

## Department of Urban Design and Planning Program Review

May 2007

Committee members:

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### **Introduction and Overview**

The charge letter asked the review committee to assess the academic and educational quality of the Department. It suggested we answer several questions regarding what the Department was doing, whether it was doing it well, how it could do things better, and how the University could assist them in doing it. We chose to discuss how what it is doing affects academic and educational quality in terms of specific issues arising from responses to the 2001 review and assessment of its strategic plan, and to focus answers to these general questions on Departmental culture and practices.

As we will discuss below, the faculty have initiated several degree and certificate options since the 2001 review. These initiatives led us to question whether the faculty was over-committed. Contrary to our expectations, we conclude that the educational experience and quality of academic work had both been enhanced by programmatic growth. Increases in quality resulted from greater commitment and cooperation by the faculty. The faculty is today working much harder, producing more educational experiences for more students, and enjoying their work more.

The University can draw an important lesson from the ongoing transformation in the Department. Effective leadership and a committed faculty built social capital that the Department is now drawing on to address issues raised in the last departmental review. This is evident in the improved working relationships and morale of the faculty, and a positive view of the faculty and Department by its students.

Improvement in working relationships among the faculty has enabled it to increase productivity while offering new curricular options—doing significantly more teaching, research, and outreach than previously, yet with an only slight increase in its pool of resources. We suggest below in discussing specific issues several things it could do better, some of which do not require additional resources.

An issue with which the University could assist is in providing a sounder long term foundation for the undergraduate CEP major. Senior faculty members who dedicated themselves to building and sustaining CEP (at considerable cost to their advancement) may be retiring in the next few years. Carefully selected faculty appointments could provide curricular leadership and teaching resources while providing needed increases in the depth and scope of the Department's research capability.

The charge letter asked the review committee to consider three sets of issues:

- Responses to the 2001 Review
- Master of Urban Planning Program, Strategic Plan and Faculty, and
- Resources

### **Responses to the 2001 Review**

The committee addressed the three major concerns raised in the 2001 review and assessed how well the Department has dealt with each of these concerns in the last five years.

#### Promotion, Merit, and Tenure Review Procedures

Now that the Department has made significant progress in expanding its faculty, course offerings, and outreach, it is turning to the need for more systematic promotion, merit, and tenure review procedures. Assistant and associate professors interviewed during this review reported that the lack of clear performance criteria and guidelines made it difficult to understand what was expected of them. The existing practice is to refer to the procedures stated in the faculty code (UW Academic Personnel Guidelines), with no additional departmental criteria or guidance. The general statement in the faculty code is of necessity written to cover all fields in the University, and works best if adapted to particular departmental needs and expectations.

We found as inadequate Professor Blanco's response to this concern as stated in her letter of January 18, 2005. Providing "UW Academic Personnel" guidelines did not go far enough toward providing departmentally appropriate standards and criteria. The Department's decision to retain the flexibility of very general procedural guidelines places assistant professors, in particular, in an untenable situation where they are left in a position of trying to discern what is expected of them.

Professor Blanco, chair of the Department, was far more responsive and constructive during our interview with her on February 22, 2007. She reported that the faculty has already made some progress by discussing how to adapt standards and criteria developed by the School of Nursing for its merit, promotion, and tenure review. The fact that faculty is working on this issue is a good sign that the Department is giving it appropriate weight. We commend the Department Chair for stating during her interview that the need for Department policy on promotion, merit, and tenure review is the faculty's highest priority during the coming year.

#### Faculty Mentoring

During the review, we learned that all assistant professors periodically consult with the chair about their plans and progress, as well as present their research to the faculty at its meetings. We learned from our interviews with junior faculty that this mentoring process works for some individuals, but not others. The lack of a shared set of expectations for promotion, merit, and tenure made it difficult for the more senior faculty to provide clear guidance. The need for improvements in faculty mentoring will be considered along with the development of a review process. We

suggest that assistant professors be assigned a senior faculty mentoring committee, and that this committee meet with the assistant professor at least once a year to suggest how they can best meet departmental expectations.

### Senior Faculty Leadership

The morale and commitment of the senior faculty has improved greatly over the last five years. Faculty members who had dedicated themselves to teaching and regional practice concerns have played a positive role in the Departmental transformation by supporting new faculty who have brought an expanded research focus. Additional appointments of new faculty will be essential for completing this transition. During our conversations with the Chair, CAUP dean, and faculty, we learned that recent recruits and senior faculty were working well together and that all individuals were committed to promoting the best interests of the Department and the welfare of its students. We attribute much of this remarkable turn-around to effective Departmental leadership.

