

Ten-Year Review of the Department of Architecture

Master of Architecture (M. Arch.)
Urban Design (Certificate)
Preservation Planning and Design (Certificate)
Bachelor of Arts (Architectural Studies)

Conducted by:

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15-16 February 2001

**Department of Architecture
University of Washington
Ten-Year Review**

SUMMARY OF PROCESS

On Monday, 16 October 2000, The Graduate School formed a committee to oversee the ten-year review of the Department of Architecture's graduate and undergraduate programs. The committee consisted of Professor James J. Clauss, Department of Classics (Chair), Professor Judy M. Anderson, School of Art, Professor John F. Stanton, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, all of the University of Washington, Associate Dean Alan J. Plattus, School of Architecture, Yale University, and Associate Professor Susan Ubbelohde, Department of Architecture, University of California, Berkeley, CA.

A meeting of the internal Committee members with deans of the Graduate School, the College of Architecture and Urban Planning, and Undergraduate Education, and the Associate Provost for Academic Planning was held on Tuesday, 21 November 2000 from 1:30pm to 2:30pm in which the Committee's charge in the review was discussed. Prior to the two-day site visit, which was held on 15-16 February 2001, local members of the committee met several times with Chair Jeffrey Ochsner for a general tour of the facilities and in preparation for a preliminary meeting on 30 January 2001 with Dean Robert Mugerauer, the Architecture Executive Committee (Doug Zuberbuhler, Elaine LaTourelle, Galen Minah, Trina Deines, and Jeffrey Ochsner), Architecture Staff (Caroline Orr, Melinda Johns, and Kim Sawada), and CAUP Associate Dean (Gail Dubrow) and the Chairs of Landscape Architecture (Iain Robertson), Urban Design and Planning (Hilda Blanco), Construction Management (Saaed Daniali). The afternoon concluded with a final discussion with Jeffrey Ochsner.

All committee members were present for the two-day site visit Thursday 15 February-Friday 16 February 2001, held in Architecture Hall 202, when we met with the professors and students individually or in groups (see Appendix A for the list of interviewees). Following a review of the interviews in executive session, four members of the committee (one had left earlier that day because of illness) met with UW administrators (John Slattery, Debra Friedman, and Robert Mugerauer) for an exit interview and preliminary assessment of the programs.

FINDINGS

The Department of Architecture at the University of Washington has a crucial role to play in the architectural scene in the greater Seattle community, the state, and the Pacific Northwest in general. It is also a venue for intellectual exchange and ferment, the place where future practitioners are broadly educated. The department's Design/Build programs in the Seattle area and its interest and work in cost-effective constructions (e.g., program in Mexico), sustainable design (e.g., certificate program in lighting design), and computer design make it the central clearing house for innovative work in the region. Local architects will increasingly depend on such innovative programs and knowledge-generating aspects of the department and university as the profession moves into the new century. This couples nicely with the already established direction of the department as it moves from a predominantly practice-based focus on design to a balanced practice- and knowledge-based unit. The department faces some stiff challenges, but challenges we feel the faculty and students are interested in, and capable of, taking on. In the report that

follows, we look at current departmental strengths, issues of concern, and we make recommendations in the light of our findings.

I. CURRENT DEPARTMENTAL STRENGTHS

1. FACULTY

The faculty is productive (particularly as viewed from the point of view of Boyer's four categories of scholarship—discovery, integration, application, and teaching), well balanced, and covers a wide array of disciplinary issues, both professional and historical/theoretical. The department also has a close and productive working relationship with the local community, as seen in the vital contacts with architectural firms and participation in community projects. Moreover, the dedication of the faculty to the interests of the department as a whole and especially of the students was found to be exceptional. They are a group whose collegiality is based on respect among a diversity of views.

The students we interviewed noted that the faculty always make themselves available and considered the departmental faculty to be "exciting."

