cooperation of the Ph.D. Program in the Built Environment.

Metrics for Success

5. Develop tangible metrics for success. Tangible metrics will also be included in the strategic plan. We have been thinking about new criteria for assessing interdisciplinary programs and evaluating success especially through our IGERT Program. However to perform a similar study, it would require resources that are not available to us. We would be eager to lead such an effort if the Graduate School or central UW administration would be interested in providing resources in this direction.
6. Continue to clarify the brand identity. Brand identity will be explored in the upcoming strategic plan. This will also evolve with the Urban Cluster exploration.

Governance

7. Regarding “reinstating the “associate director” position... [to]share the duties of the director,” although the program has never had an associate director, it is an excellent idea

to formalize training of a possible successor. We do believe however that due to the small size of the program a more effective and sustainable way to accomplish the intent of the recommendation is by hiring a post-doc who could help with the strategic visioning of an interdisciplinary program and potentially coordinate the UW Cluster Initiative. We welcome support from the University in order to do this. And we will continue to rotate some responsibilities through the IPPUDP steering committee.

University Assistance

We agree with the recommendation that the University maintain intellectual, administrative, and financial support for the program and direct new funds to the program to increase the number of student support packages available. As is documented both in the self study report and the review committee report, faculty grants are already contributing the bulk of student funding, and the program cannot maintain the current level of success without being able to provide multi-year funding offers to incoming students. We feel that at the minimum we need the Graduate School to double the research assistantships and fellowships it provides on an annual basis (from 3, 9-month research assistantships and 1 fellowship/year to 6, 9-month research assistantships and 2 fellowships/year). This would allow us to offer three years of funding to top applicants, with the understanding that faculty grants would provide support for years 3-4.

Other needed assistance from the University includes:

- as mentioned above, a post-doctoral fellow trained in education and innovation perhaps through an IGERT Program could play a vital role in exploring new ways of dealing with the challenges of interdisciplinary programs and coordinate the current explorations and possible implementation of a UW Urban Cluster. Furthermore he/she could be an effective liaison between the students and the Program's diverse faculty and unique administrative structure.
- a full time administrative coordinator to address the need of students to support the Director's administrative tasks and streamline program procedures, especially with regard to reviewing courses for waiver or substitution, and to address request course waivers and substitutions.

We also agree with the recommendation of exploring economies of scales across campus to reduce costs, as is outlined in our plan to explore creating a UW cluster of independent Ph.D. Programs that has a focus on urban issues by sharing both pedagogy and resources. Some of the possible resource sharing (and other) benefits might be: collective classes, co-hosting symposia (combining funds), shared seminars, provide a mechanism for classes to meet together, enriched core curriculum, administrative advantages, potential appeal for top applicants, communication, email lists, etc., funding for an endowed fellowship, an Endowed Chair in Urban Studies, and combine development efforts.

The University could assist these efforts by reversing some of the constraints put on departments and schools through adoption of Activity-Based Budgeting.

Finally, we welcome the Review Committee recommendation of the University working to create incentives for participation of junior and other faculty in interdisciplinary activities.

Future Directions

With the world becoming increasingly urban our field of knowledge and practice is becoming increasingly central to both academia and society. A long term strategy is to create a UW cluster of independent Ph.D. Programs that will have a focus on urban issues by sharing pedagogy and resources (based on the IGERT model). The Urban Cluster would catalyze the energy of a diversity of Ph.D. programs and provide several practical benefits: collective classes, co-hosting symposia (combining funds), shared seminars, provide a mechanism for classes to meet together, enriched core curriculum, administrative advantages, potential appeal for top applicants, communication, email lists, etc., funding for an endowed fellowship, an Endowed Chair in Urban Studies, combine development efforts. But more importantly, we see this as a way to reframe education and more effectively address the future urbanization of the planet.