### **Master of Urban Planning Program, Strategic Plan and Faculty**

#### Diversity

Like a number of other units at UW, the Department has made modest progress on diversity. It has had most success in expanding the number of women on the faculty and incorporating diversity issues more widely into its courses. Greater efforts to increase the number of students of color have met with limited success. New endowment funds in excess of \$300,000 to support minority students specializing in real estate may help future efforts, but the modest income annually available will limit any impact.

The strategic plan acknowledges the importance of increased diversity in its faculty and student body. The faculty developed a diversity plan in fall 2006 that lays out an ambitious plan of action to achieve 6 objectives. The challenge for the future is to execute the plan.

#### Advising

Student advising still remains a challenge for the Department, as recognized in the strategic plan. Students we interviewed desire advising that is proactive rather than what they perceive as largely reactive. They also would like more systematic, current, and readily accessible information on how to navigate the complex curriculum. A web-based approach was suggested. A student observed that the Chair supports this idea but currently lacks resources to implement it. Student satisfaction with the mentoring provided through "Professional Council is high. The strategic plan lists several strategies for improving advising. Again, the challenge will be to execute them.

Given the scope of issues to be considered, the Committee did not take time to discuss assessment, participation, or evaluation/data systems. Our impression is that the Department has not gotten that far in developing of procedures for assessing performance.

### Updated Strategic Plan

In the self-study, Professor Blanco provides a memo describing the Department's progress in completing an updated Strategic Plan. The Plan was included in the binder of material provided to the Committee.

The Committee was impressed by the near uniform enthusiasm of faculty members for the process by which the Department developed its new Plan, the overall direction and goals it sets for the Department, and the ambitious set of activities and initiatives that it envisions. To paraphrase some remarks: "A great step." "The start of a conversation." "Open, inclusive and transparent." "A very rich plan." One faculty member thought it might be "too much," yet recognized the competitive pressures that are pushing the Department to diversity its offerings.

The success of the planning process is one important consequence of the many positive changes in the Department since 2001 that have transformed it into a dynamic, collaborative, and exciting organization. The serious rifts that had earlier compromised its ability to function seem to have mended. The Department is "in a healthy place" and its faculty ready to move ahead together to raise its national profile.

The charge letter asked the Committee to address five questions about the Strategic Plan. We address them in order.

- 1. Does this plan provide a framework for determining whether faculty resources are sufficient to deliver high quality education in the multiple degree programs and certificate options offered by the Department?*

The Department recognizes that its involvement with so many programs and certificates requires careful management of faculty resources. It has carefully thought about how to do so and believes it has allocated sufficient resources to each activity. See the discussion of the next question.

The Committee explicitly asked the faculty it interviewed whether the Department was over-extended by its commitment to all these programs. No one felt it was.

- 2. In particular, is there a critical mass of research faculty and other resources necessary to sustain the graduate programs? How does the Department compare to other units within the CAUP in terms of these aspects?*

There appears to be the needed critical mass of productive scholars and other resources to sustain the graduate programs. The MUP absorbs the bulk of the Department's teaching resources. The Department has grown significantly since 2001 – from 11 to 17 FTE – via new lines and temporary "partner hires." And its research productivity is on the rise. Consequently, the Department is confident that there are adequate resources to sustain the MUP.

Limitations on resources mainly affect the undergraduate Community, Environment and Planning (CEP) major. These are discussed later.

The two doctoral programs, the two certificate programs, the joint degree with the Evans School, the new MS in Real Estate and the on-line MSPCI (Master in strategic planning for critical infrastructures) are important to the faculty but only

require a modest commitment of state-funded teaching resources. The low demand on such resources reflects 1. the self-supporting nature of the MSPCI and Master in Real Estate and 2. curricula that draw on many units' courses rather than needing courses dedicated entirely to those graduate programs. For example, the Department teaches the core courses in the Interdisciplinary Urban Design and Planning PhD. For other courses, students choose among pre-existing Department and other units' offerings. The Chair was emphatic that these efforts do not threaten the MUP.

Similarly, the proposed new Master in Urban Ecology, strongly supported by the Department, requires hardly any new teaching resources. Rather it will draw on existing campus-wide courses configured creatively to provide a coherent curriculum. And, the Department will sponsor this program only if central resources are provided. The proposed certificate in emergency management and hazard mitigation will be offered through UW Continuing Education as a self sustaining program.