The professionals who addressed the committee felt that in the past decade the department has hired faculty whose new ideas have helped to stimulate the local architectural community; they also noted that the combination of academic and practice-based work undertaken by the faculty had a positive effect in the department's contribution to the local profession and general architectural discourse in the region. The same group expressed the belief that graduates of the program are highly regarded in the profession and have a much broader education (thanks in part to the foreign study programs) than graduates from other programs, including Harvard.

Recent hires have enhanced an already distinguished faculty and have added to the department's national standing. In the case of the new design-computing staff, the stage has been set for the development of what has become a critical area of study in architecture, which will also link to other computer-based research on campus.

2. STUDENTS

The students we interviewed (undergraduates, graduate students, and recent graduates of the MArch program) came across as uniformly excellent. As reasons for choosing the UW architecture program, they cited the broadly based curriculum, the opportunity to study architecture in an environment like Seattle, the Design/Build program, foreign study opportunities, and the involvement of local architects from prominent firms. Recent graduates identified the lecture series, jury service, teaching opportunities, and the community orientation of the Design/Build projects as important links between themselves and their alma mater.

3. CURRICULUM

The department's broadly conceived basic curriculum, consisting of early fundamentals classes, studio, history and theory, is the backbone of its strength and success. The solid curriculum and superb teaching have provided the intellectual wherewithal for the students to gain maximum benefit from the subsidiary programs that the department offers. The following have been identified as providing significant contributions to the program.

A. Foreign Study

The area of concentration most often mentioned by students, faculty, and local practitioners as a distinctive part of the program is the diverse group of foreign study opportunities that the department offers. Programs in Asia (Hong Kong, Japan, India), Latin America (Mexico), and Europe (England, Italy, Germany, Scandinavia) have by all accounts strengthened student commitment to the field, broadened their intellectual horizons, created contacts with foreign practitioners and scholars, and provided the spring board toward a more global understanding of their chosen field. The Design/Build program in Mexico has attracted international attention; each year ca. 30 students participate. The study abroad programs have also created opportunities for undergraduates to interact more closely with graduate students, an experience which leads the former to a better understanding of the importance and methodologies of research. The local practitioners stated that, in reviewing the background of a potential employee, they typically look for the breadth of education and experience that such programs can provide.

B. Design/Build

Roughly one quarter of incoming graduate students state that the Design/Build facet of the program was a significant reason for their choice of the UW architecture program. The courses offered in Design/Build not only offer students the opportunity to execute, and examine the results of, their designs, but also allow them, particularly in the study abroad programs, to integrate theory, design, materials, and culture. The courses are prime for linkage with other departments both within the college (Construction Management) and university (cultural studies in the College of Arts and Sciences). The departmental facilities, including the shop and the photo lab are important—and unique—resources critical to the success of these courses.

C. Design Computing

With the recent hire of Ellen Do, Mark Gross, and Brian Johnson, plus the installation of a design computer lab, the department has done much toward catching up with the use of computer science in architecture. The linkage with other computer-based work on campus (computer science, art, music, drama) and the potential to bring in outside funding are but two of the advantages that the new group brings to the mix.

II. ISSUES OF CONCERN FOR THE DEPARTMENT

1. DEPARTMENTAL DIRECTION

One of the primary issues facing the department is whether to continue offering a broad architectural education through its basic curriculum or a more focused one. The issue might be resolved by going back to the strategic plan and making some hard decisions on prioritizing goals in order to help define the direction for the future. If the department continues to offer a broad Masters experience in Architecture, perhaps a more focused (topical) PhD. program would both help define the department while providing greater depth to the curriculum. Such an approach could also help give definition and balance to the dual directions within the college: professional practice (scholarship of application) and scholarly/creative research (scholarship of discovery and integration). However, the presence of a PhD program per se will not automatically improve the first professional degree program. The department needs to consider the individual strengths of both degrees, and the potential cost in terms of staffing, resources, and money involved in initiating a new program. We discuss the issues involving a PhD program below.

