

**Review of the UW Interdisciplinary Urban Design and Planning Ph.D.
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I. The Review Process

Our review, carried out during summer and autumn quarters, 2004, began with committee members carefully examining the *Interdisciplinary Ph.D. Program in Urban Design and Planning Self Study*. The internal members interviewed 26 persons associated with the program, covering the following constituencies:

- ✓ Faculty active in the program, including members of the program steering committee
- ✓ Graduate students in the program
- ✓ Administrators in units with faculty in the program
- ✓ The acting director of the program
- ✓ Graduate School staff

The committee also surveyed former graduate students by email, and sent a short survey to five faculty who are actively engaged in the program.

One committee member toured the program's facilities.

The external members (Deakin, Forsyth) joined the committee for the site visit on November 29-30. During the site visit, we held group meetings with the following constituencies:

- ✓ The director (via phone)
- ✓ The acting director
- ✓ Members of the steering committee
- ✓ The deans of the College of Architecture and Urban Planning and the Graduate School
- ✓ The program's graduate program staff person
- ✓ The chair of the Department of Urban Design and Planning
- ✓ Presentations of four graduate student research projects

II. Overview of the program

The Ph.D. in Urban Design and Planning at the University of Washington is one of 39 Ph.D. programs in urban and regional planning in the United States. The program's goal is "to prepare scholars who can advance the state of research, practice, and education related to the built environment and its relationship to society and nature in metropolitan regions throughout the world" (*Self Study Executive Summary*). The program's self study also notes the goal of bringing together "interdisciplinary perspectives from the social and natural sciences, humanities, and design and planning disciplines, and applying them to the formation and evaluation of urban and environmental plans and policies."

The program is divided into 3 phases:

In Phase I, students take a core sequence of three courses in urban design/planning (ideally their first year) and two methods courses (one qualitative, one quantitative).

- ✓ Advanced Research Design
- ✓ Advanced Planning Theory
- ✓ Interdisciplinary Urban Research Seminar

Work in Phase I is evaluated in each class and in a portfolio (course papers and other work) and written evaluations by instructors in the courses. Students present a plan of study for Phase II.

In Phase II, students take 7 courses and a teaching seminar:

- ✓ Urban Process and Patterns (3 courses; selecting from a list of courses offered by 4 departments)
- ✓ Research Design and Methods (2 courses, choices from five departments)
- ✓ Urban and Environmental Design and Planning (2 courses, choices from five departments)
- ✓ Teaching Seminar (1 course)

Phase II ends with the general examination.

Phase III is the dissertation.

The substantive areas of study in the program are:

- ✓ Urban Ecology and Environmental Planning

- ✓ Urban Design
- ✓ Land Use and Transportation
- ✓ Growth Management
- ✓ Real Estate Development

The program was established in 1967, and its first Ph.D. was awarded in 1970. It was administered by the College of Architecture and Urban Planning until 1989, when it was moved to the Graduate School in an effort to enhance scholarly research and publication. The program has remained on provisional status since that time; it was most recently reviewed in 1998. The 1998 review raised several concerns, including:

- ✓ Educational program goals
- ✓ Expectations of students in the program
- ✓ Support for students
- ✓ Programmatic and administrative relationships with other programs and departments
- ✓ Definition of core faculty
- ✓ Foundations of excellence in professional and scholarly contributions
- ✓ Consideration of resource constraints
- ✓ Administrative placement of the program
- ✓ Creation of a vision and strategic plan for implementing that vision
- ✓ Improvement of core curriculum, development of mentoring system for doctoral students (especially those in the first year)
- ✓ Acquisition of space for the program in Gould Hall

III. Findings

Successes of the program

The Interdisciplinary Ph.D. Program in Urban Design and Planning has improved dramatically in the past 5 years, and today is a program on the brink of becoming a top-tier program. Its successes are many, including:

- ✓ 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.

