Graduate Program Review  
Texas Tech University

Program Reviewed: Landscape Architecture (LARC)


Name of Reviewers

Internal:
Please include name, title, and Department
Gad Perry, Associate Professor, NRM
Ralph Ferguson, Associate Dean, GS
Nancy McIntyre, Professor, BIOL

External:
Please include name, title, and Department
Tim Baird, Associate Professor, Penn State
Michael Seymour, Associate Professor, Mississippi State

I. Academic Unit Description and Strategic Plan
Please evaluate the following:

Vision, Mission and Goals
__ Excellent __ Very Good __Appropriate _X_Needs Improvement

Strategic Plan
__ Excellent __ Very Good __Appropriate _X_Needs Improvement

Please elaborate if you have identified any items in this section as Excellent.
Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section as Needs Improvement. Provide recommendations in the area of Strategic Planning.

The committee sees significant promise in the Landscape Architecture (LARC) program. The strategic plan 2006-2011, reviewed by the committee, did raise some concerns: 1) Action steps to achieve were vague; 2) No identification of who follows-up to benchmark successes; 3) Clear accountability protocols for faculty were not specified; and 4) Perception of the stated objectives as too broad to be achievable. The takeaway is that the department needs to refresh or develop a strategic plan that includes measurable outcomes. The committee suggests that department’s goals, benchmarks, objectives, and strategies link measurably to the Texas Tech University missions of research, teaching, and service.

Though there may be a 2012-2014 strategic plan, neither faculty nor students suggested a plan exists to promote research, teaching, and service as part of the growth objective. The department chair did make clear that an on-going open dialog is in process to address strengths and weaknesses. Individual accountability with constructive guidelines may assist departmental focus in its efforts towards improvement. It is vital Texas Tech University and College of Agriculture fortify the department’s effort to invigorate LARC when demand for individuals with the credentials is on the rise around the world.

Other comments (optional)

A more one-to-one correspondence between the items of the Mission and Vision Statements and specific goals, strategies, and benchmarks may help the department focus its efforts towards improvement.

II. Program Curriculum

Please evaluate the following:

Alignment of program with stated program and institutional goals and purposes
__ Excellent __ Very Good __Appropriate _X_Needs Improvement __N/A

Curriculum development coordination and delivery
__ Excellent __ Very Good __Appropriate _X_Needs Improvement __N/A

Program learning outcomes assessment
__ Excellent __ Very Good __Appropriate _X_Needs Improvement __N/A
Program curriculum compared to peer programs

__ Excellent  __ Very Good  __ Appropriate  __ Needs Improvement  _ N/A

Please elaborate if you have identified any items in this section as Excellent.

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section as Needs Improvement. Provide recommendations in the area of Program Curriculum.

1. The program suffers from a low number of students, which makes graduate-only classes difficult to hold. From the discussions, it appears the department is prudent in the use of piggyback courses. Some graduate students did feel positive that the participation in piggyback courses as leaders offered a valuable learning experience. The committee encourages that separate undergraduate and graduate syllabi should be created for piggybacked classes.

2. Teaching quality needs to be expeditiously improved through greater emphasis on appropriate incentives and consequences that are tied to individual faculty performance. There was strong student dissatisfaction about select faculty. Comments such as “The rest of the faculty just don’t seem to care, therefore classes are sub-par at best” are extremely alarming, especially in a program already suffering from untenably low numbers.

3. The lack of faculty scholarship reflects through low student satisfaction with advising and research facilities in the program. Faculty scholarship needs to increase, and the sharing of current research knowledge and skills with graduate students needs to be a priority.

4. Skills taught are not always indicative of current standards in the field. We are especially concerned with the high attention devoted to skills and techniques that are behind the times. In particular, we recommend an increase in classes that emphasize digital (rather than hand-drawing) skills and a reduction in time devoted to site-engineering methods. Although graduates are finding jobs, few of those are highly desirable and indicative of exceptional preparedness.

5. In the absence of dedicated funding for TAs, it is hard to address graduate student complaints about the lack of opportunities to gain teaching experience. Adding a dedicated class, as other departments have done, could help address this while providing assistance for hands-on classes.

6. Moving the LPMD program from Architecture to LA, especially if it included a dedicated faculty member with strong research credentials, could help both programs. For LA, it could provide funded GRA positions, PhD students who can help mentor MLA students, and a broader context, among other advantages. For LPMD, it could provide a more appropriate home program, as is
done at the University of Massachusetts (https://www.umass.edu/larp/) and Texas A&M (http://laup.arch.tamu.edu/about/), for example.

7. As the department re-focuses, it could do more to reach out to local communities needing LA expertise. This would also allow for faculty and graduate student scholarly activities to apply knowledge and skills on real-time service projects.

8. The student survey indicated many perceived problems, although only two surveys were completed. Our meeting with the majority of students in the program indicated that students would appreciate being informed about potentially relevant elective classes from outside the department.