2. FACULTY

The ethic of consensus that is a hallmark and a strength of this department paradoxically has a potential downside: 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. The result is the potential loss of the traditional areas of strength enjoyed by the department. To the faculty's credit, they have all absorbed the extra work created by the loss of positions, as is evident from the students' remarks and their tangible successes. The situation, however, cannot continue without considerable faculty burnout and/or loss of effectiveness. Hard decisions need to be made.

On a related issue, these days junior faculty facing promotion throughout the university are judged primarily on the basis of their scholarly work. Yet junior faculty in architecture spend a considerable amount of time in the class-room or in the studio. The college and university for their part will need to recognize that Promotion and Tenure Committee decisions must be made on a basis that is consistent with departmental demands. The most productive approach would be to make the resources available to the department that would allow it to encourage scholarly pursuit among faculty, who can then not only meet the demands of the P&T Committee but also can engage in discourse among the world-wide architectural community. If this cannot be made to happen, the Chair needs to provide some slack in the classroom demands of the junior faculty so that they can do what is needed for tenure.

A major factor in the situation as described is the considerable loss of FTEs. The department has shrunk from 40 to 25 faculty lines over the past 20 or so years and every aspect of the program has taken the hit. Horizontal cutting like this, while democratic, threatens to undermine the centers of excellence that have given the department national and international distinction. A case in point is the department's certificate program in lighting design. Marietta Millet had established a significant national and international reputation for the department relative to lighting and day-lighting, with Joel Loveland joining her and extending both the research and practice aspects in addition to teaching. Professor Millet accomplished this largely through her research funding and national participation professionally. Loveland's program of working between the world of practice and the department is laudable, but he cannot carry the academic or research side by himself in that situation. Not to fill Professor Millet's position would be a great loss, and not only to the Seattle area. She has always been a strong player in the synergy of the West Coast schools in the area of energy/lighting/sustainability, which is important to the country and to international students and architects. The fact is, issues of sustainability are much larger and more important and more urgent than just lighting issues. The department really needs to address them more broadly than they currently do, and with a grounding in design as well as technology. As the department looks to replace recent retirements, the difficult choice between balance and strength will have to be made.

Another area where the department has suffered significant loss is among the faculty who focus on structures, having experienced a loss from five to two full-time slots. The current staff can only cover the most basic courses, such that new issues in this critical area of the discipline cannot be addressed in advanced studios.

An issue that all professional schools face is accreditation and it can be a matter of considerable anxiety. Moreover, it can, if allowed, become a goal instead of an assumption. The department has shown great resiliency over the past two decades and

has in its most recent review received high marks from the national accreditation board (NAAB). Given this success, departmental administration and faculty can and should now focus less on the criteria of accreditation and more on the disciplinary and interdisciplinary goals of the faculty and students.

2. STUDENTS

A. Support

Student financial support ranges from nothing to negligible to minimal at best (hourly positions). The most significant support that students receive comes in the form of in-state tuition for those who come from outside of Washington. What makes a bad situation worse is the fact that, different from medical, law, and other professional schools, graduating architects can only anticipate a typical starting salary of ca. \$35,000 per annum, hardly a strong position for the repayment of student loans. This situation may explain in part why many students end up going on to other fields (e.g., graphics, industrial design, software development, etc.), although, it should be added, the fact that graduates of the program have career options in related fields is in itself a very good sign, a reflection of the growth of dot.coms and need for web design, *inter alia*.

The study of architecture at the UW provides not only future practitioners, but also leadership in, and development of, a field which has the ability to address significant environmental issues that architecture faces today. For this reason, it is incumbent on the department, with the assistance of the college and university, to develop new resources to support future architects. The self-study speaks of the department being given RAs (in addition to TAs). In most of the university, a TA is paid for from university funds, and helps in the teaching of classes, labs, etc. An RA is someone who is paid from a research grant obtained from outside sources. Thus if a faculty member wants an RA, (s)he has to write a proposal and get money him/herself. The university typically does not provide them. Unfortunately, the sources available to architects are less numerous than those available to scientists; they do exist, however, within certain specialist areas and the department should make every effort to secure some support from these resources. Furthermore, there appears to be relatively little competition for some grant funds within NSF, NEA, etc, so they appear easier to get in many cases. Conducting funded research does not require a PhD program, but the converse is true. Thus, the faculty would do well at the very least to start looking for grant money now. The advantages are obvious: the possibility of attracting the best students (a large number of the top applicants are lost to other programs that offer such support); research support for faculty who are currently spending time making up for lost faculty positions; and the opportunity for graduate students to have teaching experience and give relief to faculty in undergraduate courses.

