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November 12, 2019

To: Renee Cheng, Dean, College of Built Environments

From: Joy Williamson-Lott, Dean
Kima Cargill, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Planning

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joy Williamson-Lott".

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kima Cargill, Ph.D.".

RE: Review of the Department of Urban Design and Planning (2017-2018)

This memorandum outlines the Graduate School's final recommendations from the Department of Urban Design and Planning academic program review. Detailed comments on the review can be found in the documents that were part of the following formal review proceedings:

- Charge meeting between review committee and administrators (October 6, 2017)
- Self-Study (January 12, 2018)
- Site visit (February 5-6, 2018)
- Review committee report (March 6, 2018)
- Unit response to the report (April 13, 2018)
- Graduate School Council consideration of review (May 2, 2019)

The review committee consisted of:

Ali Modarres, Director and Professor, UWT Urban Studies Program (Committee Chair)

Blayne Heckel, Professor, UW Department of Physics

Evelyn Blumenberg, Professor and Chair, Luskin School of Public Affairs, University of California Los Angeles

Gary Hack, Professor Emeritus, City and Regional Planning, University of Pennsylvania

The Department of Urban Design and Planning offers the following degrees: Bachelor of Arts, Master of Infrastructure Planning and Management, and Master of Urban Planning.

Members of the Graduate School Council presented findings and recommendations to the full Council at its meeting on May 2, 2019. A summary of this report, composed by Graduate School Council Members, is attached to this document.

Graduate School Council Recommendations

We concur with the Council's recommendations.

cc: Mark Richards, Provost and Executive Vice President
Patricia Moy, Associate Vice Provost for Academic and Student Affairs, Office of the Provost
Janice DeCosmo, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Academic Affairs
Christopher Campbell, Chair, Department of Urban Design and Planning
Becky Corriell, Director, Academic Affairs and Planning, the Graduate School
Academic Unit Review Committee Members
Members of the Graduate School Council
GPSS President

Attachment

University of Washington | Graduate Council

Academic Unit Name: Urban Design and Planning, Site visit February 26, 2018

Degrees/Certificates Included in the Review:

Minor in Urban Design and Planning

Major in Community, Environment, and Planning (CEP)

Master of Urban Planning (MUP) - accredited professional degree with five sub-specializations

Master of Infrastructure Planning and Management (MIPM) – Online through the Continuum College

Interdisciplinary PhD in Urban Design and Planning –housed in the Graduate School

Three formal concurrent degree options in the MUP offered in conjunction with:

- The Department of Landscape Architecture (MUP/LARCH)
- The Evans School of Public Policy (MUP/MPA)
- The School of Public Health

Participates in three college-wide graduate certificates in Urban Design, Historic Preservation, and Real Estate supports the college-wide PhD in the Built Environment

Key points:

- Mission is to develop a community of inquiry, learning, and practice that helps cities and urban regions become more livable through a democratic process of urban design and planning.
- The department employs the following: one full time staff member (Assistant to the Chair) who handles administrative duties; one full time Graduate Student Adviser who managed student services, outreach, and admissions for the MUP program; one full time Program Manager who oversees the undergraduate CEP program; a .5FTE Program Director is also employed who oversees the MIPM program, and who is assisted by a .5FTE staff assistant; two part time student workers; a full time Communications Specialist (though this is a one year contract position soon to be ending; the position will not be re-filled).
- Small number of faculty that has been reduced over the past five years, with a high of 13.5 FTE (2006) to 10.5 FTE currently. The lost FTEs were cut, and the savings have funded annual raises, promotions, and a unit adjustment to the Associate Professors.
- Since 2006, student enrollments have remained steady or slightly increased; they admit 35 students per year and typically have 105 students enrolled/year (70% full-time/10% part-time/20 dual-degree).
- Revenues have remained steady, salaries have gone up, the staff work of the department has grown, and there are no immediate plans (or resources) to make new tenure-track or new staffing hires.
- The accredited MUP program creates some curriculum constraints (studio classes, thesis credits).
- Last Review April 2006, (Partial)

Program Strengths:

- The department benefits from having an exceptional group of faculty committed to the success of its degree programs, learning outcomes, and relevance to the discipline and the profession. Faculty of all ranks, including part-time and adjunct faculty, expressed a deep commitment to and passion for the department. A sense of community and collegiality existed across all faculty members.
- The department has an exceptionally capable staff members who support all aspects of the department and the various degree programs. They make the entire operation run successfully.
- Several faculty members in the department have developed cross-disciplinary partnerships with units across the university. These efforts diversify the student and faculty, and offers hope for tackling difficult and persistent urban problems and emerging issues.
- The department has a very active and extraordinary Professional Council. Dedicated local professionals play an active role in mentoring students, providing paid internships, assisting with fundraising, helping with the professional development of students, and finding jobs for graduates.
- Since 2007, the department has had a diversity committee consisting of students, faculty, and staff. A diversity plan in place and is in the process of being implemented. All new MUP curriculum proposals are currently being reviewed to ensure they meet stated diversity standards, while the college (including the department's faculty, staff, and students) are also participating in an IDI (Intercultural Development Inventory) assessment and training process.
- The Community, Environment & Planning (CEP) undergraduate program is a unique program, enthusiastically supported by students, alumni, and associated staff where students are fully engaged in all aspects of the program.

Challenges and Risks:

- The department lacks adequate faculty resources. Teaching loads have increased as the result of not replacing 3 FTEs and faculty expectations have substantially increased as faculty are expected to be heavily involved in various program activities (curriculum development, governance, recruitment, fundraising, engagement, and advocacy).
- The department lacks adequate financial resources. The department needs to make a set of strategic decisions about growth that will result in program sizes that increase financial resources, attract additional resources, and expand the faculty available for education and research.
- Students do not always find the right balance and desire a combination of theory and professional skills that will help them become effective planners.
- While the former will be partially addressed if the department is able to grow its degree programs, the latter has been made clearly obvious by the difficulty of covering all the educational commitments in the face of a decline in faculty FTEs of at least 20% over the past few years.

Review Committee Recommendations:

- Strengthen the MUP Curriculum. Urban environments are constantly evolving, planning programs need to regularly evaluate their curriculum to ensure that it provides students with the training that they need to be successful professional planners.
 - The curriculum is heavily weighted in favor of required courses (12 of 21 courses are required). Students feel that there are too many introductory courses, they are often too elementary for graduate students and too few advanced courses. The existing curriculum

- needs to be refreshed, duplication of content needs to be removed, and more flexibility and latitude should be provided for clusters of specialized courses, including courses in other programs.
- The emphasis on required courses ties faculty up in teaching generalized courses rather than courses in their specialized fields of expertise.
 - Update course scheduling. The department should critically evaluate the scheduling and sequencing of courses. Students feel that there are too many introductory courses in the first year. Many students are anxious to take classes in their substantive area of interest early in their studies so that they acquire professional skills that will help them obtain summer jobs or internships. However, many faculty members prefer that students take the “building-block” core courses in the first few quarters. The department needs to balance these two objectives.
 - Rethink the “urban design” specialization. Students have concluded that it is not possible to acquire the requisite skills to become an urban designer in the traditional sense – as a person who designs and renders plans for urban places – by taking the three courses and one studio currently offered. It is recommended that the department develop, in a 3-5 course sequence, an appreciation and critical understanding of the process by which sites and cities are designed. Some of these courses also are essential for those who wish to specialize in land use planning and could be a valuable addition to the professional education of architects and landscape architects. For those students who wish to go beyond this foundation, smoothing the pathway for urban design certificates and dual degrees is essential.
 - Reconsider thesis/terminal project requirements. Individual theses can be a time-sink for faculty and often are not a useful way to hone skills before students enter professional practice. An alternative could be to encourage group projects based on real issues in the field, with students collaborating under the guidance of a faculty advisor. Individual theses can be retained as an option, if the student has a topic and there is a faculty member substantively interested in working with the student on that topic.
 - Better support the Faculty.
 - Ensure that faculty salaries are commensurate with the salaries of faculty at similar institutions. Faculty salaries have fallen to the bottom of the levels of peer programs, this will threaten the retention and recruitment efforts of the department. Unless the faculty salary situation is remedied, the program will inevitably decline.
 - Improve associate professor mentoring and support. The associate professors are carrying much of the collective responsibility for outreach, studios and internal governance, leaving little time for activities that will assure their promotion to full professor. Careful mentoring should be put in place to facilitate advancement and promotion to full time professor.
 - Recognize and reward practitioner educators for their substantial contributions to the department. In addition, given the importance of professional practice in the department, ensure that time and energy devoted to activities in the field are recognized and valued in promotion and tenure decisions (as they are in architecture and other sister fields).
 - Better support and improve student recruitment.
 - The department should expand its recruitment efforts to increase the number of applicants to the degree programs. Support from related offices on campus and outreach and developing active relationships with other universities in the state (especially UW Tacoma) and beyond are important in this effort.