*3. How does the involvement of faculty with the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. program impact the Department?*

In two words: very favorably.

As members of the lead department for the Program, the faculty is heavily invested in it. There is great pride in the dramatic improvements that have taken place since 2001 and, as the 2004 review states, moved it to "the brink of becoming a top-tier program."

The reinvigorated PhD will help raise the national reputation of the Department in general and will attract better doctoral students. Better PhD students, in turn, will mean more stimulating teaching experiences for Department faculty who provide the core courses and, as research assistants, will contribute more to faculty research productivity. The Program's growing reputation may also help attract stronger master students.

The core PhD courses as well as dissertation advising, of course, absorb significant teaching resources. However, no one we talked to raised concern about these costs.

*4. What is the extent of faculty involvement with the Built Environment Ph.D. program and how does their involvement impact the Department?*

The faculty is considerably less involved with this program than the interdisciplinary one. The Chair reports that the Built Environment Ph.D. is not a drain on teaching resources. Two professors noted that the relationship between the two PhD programs could be better, but do not regard this as a major problem.

*5. How well has the unit articulated in the strategic plan about being a cutting edge Department or in achieving that goal?*

Extremely well.

The Plan (pp. 10-12) clearly expounds the Department's core mission and values and the ambitious goals it wants to reach by 2010. These goals encompass

excellence in graduate training, recognition by regional and state decision makers as playing a major role in helping the region and state create more livable and sustainable communities, international recognition as one of the elite departments of urban planning, design and development, and creating an internal culture that fosters the Department's development as an exceptionally creative organization.

To be realized, ambitious goals require specific strategies and concrete plans. The plan generally meets this requirement. It thoughtfully discusses strategic issues related to curriculum and degrees, research and public service, students and the learning environment, and program operations – governance, resources, diversity and facilities. It then lays out both short term and longer term action items for moving forward in all four areas.

Some of the items are quite specific and well developed; others are much less so. For some issues there are short term action items, but no longer term ones. The Committee does not view these gaps as worrisome. As one faculty member noted, the Plan is a guide, the start of a long conversation, not a *fait accompli*. It will provide a broad vision and a point of reference between now and 2010, and probably beyond.

## Resources

The charge letter asked the Committee to address three questions about resources.

1. *Given UW budget constraints, it is unlikely that significant new resources will be available to this or any other academic unit. Is this Department making the best use of their current funding?*

The Department is making prudent, valuable use of the partner hires it has received in recent years. Those professors mainly teach in the successful undergraduate CEP program, and have not been used to expand the MUP program. So, while these positions support the mission of the Department, if they were to vanish the core MUP program would not suffer.

Similarly, its new initiatives in real estate and strategic planning for critical infrastructures are self-sustaining and do not divert resources from the MUP.

The Department also seems to effectively leverage its investments in the interdisciplinary PhD by sustaining active involvement of faculty from many other units.

2. *If new resources are required, how might the Department raise these funds? Does the Department's strategic plan include development as a component that identifies future funding needs and potential sources?*

The plan lists as a short-term strategy: "Continue to work with the CAUP Development Office to develop a strategy for attracting Foundation support for student scholarships and fellowships; to develop an alumni association, and to increase gifts from alumni to the Department." The plan does not provide any details on the nature of such a strategy and how it could be implemented, nor specify a concrete timetable.

This is one gap in the strategic plan that needs attention soon. This element of the plan requires elaboration in much more detail and implementation as soon as feasible. The Department needs to work with the College's development office and coordinate activities with the other departments. This may limit or slow down some development efforts by the Department. At the same time, the Department can focus its own development efforts on two important tasks that will have long term pay-offs and not impinge on any of the College's broader development plans: developing an alumni association, and using it to increase alumni gifts to the Department.

*3. If limited new state resources were available, what would be the best strategic investment to meet the Department's current goals and to position this Department to be at the cutting edge of its discipline in the future?*

New state resources would best be used to add permanent faculty lines that put the CEP program on sounder footing. The Department views this as a priority. The Committee agrees. Despite the success of the program, its long term viability will be in jeopardy if it must regularly depend on part-time and other temporary positions to handle most of the teaching.

The next best use would be to provide modest support for the proposed Master in Urban Ecology. Developed by one of the Department's strongest professors, it appears to be an innovative program.