B. The Masters Thesis.

Faculty and students alike called our attention to the problems that beset this major component of the MArch degree. These include the following:

- o Many students have noted a lack of clarity and direction at this stage of the degree. While the program is structured such that students address disciplinary issues systematically, they are not sufficiently prepared to take on a project of the scope and depth required by the MArch. As a result, in many cases work on the thesis has dragged on far too long and has overlapped with the beginning of professional careers. The process has proved to be too open ended.

- o Students have also commented on the lack of a sense of closure by way of a formal show which can be attended by other students who are also working toward their degrees. They long for the opportunities that will expose their work to critical juries as preparation for the real world and for their junior colleagues to take part in the process of acculturation that is crucial for life after graduate school. Distinguished visitors from beyond the Seattle area have been identified as important participants in such reviews.
- o Supervision of Masters theses is not well distributed among the faculty. For the faculty, this is inequitable, especially for those part-time, practicing, faculty who are often called upon to supervise theses when they are not teaching. It is also unsatisfactory for the students, because faculty supervising many theses simultaneously do not have the time available to provide the supervision that the thesis deserves. This suggests to the students that a thesis has less value than other undertakings, such as classes or studio. Providing teaching credit for supervising theses would go some way to alleviating the problems.

Everyone on the faculty is aware of the problem and, in fact, the creation of a seminar that prepares students for research on the MArch thesis was approved by the faculty recently, but resources for the creation of this course were not available. Given that the attrition rate in the program is highest between completion of course work and that of the degree, faculty and administration need to address the problem by way of teaching assignments (the creation of a proseminar or pre-thesis studio) and resources (new FTEs). The possible creation of two options, in one which the thesis would be replaced by a final studio class, was broached during the interviews and was felt to be an approach worth consideration.

Other issues noted by the students include: (1) a paucity of visiting professors from the national and international scene; (2) lack of interface and communication with other departments in the college, as evidenced by the conflict of schedules with Construction Management; (3) a desire for a better structured advising system (though they all agreed that communication between students and individual faculty was direct and immediate).

3. RESOURCES

A. Faculty and Visiting Scholars

As mentioned above, one of the greatest losses that the department has faced is personnel, with the loss of almost a third of its FTEs. In addition to the adverse effects on the graduate program, also mentioned above, the erosion suffered equally by all segments of the program has resulted in the reduction in the number of undergraduate majors by half beginning in 1992. In fact, it is not clear how the department can actually staff the number of courses for graduates and undergraduates that are currently on the books. Given the pressure the university faces in increasing undergraduate enrollments, it is essential that the number of faculty be increased if the needs of the new students are to be met.

Aside from the main departmental graduate and undergraduate programs, the department also participates in two interdisciplinary certificate programs run within CAUP (Preservation Planning and Design and Urban Design). A strength of the certificate programs lies in the fact that they can be completed largely within the MArch program and that, different from non-certificate students, students in these programs share a graduate program coordinator. At present, the Urban Design certificate is sound, being largely overseen by the Department of Urban Planning. The Preservation Planning and

Design program is more dependent upon Architecture, whose hiring procedure of considering studio expertise first does not guarantee the future of this program. In short, there is need for a college-wide perspective in support of these interdepartmental programs. Here too the department needs to identify its short and long term strategic goals.