- Other colleges on campus are pursuing plans for direct admissions into the college, this can increase enrollment. If it hasn't already done so, the College of Built Environments should consider the merits of direct admissions.
- Continue with the development and implementation of the department's diversity plan.
 - The student body and curricular content clearly need to be diversified further, and these are inter-related. A more diverse curriculum and faculty will help attract a more diverse student body. Incorporating race and equity content into all the core courses would be a positive development, extending beyond offering a single seminar on the subject.
 - If the department pursues direct admissions into the college, a more holistic admissions policy can lead to a more diverse student body.
 - By expanding its recruitment efforts and increasing the number of applicants, the department can better fulfill its diversity objectives.
- Identify substantive growth areas
 - There was substantial agreement among faculty on two substantive growth areas. The rapidly expanding area of big data, smart cities and data science is one priority. The second growth area includes efforts to understand and promote healthy communities.
- Continue efforts to raise funds and minimize costs.
 - The department's growth potential is limited by available financial resources. Student tuition is the largest source of department revenue and increasing student enrollment will support personnel growth. Increasing enrollment by 10 student per year in both the undergraduate and MUP degree programs is recommended.
 - Expand the role of the professional council in fundraising and mentoring students. The department has an important resource for advancement in its professional council. It should be a priority to fully engage the professional council in advancement planning. Members of the Professional Council are willing and eager to work with the department to raise funds.

Areas of concurrence:

- There was concurrence with the report's overall assessment of the department's strengths, but three other strengths not in the report were noted.
- The Interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Urban Planning, celebrating its 50th year, was the first of its kind in the nation and continues to enjoy an outstanding reputation nationally and internationally.
- The Master of Infrastructure Planning and Management (MIPM) program, an online, fee-based degree program. This program has been transformed over the last four years from a deficit program to a fiscal growth program and has seen its enrollments more than triple.
- The Livable City Year program. Now in its third year, this program pairs local governments with UW faculty and students for one academic year to work on city-defined projects that promote local sustainability and livability goals. This program has expanded to include all three UW campuses and has generated more than \$2 million supporting UW students and faculty.
- There was also concurrence with most of the report's extensive recommendations.
- Progress in revisions of the MUP program has been made. The department has now agreed on a new structure for the curriculum, and produced several of the syllabi for the new courses in the core. This work will be completed in the 2019-2020 academic year.
- In addition, the department is currently focused on revisions to the MUP program specializations. This process may extend into 2020-2021.

Areas of disagreement:

- The faculty do not support the recommendation that the department considers direct admissions as a way of diversifying our student body. First, this would not impact our master's program, where the need for more diversity is highest. Second, we believe that direct admission would impact the undergraduate CEP program by undermining the successful pedagogical model on which the program is based (small classes and cohesive cohorts).
- There were some reservations to increasing enrollment of the MUP courses to increase revenues. The relationship between enrollment growth and revenue growth is not clear or direct with the implementation of ABB. Nation-wide, enrollments in MUP programs has been in decline for several years, so it is difficult to grow the MUP program. Space can be created for more students, but it is difficult to attract students.
- There was some frustration with the perception in the review that the department needs to increase the relationship with Seattle and the region. On the contrary, the impact as a small department has been quite impressive. Examples include the Livable City Year program – where separate, city-defined projects with local municipalities have been established. There is the Hazard Mitigation Lab, which is working with Washington coastal communities on life-saving tsunami preparation plans, and with local tribes on sea-level rise mitigation. The Infrastructure Lab, which has worked with the City of Seattle to develop new regulations governing the use of big-data in the public sphere. And there are dozens of neighborhood-based studio projects, Master theses, and professional internships that have had transformative impacts on the local communities. There are also the hundreds of alumni who currently work in the region in planning or planning related capacities for cities, local firms, and non-profits.
- It was mentioned the report that there was no faculty leadership in the pipeline but the chair pointed out there are two faculty who are interested in department leadership.

Graduate School Council Recommendations:

- Although there was no recommendation in the committee report, a full review in 10 years is recommended. The department is in the midst of implementing several changes and seem to be proactive and diligently working on making the needed changes. The loss of 3 FTE and declining enrollment is an area of concern.