9. The Curriculum Map (Appendix B) is out of date (e.g. in terms of course prefixes and course offerings).

10. Development of a Graduate Student Handbook (mapping out curriculum options, giving graduation expectations, etc.) would be beneficial.

Other comments (optional)

The department is one of only 17 programs nationwide to have both their Bachelor’s and Master’s programs professionally accredited. The program provides strong practical knowledge, contributing to the ability of graduates to find jobs. The availability of faculty to students was also noteworthy. The non-thesis project option added in 2013 should help boost graduation rates from “all but done” students and should be more in line with professional expectations in the field. All of the graduate students with whom we spoke are part of this option, evidence of its popularity.

We commend the department for the technical expertise of the faculty, but certain course content needs to be updated and aligned with current practices, possibly streamlining courses to accommodate newer technology and content and to eliminate unnecessary methods that are no longer needed in practice.
III. Faculty Productivity

Please evaluate the following

___ Excellent  ___ Very Good  ___ Appropriate  _X_ Needs Improvement  ___ N/A

Publications

___ Excellent  ___ Very Good  ___ Appropriate  _X_ Needs Improvement  ___ N/A

Teaching Load

___ Excellent  ___ Very Good  ___ Appropriate  _X_ Needs Improvement  ___ N/A

External Grants

___ Excellent  ___ Very Good  ___ Appropriate  _X_ Needs Improvement  ___ N/A

Teaching Evaluations

___ Excellent  ___ Very Good  ___ Appropriate  _X_ Needs Improvement  ___ N/A

Professional Service

___ Excellent  ___ Very Good  ___ Appropriate  _X_ Needs Improvement  ___ N/A

Community Service

___ Excellent  ___ Very Good  ___ Appropriate  _X_ Needs Improvement  ___ N/A

Please elaborate if you have identified any items in this section as Excellent.
Click here to enter text.
Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section as Needs Improvement. Provide recommendations in the area of Faculty Productivity.

From its inception, the discipline of Landscape Architecture has had one metaphorical foot in the humanities, and the other in the sciences. Evaluation of the program must keep this in mind. Broadly speaking (and with some notable exceptions), performance is sub-par. Teaching loads, as reported on the CVs we were provided, appear low. Despite this, student evaluations are unacceptably low for some faculty. Few proposals for funding were submitted and even fewer were good enough to be funded (all of those funded in 2011 and 2012 were multi-department proposals, emphasizing the need for greater collaboration across departmental lines). Few studies were reported at scholarly meetings or disciplinary literature. Community outreach activities (e.g. service-learning), at least by some faculty, appear more satisfactory – but were poorly documented in the report we received, and should be promoted. As stated above, greater individual accountability should be encouraged. For example, faculty should be encouraged (and supported) to present at professional conferences and to publish in professional journals; doing so will build the credentials necessary to make faculty competitive for grants, and will bring attention to the program to potential students and collaborators. Current support comes from individual faculty contacting the Dean’s office one-on-one; a more institutionalized (i.e., formalized distribution), merit-based approach (e.g. based on productivity) is warranted.

We were not provided with teaching evaluation scores in the report. We have some serious concerns regarding some of the faculty’s reported classroom behavior and content.

We are also concerned about the mismatch between faculty and graduate student perceptions. For example, in response to a question regarding adequacy of graduate classes (Q 7), faculty averaged 4.58 compared to 2.25 from the students. Similarly, in Q 8 (graduate teaching quality) faculty averaged 4.75 compared to 2.25 from graduate students. It does not appear, therefore, as if there is sufficient communication between the two groups.

The department currently has one advertised faculty vacancy and will potentially have three more in the coming 2-3 years due to contract terminations and retirement. The replacements for these positions will be crucial to the success of the program; the positions must be filled with enthusiastic personnel who will be productive and teach contemporary skills and who will be supported (e.g. via institutional support in terms of start-up) in building partnerships within and outside TTU.

Other comments (optional)
Click here to enter text.

IV. Students and Graduates

Please evaluate the following

Time to degree
____ Excellent ______ Very Good _X_ Appropriate ______ Needs Improvement _____ N/A
Retention
__ Excellent  __ Very Good  _X_Appropriate  __Needs Improvement  __N/A

Graduate rates
__ Excellent  __ Very Good  _X_Appropriate  __Needs Improvement  __N/A

Enrollment
__ Excellent  __ Very Good  __Appropriate  _X_Needs Improvement  __N/A

Demographics
__ Excellent  __ Very Good  _X_Appropriate  __Needs Improvement  __N/A

Number of degrees conferred annually
__ Excellent  __ Very Good  __Appropriate  _X_Needs Improvement  __N/A

Support Services
__ Excellent  __ Very Good  _X_Appropriate  __Needs Improvement  __N/A

Job Placement
__ Excellent  __ Very Good  _X_Appropriate  __Needs Improvement  __N/A

Student/Faculty Ratio
__ Excellent  _X_Very Good  __Appropriate  __Needs Improvement  __N/A

Please elaborate if you have identified any items in this section as Excellent.