The program's successes are all the more remarkable given its small size (faculty, students, staff), limited resources, and its reliance on the good will and voluntary labor of so many of its affiliated faculty. As one faculty member noted, this is a program that is run through a loose-knit network of faculty across campus – and that works extraordinarily well.

The program has been very responsive to the concerns raised in 1998. Specifically, the program's director and faculty have:

- ✓ Clarified program goals, student requirements and general program policies
- ✓ Dramatically increased student funding; virtually all students in the program have 3 years of 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

The faculty most closely engaged in the program (and particularly the director, acting director and members of the steering committee) demonstrate a remarkable dedication to the program, and a great vitality. For many of the faculty outside of the Department of Urban Design and Planning, engagement in this program is truly voluntary; they receive little or no recognition from their home departments for their service on interdisciplinary doctoral committees.

The program's greatest strength is its interdisciplinarity. As one member of the steering committee noted, this is a program that has faculty and students from four colleges engaged in conversation, problem-solving and research. Virtually every graduate student we met cited the program's interdisciplinarity as its greatest strength. That interdisciplinarity was the chief reason many of them applied to the University of Washington for graduate work.

Students and faculty point to a high level of movement by students through a variety of different departments during their training – most notably Urban Design and Planning, Civil and Environmental Engineering, Computer Science and Engineering and Forest Resources, and to some extent, the Evans School of Public Affairs, Sociology and Geography. The program's steering committee includes three faculty from Urban Design and Planning and three others (from Public Affairs, Forest Resources, and Geography). The core faculty (those most involved with students) is virtually evenly divided between the College of Architecture and Urban Planning (9 faculty) and other units (8), while 6 of the affiliate faculty come from the CAUP and 10 from other units. The graduate students report that they have great flexibility in seeking courses and faculty mentors across the university.

Students, faculty and staff all report that the annual symposium is an extremely valuable event that allows everyone involved in the program to interact and that fosters interdisciplinary engagement.

Another strength is the energetic leadership from a small number of faculty -- notably the director, the acting director and the faculty on the steering committee. The director receives high praise from faculty and students in the program; he is seen as someone who has done much to focus the program and to strengthen its research activity.

Individual faculty are leaders in their areas of specialization. The doctoral program composition is tailored to reflect this expertise. The success of a number of faculty in gaining funding from sources such NSF and CDC attests to their stature. The external members of the review committee in particular noted that the program has evolved from a practice oriented program to an outstanding research program with the potential to move into the top ranks nationally. They have made excellent use of the modest resources given to them.

Students are another key strength of the program. The number of applications for the program has risen steadily in recent years, rising from 34 in 1998-99 to 60 in 2003-4. The acceptance rate has dropped during this period, from 29.4 percent to 6.7 percent. During the last two years all of the students that were made offers of admission entered the program. Most of the graduate students we interviewed had high praise for the program, indicating that it served their interests and matched their expectations quite well.

Students said they chose the program for several reasons, including:

1. Interdisciplinary nature of the program

2. Reputation of individual faculty whom the students called “outstanding and renowned”
3. Opportunity to work in collaborative research projects
4. Program flexibility

There is remarkable collegiality among the graduate students across the entire cohort (from 1st year to 4th year students). They are truly engaged with the program, and most of all, with one another – as fellow students but also as research collaborators. One catalyst to their activity is the space they have received in Gould Hall. They say that this space gives them a “center” for the program and thus facilitates student interaction and creating an intellectual community. The graduate students appear to be particularly active in taking advantage of this opportunity; their on-going forum (aka The Bowling League) facilitates discussion and intellectual community.

The self study illustrates that the program is much more focused than it was 6 years ago (at the time of the last review); faculty, staff and students also point to this increase in focus. For example, program requirements are spelled out for students in far greater detail than 6 years ago. The definition of “core” and “affiliate” faculty has been clarified, ideally providing students with a clearer sense of faculty availability and interest. (“Core” faculty are those who have worked with at least three students in the program over the preceding three years in teaching, committee membership or funding while affiliate faculty have lower involvement. Faculty can move back and forth in the categories, depending on level of involvement with students.) This is a strength of the program – it has developed mechanisms for defining who are the core faculty by the level of regular involvement in the program.

