Academic Program Review of Graduate Programs in the College of Architecture

Texas Tech University

Review Team:

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Executive Summary

The Graduate Degree Programs in the College of Architecture were reviewed and evaluated by a faculty group consisting of Dr. Gary Harris, Professor of Mathematics, Dr. Doug Smith, Professor of Civil Engineering, and Todd DeVriese, Director of School of Art at Texas Tech and chair of the review team. Dr. Filiz Ozel, Professor of Architecture and Landscape Architecture and Associate Vice Provost of the Graduate College at Arizona State University served as the external reviewer. The degree programs reviewed by the assessment team included the Master of Architecture, the Master of Science in Architecture, and the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Land Use Planning, Management and Design programs. Dr. Ozel’s report focused upon the Ph.D. program in Land Use Planning, Management and Design, and sections of her report is cited here in this report.

The review was structured to examine the graduate programs in the College of Architecture through the lenses of Faculty Productivity, Quality and Quantity of Graduate Students and Graduates, Curriculum and Programs of Study, as well as Facilities and Resources. The report contains the assessment of these areas and makes recommendations based upon the work conducted by the team.

This report is based on information gleaned from the self-study report produced by the College of Architecture, as well as from separate meetings the committee held on February 23 with Dean Andrew Vernooy, Associate Dean Michael Peters, then with the College of Architecture faculty, and two scheduled meeting with graduate students. A meeting with Dr. Saif Haq occurred on February 24 with Dr. Ozel and Prof. DeVriese to seek further information on the PhD program.
Program Overview and Vision – Good to Very Good

The Texas Tech University (TTU) College of Architecture graduate programs are well grounded and appropriate regarding scope and mission. The mission of the College of Architecture serves as a framework for the programs:

The College of Architecture educates students for future design practice and advances knowledge of the discipline for the benefit of society.

The Master of Science in Architecture program, which has three different focus areas (Historic Preservation, Visualization, and Community Development) form a rich array of offerings for students. These foci allow the faculty to meet the educational needs of practicing professionals, while maintaining a balance with research goals.

The faculty are all qualified and have a range and depth of expertise which informs the programs, and are well regarded as a active group of researchers and practitioners. The college has dedicated leaders, seeking to continually improve the graduate programs.

Several of the objectives in the college’s strategic plan bear examination, with respect to this assessment programs. Specifically, I would draw attention to these two:

- 3.4 Objective: Provide opportunities for students, staff and faculty to experience and appreciate diverse world views through international studies. (NAAB 1.5 Society)
- 3.5 Objective: Provide opportunities for students, staff and faculty to experience and appreciate diverse perspectives through collaborations with other campus entities. (NAAB 1.1 Academic Context)

These objectives demonstrate a realization of the global nature of education, as well as concrete strategies to move students into an understanding of their role as architects in a global society. The realization of these objectives place the college’s programs in a leading position nationally with peer institutions.

Faculty Productivity: Satisfactory

Comments:
The Graduate Faculty Application Forms submitted in January 2009 by the College of Architecture indicate that the graduate faculty, in general, produce the scholarly and creative output adequate to support the Masters program in the college. However, it
appears that a small percentage of the graduate faculty handle a disproportionately large percentage of the graduate student direction.

The bulk of the external research funding for the college is generated by a relatively small cluster of faculty, and revolves around historical preservation via digital imaging. Money from this research does support some graduate students, but a small percentage of the graduate students in the college receive adequate financial support.

Faculty connection with industry is strong and supportive of the internship program job placement. Special mention was made of the faculty member who resides in the Houston area.

Both the faculty survey and the interview with the faculty indicated that a significant percentage of the faculty felt they were left out of the decision process resulting in a major program change: going from a thesis based masters degree to a non-thesis masters degree. It appears this is a contentious issue that has a number of faculty members feeling disenfranchised. Additionally, the report on the PhD program in Architecture produced by Dr. Filiz Ozel, External Reviewer, give insight into other areas of faculty productivity:

"Some faculty members’ reluctance in getting involved in the PhD program can be attributed to two factors. First one has to do with the relatively high teaching loads of the architecture faculty which can be a factor in the faculty’s inability to take on additional teaching loads in the PhD program. This point certainly needs attention. Secondly, the ambiguity regarding the ownership of the PhD program can be another reason for the reluctance of the faculty. Due to the multi-disciplinary nature of the PhD in LPMD program, architecture faculty may not be quite clear regarding their role in the program. “

Suggestions:
The college needs to look for ways to encourage more of the graduate faculty to be involved with directing graduate students.

As externally funded research provides a major source of financial support for graduate students, the college should seek ways to encourage more of its faculty to participate in funded research.

The administration within the college should seek ways to improve communication between the program administrators and the faculty. A mechanism should be put in
place to ensure that a free exchange of ideas can take place when program and policy changes are being considered. When such changes are made the faculty input should be critically analyzed and the rational for the changes should be clearly communicated to the faculty of the college.

