

## Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning

A department in the College of Natural Resources and the Environment offering the A.S. in Landscape Contracting, the B.S. in Environmental Design, the B.S. in Landscape Architecture, the Master's degree in Landscape Architecture, the Master's degree in Regional Planning, and the Ph.D. in Regional Planning.

### ■ The Review Process

This was a standard AQAD review. Reviewers were:

Stephen Ervin (Harvard University)  
Frederick Steiner (University of Texas, Austin)

### ■ Main Issues

The visiting team found the department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning (LARP) to be “mostly strong — but in several ways vulnerable.” Strengths cited included its “vibrant and well recognized” professional programs, “a strong legacy of active research and outreach,” and a “diverse, distinguished and dedicated” faculty. These faculty, however, were found to be “too few in number,” representing one of the chief vulnerabilities of the department. In addition, the team strongly cautioned that the department’s facilities and technological infrastructure “are in some cases so poor that they pose an active threat to the continued viability of the department.” An area of potential vulnerability was the curriculum, which needs “constant attention and occasional updating to reflect changing cultural, technological and other realities.”

The team identified several specific challenges to be addressed by the department:

- **Renewing the faculty.** The team noted that departing faculty “include several of the most distinguished ... educators in the nation,” and that those remaining “face the task of maintaining LARP’s strong image with fewer resources to do so.” The team also cited a recent accrediting review that found the size of the Regional Planning program “close to the minimum for accreditation.”
- **Improving facilities.** The “dismal” existing facilities “limit ... expansion potential and even threaten accreditation.” In addition, the team warned that it is difficult to recruit the “best, visually sophisticated design graduate students” into “barely adequate, ... deteriorating” facilities.
- **Modernizing Information and Instructional Technology.** This was seen as especially important given technological changes in the field: Computer Aided Design (CAD) and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) are now “entry-level requirements for most jobs.”
- **Increasing Funded Research.** The current low level of research funding “makes it difficult to build and expand the Ph.D. program.”
- **Growing the Endowment.** The team found the department’s endowment funds to be “very low,” and urged growth to build excellence and offset state funding fluctuations.
- **Integrating the Curricula.** Bringing together the two sides of the department’s curricula (i.e. landscape architecture and regional planning) was seen as important, and cited as something desired by students.

- **Recruiting Graduate Students.** The team noted that LARP's location in a region with several other excellent programs makes recruiting of the best students a continuing challenge, and that the number of underrepresented minorities is too low.

The team noted that LARP has "rich opportunities" as it works to address these challenges, including the scarcity of Ph.D. programs with a landscape architecture identity, the proposed Master's program in Architecture and the Five College architecture studies program, the capacity to marry outreach with the case-study approach to research, and interdisciplinary collaboration with other faculty in the College. The team made a number of specific recommendations reflecting its assessment of challenges and opportunities.

## ■ **Results of the Review**

The department developed an action plan in response to the team's report with the following major components: 1) hiring a faculty member in Urban Planning and Design, another in Landscape Architecture Design, and another as an individual to be recruited as department head; 2) increasing research funding by 10-15% per year; 3) expanding overall scholarly productivity; 4) beginning work on an information/instructional technology plan; 5) initiating short-term facilities improvements to Hills North, and exploring longer term migration to other facilities; 6) increasing alumni and development activities; 7) addressing the integration and modernization of the curriculum, and expanding enrollment in the non-studio Environmental Design program and potentially in the two-year Landscape Contracting program; and 8) identifying peer departments against which to benchmark progress.

The Dean concurred with the team's findings and the department's general response, and set some specific expectations for implementation of the action plan. The Dean agreed that the three proposed faculty positions "are important to fill as it becomes possible." He encouraged the department to pursue growth in research funding of at least 15% per year, and offered to provide assistance in preparation of grant proposals. With respect to information and instructional technology, the Dean asked the department "to get very serious about the subject very soon," and to tap existing expertise rather than start the examination of issues from scratch. He called for targeted fundraising, with matching help from the College and University, to underwrite improvements. The Dean agreed to seek additional space, and to pursue some improvements to Hills North. He asked the department to identify key fundraising objectives, and to work with development staff to organize a campaign. Finally, the Dean endorsed the visiting team's curricular recommendations and the expansion of the Environmental Design and Landscape Contracting programs.