The program’s research focus also seems sharpened, both through faculty activity as well as engagement of graduate students in research projects and attendance at academic conferences. The annual program colloquium places substantive emphasis on research, while the monthly graduate student forum also contributes to creating of an intellectual community. The outside reviewers noted that in the national context faculty have a reputation as good mentors and recent graduates have secured faculty positions in well respected research universities. Overall, the students are well served by this program.

The self study demonstrates careful consideration of the program’s administrative placement. The self study and virtually all faculty interviewed endorsed the current administrative structure (based in the graduate school with day-to-day operation by the director and the steering committee).

The successes of the program are due in part to the support of the Graduate School and the College of Architecture and Urban Planning. The director of the program referred to the Graduate School’s moral support, RA funding, and colloquium funding as critical to the program’s success. The space made available by the Dean of Architecture and Urban Planning has provided a physical center for the program that has facilitated intellectual activity, collegiality and collaboration.

Recommendations

The review committee would like to stress the remarkable vitality and accomplishments of this program, made all the more impressive by the relatively small number of faculty at the core of the program, by limited resources and by the essentially voluntary nature of much of the enterprise. It’s clear that this is a group of faculty, students and staff who have done much with little – but therein lay some of the greatest challenges for this program. We offer the following suggestions with a sense that this is a program on the verge of national leadership in selected areas of the field, and that a few key steps could really have significant impact on the quality and reputation of the program.

1. Continuing Status, end of provisional

We strongly recommend that the program be placed on “continuing” status. The reasons for its earlier provisional status stemmed from the issues raised in the 1998 review; almost all of these have been addressed by the program. Most of all, there is a distinct intellectual focus and profile of the program that attests to the vitality of the enterprise.

2. Location

We recommend 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 – continue. This is an arrangement that is working well; virtually all faculty affiliated with the program see this arrangement as a key to sustaining the remarkable interdisciplinary nature of the program. The fact that the program’s greatest asset is this interdisciplinarity argues for a continuation of the current structure.

3. Diversification of funding

The program’s tremendous successes in the past 5 years rest primarily on the grant activity of a small number of faculty. This is, at the moment, a wonderful source of funding – but it is inherently precarious given its reliance on granting agencies and individual faculty success. So we recommend that the program diversify its funding base. Some possible methods for this include:

- a. Pursuing external fellowships particularly for 2nd, 3rd and 4th year students (e.g., SSRC, Eisenhower, STAR, HUD, Fannie Mae, etc.)
- b. Pursuing UW funding and fellowships (such as Dissertation fellowships, Huckabay fellowships, GO-MAP funding, etc.)
- c. Developing a large-population undergraduate course on topics of high interest, using TAs lines to support graduate students and provide teaching opportunities.
- d. Creating of development plan; the need for permanent endowment funds is critical.
- e. Collaborating with additional UW units – such as the UW Transportation Center.

4. Incentives for faculty participation

Many of the faculty involved with the program participate simply because they want to do so; those outside of the Department of Urban Design and Planning receive little or no credit for their work in this interdisciplinary program. One such faculty member noted that his home college did not forbid him from such engagement, and that was enough for him. Such a system generally works against involvement by junior faculty and leaves the program overly dependent on the good will of participating faculty. Therefore, we recommend that the program director and steering committee work with the Graduate School and other units that are affiliated with the program (e.g., Evans School, College of Engineering Forest Resources, etc.) in creating incentives for participation in this remarkable interdisciplinary program. If the Graduate School and the University truly value interdisciplinary programs, then there must be some incentives for faculty participation, especially for junior faculty.

Examples of incentives might include:

- a. Creating a university faculty appointment (in addition to a departmental appointment) that would directly facilitate faculty involvement in interdisciplinary programs. This possibility was raised two years ago by the Graduate School.