Click here to enter text.
Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section as Needs Improvement. Provide recommendations in the area of Students and Graduates.

The biggest problem is the small number of students in the program. Although similar programs have all experienced declines in recent years, they have not done so to quite the same extent seen at TTU. The number of degrees awarded (p. 6) is lower than comparable programs, even though enrollment (p. 8) is comparable to two of the four comparable programs (smaller than the other two).

The program has dropped below the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board’s graduating minimum standard. The geographic isolation of TTU poses challenges to recruitment and to travel to case studies for research and teaching. Recruitment efforts (and support for such efforts) from within and outside TTU are warranted. Current recruitment efforts at the college level are perceived as focusing on agriculture and not on LA; some efforts should be focused on LA. Efforts should be made to tap into a strong alumni base for financial support for scholarships and student travel; most of the graduate students had not attended or presented at professional conferences due to lack of financial support. The graduate students should be made aware of matching Graduate School travel funds.

An additional issue is lack of dedicated financial support for students in the program. We want to commend the Dean’s office for committing some funds from the Graduate School to the task (two fellowships to recruit students to the program). We recommend that future faculty hires include graduate student support as part of the start-up package. The scholarships awarded to students are fairly small (no “full rides”), and there are no RAs or TAs, so the students are financially supporting themselves primarily by working full time and taking a full-time course load. This contributes to long time to graduation.

Other comments (optional)
The low number of students results in an exceptional faculty: student ratio. The students impressed us with their energy and enthusiasm in talking about their projects and their commitment to the program.

V. Facilities and Resources

Please evaluate the following:

Facilities
__ Excellent __ Very Good _X_Appropriate __Needs Improvement __N/A

Facility Support Resources
__ Excellent __ Very Good _X_Appropriate __Needs Improvement __N/A
Financial Resources
__ Excellent  __ Very Good  __ Appropriate  _X_ Needs Improvement  __ N/A

Staff Resources
__ Excellent  __ Very Good  _X_ Appropriate  __ Needs Improvement  __ N/A

Please elaborate if you have identified any items in this section as Excellent.
Click here to enter text.

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section as Needs Improvement. Provide recommendations in the area of Facilities and Resources.

Current facilities appear adequate, but not stellar. We are quite concerned about the announced loss of space (some 4,000 square feet) resulting from the forthcoming construction of the new PSS extension. Not only is there no clear alternative identified yet, but the facilities being lost are some of the better ones available to the department. Here, as with issues relating to travel assistance, student scholarships, etc., it is incumbent upon higher administration to ensure that the department has access to resources needed for its success. The department needs support in terms of faculty and student travel to engage in conferences and other professional activities.

Other comments (optional)
To achieve their mission, financial injection is needed

VI. Overall Ranking

Overall Ranking
__ Excellent  __ Very Good  __ Appropriate  _X_ Needs Improvement

Please provide summative conclusions based on the overall review.

We emphatically support the Department of Landscape Architecture as an increasingly important component in the modern world and in terms of TTU’s stated strategic vision of sustainability. Our evaluation is that the department has great potential to fulfill important roles in the college and university, especially in relation to the university’s strategic plan and its identification of a sustainable society as one of the eight core themes for the university. The department has been productive and excellent in the past. Although we found many areas needing improvement (including many issues from
the previous Graduate Program Review that had not been resolved), it is our belief that the department can again shine. Landscape Architecture is a discipline that is of ever-increasing relevance in a rapidly developing world, and so we see the discipline as occupying an important role in a large university like TTU. However, the department cannot persist on its current course. To allow it to improve and succeed, actions are needed at both the departmental and university levels:

**The department** needs to acknowledge that it is in a slump and undertake active and rapid measures to reverse this trend. Above, we have identified some strategies that we think can help in this.

**The university** must provide the department the time and resources needed to do this. In particular, we are concerned that the loss of space and potential loss of personnel might make it difficult for the department to improve.

We want to commend the Chair for identifying many of these issues prior to our visit, being willing to admit that problems exist, and aggressively acting to start the recovery process. We hope that senior departmental faculty can do the same and be part of the needed change. The current and projected faculty vacancies, if strategically planned, have the potential to transform the department. We encourage the department to hire and promote energetic, current-thinking people to teach modern skills, produce relevant scholarship, and help mentor graduate students to help in this transformation.

*Please provide summative recommendations based on the overall review.*

Engage more technology in the academic training process

Focus the department’s vision and develop specific strategies to improve its teaching, research, and service duties

Student scholarship support

Travel support to students and faculty

Reach out to alumni