Faculty and students identified the need for further contact and enrichment from extramural professors and professionals to complement their education from UW faculty. On the one hand, funds need to be made available for UW faculty to travel to other universities and conferences; on the other hand, visiting professors need to be invited to sit on juries, offer lectures, and give courses for an entire quarter.

B. Staff

In addition to faculty, the department depends on four staff who serve ca. 25 full-time faculty, 5 emeriti, 2 joint appointees, 8 adjuncts, 5 full-time lecturers and a considerable number of part-time instructors who are practicing architects. In addition to this, they tend to the needs of 175 graduate students and 100 undergraduate majors. One area of departmental life that is adversely affected by the limited number of staff is admissions to the graduate program. The 15 faculty members of the graduate admissions committee (over half of the full-time faculty) spend upwards of between 10-40 hours in the winter quarter dealing with student files, even to the point of providing detailed feedback to those not accepted into the program (60 of the 400-500 applicants each year are accepted). In short, an equation can be made between the lack of resources and the tendency of the faculty to make up for that out of their own time and energy, thereby undermining the creative work necessary for faculty development and departmental intellectual growth. This cycle needs to be broken or the school will not advance to the next level of quality as it deserves to.

C. Space

In addition to faculty and staff, the department faces a constant problem with space. The study of architecture depends on dedicated studio space, which amounts to a design table for each student for an entire quarter. One of the recognized strengths of the department is that it limits studios to 12 students. While all departments and programs on campus face issues pertaining to space, architecture is particularly dependent on this precious commodity for studios and so present and future enrollments, graduate and undergraduate, are and will be predicated upon decisions regarding allocation of classroom space.

All of these issues require new resources, whether from the state or outside funding (the local practitioners identified donors representing the "new philanthropy" as potential resources for environmental issues, technology, K-12 education). It is therefore incumbent upon the department to prioritize its needs and consider a number of approaches to funding their identified goals. For instance, the department should submit a list of desiderata for inclusion in the upcoming capital campaign; work closely with the newly appointed development officer in the college; and initiate a long-term program of seeking external funding for those projects which will attract the kind of dollars which will not only support faculty research, but also TA- and RAships. Given current fiscal trends in academia, the department, sad to say, can no longer expect to receive adequate funds from the state alone, but must be prepared to generate some income from private and governmental sources. The avenues for such dollars are already available in the areas of energy conservation, computer applications, K-12 education, etc.

D. Computer Equipment

Installation of the new design computer lab, an impressive leap forward for the department, has not, however, raised the overall level of departmental computing to that required by the profession at large. The use of computers in the world of practice is growing exponentially and upgrading is happening at an even faster and faster pace. The department needs a computer system—including hardware, software, technical support, and management—that benefits all students. Given that now architectural firms typically upgrade computers and software every two to three years, the department, with college and university help, must acquire, and as soon as possible, the kind of computer resources that will prepare graduates adequately for this crucial facet of their professional careers.

4. THE PHD

CAUP and the Department of Architecture are currently considering the possibility of bringing the PhD in Urban Design back from the Graduate School to the College and including architecture within the degree. Such a proposition responds to a nationwide swing in this direction. There are a number of reasons for beginning such a program (competition among peer and superior departments, the research focus that such a program necessitates, etc.). But there are a number of issues that would need to be addressed before moving in this direction.

- o Critical mass in areas of research among the faculty would have to be achieved first (such as history/theory, design computing, building techniques).
- o Careful consideration of how the department will handle the tension that naturally exists between research and design studio.
- o Support for graduate students in the form of fellowships, RAs, and TAs would have to be secured.
- o Collaboration with the other departments in CAUP and in the university at large would have to be identified and agreed upon.
- o The faculty will have to change gears in terms of publication. In most disciplines, acceptance of the work of faculty and students in books and reviewed articles is the measure of the intellectual strength of the program. Changing the Departmental culture to one that expects refereed publication of all faculty would be a good way of preparing for the PhD program.