- b. Research support (perhaps an RA, summer stipend, or some other support) for faculty who participate in interdisciplinary programs.
- c. Buying time from teaching (in a home department) to take pressure off of faculty, thus allowing them to work more with the interdisciplinary program.
- d. Greater communication to leaders of affiliated units (e.g., Forest Resources, Engineering, etc.) about the value of this interdisciplinary program to graduate students (including those in Engineering, etc., who benefit from the presence of the program's students in their classes).

5. More effective administration

The program's successes, particularly in grant funds, have rested on the remarkable vitality and activity of a small handful of faculty. Attention to grants, along with grant administration, student mentoring, teaching has meant that the program has not always been as attentive as it might be to administrative details. The program's graduate program assistant, based in the Graduate School, garners extensive praise from faculty and students for her work. She is a great asset to the program. Still, other administrative improvements could be made that would help the program run more smoothly, allow faculty to focus more on key research and mentoring issues, and clarify policies for students.

We recommend:

- a. Creating a part time faculty deputy director for the program, whose attention would be focused on program policies, general administration of the program, etc.
- b. Adding some staff support -- perhaps student assistants -- to help with program administration
- c. Increasing staff contact with students in the program ; the grad program assistant might hold office hours in Gould Hall

The review committee also sees a few problems that could be easily fixed with improvements, such as:

- a. A formal checklist of requirements for all students to be reviewed annually with the faculty advisor
- b. Greater faculty attention to program requirements; students need to be able to turn to faculty for some program information
- c. Up-to-date lists of courses for students; this needs to be kept current
- d. More expeditious decision making on issues such a course substitutions (and a mechanism for this -- either by the director, a deputy director or the steering committee).

6. Governance

The program's success comes from the involvement of faculty from across campus, but governance tends to be concentrated in a few hands. There are three issues.

- a. First is creating a mechanism for appointment to the steering committee. We recommend that the core faculty nominate and approve members of the steering committee, and that some general principle of rotation be observed.
- b. Second, mechanisms should be developed so that the core faculty can be more involved in key decisions such as admissions, curriculum revisions, and strategic planning.
- c. Third, is identifying and cultivating capacity for future leadership among junior faculty. Creating the position of deputy director would facilitate such skill building.

The director has served the program well. We recommend that he continue in this role if he wishes.

7. Vision and Strategic plan

A small program needs to pay particular attention to its focus and planning for its future. We recommend that the program create an updated strategic plan, engaging both junior and senior faculty, that deals with the following topics:

- a. Where is the field going and where does the interdisciplinary program fit within the field?
- b. Where does the interdisciplinary program have a competitive advantage? How will it maintain it?
- c. What areas should the program develop? What will be its niche?
- d. 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?
- e. What are the relationships between the interdisciplinary program, programs in urban ecology and the Ph.D. in the built environment?
- f. What resources does the program need and what are its strategies for obtaining them?
- g. How can the program sustain the current level of student activity and collegiality?

The program has had tremendous success in obtaining funding for doctoral research in a few key areas. The strategic plan should specifically address how the program can nurture other core concerns in planning and urban design.

We recommend that the program publish an annual report to record its important accomplishments and to monitor its progress towards stated goals.

8. Critical mass.

We recommend that the program seek to gain a critical mass of faculty in a few key areas (see #7, vision and strategic plan above) so that it can obtain true national prominence. There are 3 possible routes:

- a. The addition of a minimum of 2 or 3 faculty positions
- b. More active engagement with other faculty at UW or
- c. More active engagement with junior faculty at UW.

The built environment Ph.D. should also be seen as an opportunity for students in the interdisciplinary Ph.D. program to engage with faculty research in design and humanistic areas.

Junior faculty are an important resource in a program of this size. While it is important to give them time to develop their research and to publish, it is critical to the program's long term well-being that junior faculty be integrated into the program administration so that they develop the capacity to take over leadership of the program.