Quality and Quantity of Graduate Students and Graduates: Satisfactory

Comments:
The data presented for the period 2001 through 2007 indicates a drop in total applicants and in new graduate students for 2007. The total number of graduate students remains reasonable for the size of the graduate faculty; however, the 2008 and 2009 data should be analyzed to determine if the 2007 drop is cause for concern.

The quality of the graduate students as measured by the average GRE scores of the students admitted is high, especially in the quantitative area. Average time to degree for the Masters of Architecture is quite appropriate. The internship program is strong and the college has an active and successful job placement program for its graduates. The types of jobs obtained by the graduates are appropriate for such a program with emphasis on preparing students for the profession.

The student survey and the student interview exposed a possible problem with communication between the faculty, especially the academic advisors, and the students concerning degree requirements and expectations with respect to time to graduation. Much of this seems to have been precipitated by the change in the degree program from the thesis to the not-thesis masters. In the end however, there was general agreement among the students that the program was meeting their expectations with respect to their future career opportunities.

The bulk of the graduate students in architecture comes from the undergraduate program in its own college. This can cause problems with diversity issues. The diversity of the graduate student population is reasonable with respect to gender, but blacks and Hispanics seem to be underrepresented.

There is not adequate financial support available for their graduate students.

The strategic plan calls for the creation of a masters program targeting students with undergraduate degrees from other disciplines. In addition there is a desire for the post
professional masters program to evolve into a doctoral program. There is no evidence of progress on either of these fronts.

Suggestions:
The college should look at its academic advising procedures to make sure that the degree requirements, times to graduation, and the rational behind the structure of the degree program are clearly communicated to each student in the program.

The college should aggressively pursue greater funding for support of its graduate students, both through increased funds for scholarships and funded research projects.

The college needs to look for ways to increase the number of graduate students entering its masters program form outside of TTU. A masters program for students coming form other disciplines and increased availability of financial support could be effective in this regard.

Curriculum and Programs of Study – Rating: Very Good

The graduate program in the College of Architecture consists of a Master of Architecture and a Master of Science in Architecture degree program. The Master of Architecture is the program accredited by the National Architecture Accrediting Board (NAAB). The Master of Architecture program was reviewed by NAAB in March 2004 and met all the criteria for accreditation except that they recommended that the curriculum needed more general studies opportunities for undergraduates. Addressing any deficit in the curriculum at the undergraduate program is outside the scope of this committee’s charge.

The graduate degree programs in Architecture are professional degree programs. Architecture programs across the country typically use one of two models for their graduate program: (1) a conceptual model which is open ended problem with respect to the parameters that enter the problem solution; and, (2) project model where the parameters for problem solution are defined or constrained. The program is in transition between the conceptual model and the project model. The project model is practice oriented which matches the niche that their graduates fill upon completion of their degrees. The College is project model concept is supported by the professional community in that practicing architects teach and review projects in various studio courses.
The transition between the conceptual and project models has caused some confusion and concern in the graduate student and faculty ranks. In general, students felt: that the change in models has resulted in better work quality in comprehensive studios; that the faculty is well qualified; and, that they are well prepared for professional practice. Students also expressed concerns about a lack of communication between administration and students regarding the change in program. As a result of the lack of communication students felt they no longer had a clear understanding of what is expected of them. Students suggested that a student representative in faculty meeting would help mitigate the communication problems. Faculty expressed concerns regarding a lack of communication and opportunity to provide input into the change of model in the degree program.

It is the opinion of the committee that the graduate program in Architecture is very good.

**Facilities and Resources – Rating: Adequate**

Physical facilities on the Texas Tech Campus are maxed out with no room for growth. If the University is expecting growth in the Architecture program then additional space off-campus will have to be utilized. Significant upgrades in visual capabilities, office furniture and studio spaces are been recently accomplished or are currently on-going. Library and model.–making facilities appear to be sufficient.

There is a general consensus among the faculty that due to the large number of contact hours associated with studio classes that additional faculty are needed to help with the teaching load. The faculty also noted a need for additional resources for post professional degree program for graduate students.

One other point made in the report on the PhD program in Architecture by Dr. Filiz Ozel in her review:

"The architecture library and subscriptions to on-line databases and journals are great resources for PhD students. Greater involvement of the very knowledgeable architectural librarian herself in the first year PhD courses, especially in the research methods course, can be an important boost to the student’s research skills."

Summary

The primary concerns cited by Dr. Ozel in her summary are highly relevant – the heavy teaching load of the architecture faculty limits the involvement of faculty in the graduate programs, and a more robust understanding and communication of the administration of the program will help to resolve some of the issues raised in this report.

The graduate programs in the College of Architecture provide a substantial set of offerings to students and professionals in the region. The aspirations held for this program, in terms of growth in quantity and quality, will require additional resources in order to move forward. It is strongly recommended that the university leadership move to better resource this successful program.

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