A fully implemented PhD program should have the beneficial effect of enhancing research among faculty and students alike and raise the department's status among peer institutions. The faculty need to have a hard, realistic discussion about the PhD program, however. The discussion should focus on what the PhD program would really cost the department (in terms of time, change of departmental culture, the possibility of generating a two-tiered faculty and the potential damage to collegiality, etc.) vs. the gain (national recognition, etc.). The faculty should also identify the minimal level of support without which they would not go ahead with such a plan. They are already too stretched to take on new responsibilities without new resources. Prior to moving in this direction, it would be useful to see what effects the new MS in Architecture has on the graduate program.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

The committee recommends the following course of action to the Graduate School:

- o The department's graduate program (MArch) and undergraduate program (BA) should be continued and supported for the next ten years. It is a stronger department than it was ten years ago, but also faces new challenges which we feel confident it will work hard to meet.

The committee also recommends that the department

- o Revisit and rewrite their strategic plan after their priorities have been identified. Ideas and action items should be ranked in importance and a time-line should be included. (Time-lines can always be modified if external constraints change.)
- o Identify areas of strength not in the context of the departmental past, but in relation to the future of the discipline and profession. In this regard, the department needs to consider first how it can maintain the current interdisciplinary certificates offered by the college and handle the new MS and only then weigh the advisability of adding a PhD program.
- o Take the time to consider the areas in which the faculty's time and energies can most effectively be spent. The faculty are presently working so hard that the time for such introspection may seem difficult to find, but a realistic review in the light of the meager increases in resources that the University is able to provide is essential if the Department is to move forward.
- o Decide upon the best hires for the department in the wake of a revised strategic plan. The ideal faculty would be those who can not only handle current programs within and outside of the department, but also attract new revenues as well as other highly productive faculty who will complement the current faculty along different lines than may presently be imagined.
- o Recognize the need to become more entrepreneurial in locating external funding in order to keep the department competitive nationally. Professor Sharon Sutton would be an excellent resource to consult on this issue.
- o Consider whether or not it is advisable to offer two MArch tracks: one with a thesis and one without that concludes in a "terminal" seminar. Whether or not the latter is unacceptable, the department needs to find the resources for the pre-thesis seminar it already voted on and the faculty needed to oversee the theses.
- o Consider faculty exchanges as a way of enriching the program and develop the funding to bring in national and international speakers and guests.
- o Streamline the admissions process by using a quick check-off form, such as used at the University of California (Berkeley), to send information back to those who do not gain admission with the understanding that providing such a high level of service to those rejected means a lower level of service to those accepted.

The committee also recommends that the college and university

- o Allocate funding to provide for at least five new positions not only to replace recent retirements but also to address the long-term loss of faculty that has undermined the viability of this highly successful program. A significant commitment from the University after all of the years of belt-tightening is sorely needed.

Furthermore, these new positions need to be added within the next two to three years, for shortly after that the department is likely to face a number of retirements in a fairly brief period. The retirement of critical senior faculty, followed by their replacement by junior faculty, would put the department's programs and development in serious jeopardy, given the time necessary for new faculty to get up to speed.

Based on our reading of the department's self-study and other documents provided as well as on our interviews with the faculty, we would suggest that two positions be allocated for structures, two for sustainability (lighting, energy), and one in computing. The final decision on area of interest, however, should rest with the department.

- o Provide, and help the department provide, the resources for creating a computer system—including hardware, software, technical support, and management—that prepares all students adequately for the ever-increasing computing needs of their professional careers and also for generating a budget to support future upgrades and technical support. Given the budgetary restraints facing the university in Olympia, the administration may not be able to provide more than the much needed computer hardware, in which case the department will have to become creative in developing a strategy for supporting the on-going needs in this area. In any event, this emerges as another critical issue the department will want to discuss as they revisit their strategic plan.
- o Provide, and help the department provide, the resources for the kind of activities that will enrich departmental life: visiting lecturers and professors, travel for faculty and graduate students.
- o Provide staffing to help with the preparation of proposals and administration of grants.