Annual Program Assessment Results Report

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Report Overview
During the past year the Department of Landscape Architecture continued to improve methods of direct measurement and data collection related to student learning outcomes. In addition several forms of indirect measurement were also used during the past year. The primary method of indirect measurement was a faculty survey evaluating students’ performance. The results of this survey facilitated a discussion regarding students’ strengths and deficiencies. The results of the data collection along with the results of a faculty survey were discussed during a faculty meeting this spring and used to inform decisions regarding the program curriculum and to develop a plan of action for next year.

The pedagogy behind outcomes assessment and the department’s student learning outcomes was presented and discussed at the annual Landscape Architecture Advisory Board meeting. This Board is comprised of local professionals who review and make suggestions to the department regarding the direction and quality of the program. The Board’s response to the learning outcomes was very supportive and no modifications were suggested.

This report begins with the four broad program goals and is followed by the student learning outcomes and the results collected using various forms of assessment. The final section documents a plan of action for the upcoming year. A key part of the action plan includes refinement of the program assessment matrix which more clearly identifies key assessments, gives more specificity to which outcomes are required for each class, and identifies what methods are to be used to assess student learning.

1. Program Goals
The Landscape Architecture program has identified four broad areas of leadership for students: Design, Communication and Representation, Professional Ethics, and Content Knowledge. These four goals, while distinct from each other, are overlapping and intertwined. Students are expected to be proficient or above in each of these areas by the time they graduate from this program.

- **Design** - Students will be able to formulate questions and arguments about landscape and landscape’s role as a significant cultural medium; determine processes and practices that lead to conceptual, analytical, and formative actions that transform existing situations into preferred alternatives based on ethical, communicative, and content knowledge criteria.
Communication and Representation – Students will be able to speak, write, create, and employ appropriate representational media to effectively convey ideas on subject matter contained in the professional curriculum to a variety of audiences.

Professional Ethics – Students will be able to critically evaluate local and global ramifications of social issues, diverse cultures, economic systems, ecological systems, and professional practice as guiding principles for design thinking and implementation.

Content Knowledge – Students will be able to develop a critical understanding and application of the histories, theories, and practices of landscape architecture and its role in reflecting and shaping culture and environments.

2. Program-Level Assessments
This year’s assessment focused on the Design Studio Audit and a Faculty Survey. Even though several methods of assessment were used, only the most significant are listed and included in this report.

Design Studio Audit
As discussed in the previous reports, the design studio audit is to be the primary assessment because it best reflects overall student performance and student progress in the majority of student learning outcomes. The design studio is the integrative centerpiece of the curriculum and is intentionally linked with concurrently taken courses from within the other sequence areas. At the end of the semester during the student project presentations, the department faculty and external reviewers use the rubric to critically discuss and assess the quality of each project from the views of their respective objectives, requirements, methods and student performance. Last year data was collected from two studio courses; this year data was collected from three studio courses and also a lecture course.

- LA Studios 1/2 - first semester  (Data collected in Fall of 2005 and 2006)
- LA Studios 5/6 - third semester  (Data collected in Fall of 2006 and 2007)
- LA Studios 11/12 – final (sixth) semester  (Began data collection in Spring 2008)
- LA History 5532 – first semester  (Began data collection in Fall 2008)

Rubrics are used to assess students’ performance on their final projects. In the past rubrics have not been directly linked to the departmental outcomes. Therefore in the revision and development of rubrics, faculty focused on developing rubrics that more directly measured the learning objectives defined by department.
There are several specific student learning outcomes for each of the four broad learning goals. The following tables summarize the data collected for students’ final projects in LA Studios 1/2, LA Studios 5/6, LA Studios 11/12, and LA History 5532.

**Student Learning Outcome #1 – Design**

Students will be able to:
- A. Research, identify and assess constraints and opportunities.
- B. Situate the design problem within a larger cultural, social and ecological context.
- C. Set-up and test strategies that synthesize the research and contextual processes.
- D. Implement and demonstrate the strategies through physical application.
- E. Evaluate and reconsider outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Learning Outcome-Design</th>
<th>Below</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Above</th>
<th>Total number of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LA Studios 1/2 first semester</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>LA Studios 5/6 third semester</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>LA Studios 11/12 final semester</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
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</table>

Results:
The majority of the students in their first semester were proficient or above, however, over 20% of the students were below proficient. The ability to evolve an idea is a persistent problem, even in the proficient performances. Students who were above proficient worked at a quicker pace and took more innovative risks to move beyond the initial concept. Suggested modifications in the first year studio would be to more clearly communicate the project outcomes and create more steps in the process to assist students in further developing their ideas.

Students in their third semester who were below proficient were not able to relate the conceptual idea to the reality on the ground primarily because their research was not rigorous. They struggled to fully analyze and interpret the data. Their ability to craft a convincing argument and understand the logical structure of the argument was weak. Students who were proficient or above, invented ideas based on solid research and supported their ideas with an argument.

The majority of the projects in the sixth semester were proficient or above. The students with weaker projects struggled to develop the project details and to invent ideas that continued to move their projects forward. Proficient projects typically struggled with the same issue. However, these students were able to move into schematic ideas, but evocative concepts could have been further developed. The ability to invent ideas and develop concepts with more detail is a typical struggle for students.
Student Learning Outcome #2 – Communication and Representation

Students should be able to:

A. Write an organized, compelling and grammatically correct argument or thesis supported by well documented research.
B. Prepare and present an organized, professional and compelling verbal and visual presentation using appropriate media to explain complex ideas and concepts.
C. Constructively critique their work and the work of others.
D. Clearly articulate and document the iterative process of developing design ideas.
E. Effectively communicate design ideas to a variety of audiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Learning Outcome-Communication &amp; Representation</th>
<th>Below</th>
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<th>Total number of students</th>
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<tr>
<td>LA History written communication</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA Studios 1/2 graphic representation</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>LA Studios 5/6 graphic representation</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA Studios 11/12 graphic representation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results:

Written Communication
The majority of the students was proficient or above in their ability to write a well-organized paper and only one student was below. The below proficient project was unable to thread an argument through the paper and lacked adequate research. Proficient projects were complete and demonstrated the ability to develop an argument. Above proficient projects included more research than the assignment required and threaded together a very good argument. These papers did not just regurgitate what is already known, they included something innovative. No special modifications in the written assignment or rubric are required. A handout documenting specific guidelines for scholarly nomenclature and writing is under development.

Graphic Communication
During this first semester project many students were below proficient. Some students struggled with the verbal presentation and others struggled with the graphic representation. Below proficient projects were lacking in clarity and legibility. The ideas were not clear graphically or verbally and students did not communicate their intentions. Proficient projects were complete and the basic ideas were legible and clearly demonstrated. Above proficient projects presented more complex ideas clearly. The student projects did not sacrifice complexity and depth for clarity. These projects were successful at being precise and evocative at the same time.

Students in the third semester that were below proficient were not able to develop their ideas using an iterative design process and therefore their projects remained underdeveloped. During the process they were unable to find the appropriate graphic conventions to explore or explain their ideas. Proficient students were able to find the appropriate graphic conventions to evolve and communicate their ideas.
Student projects in the sixth semester that were below proficient projects typically relied on verbal communication. There was a disconnect between what the student was thinking about and talking about versus what they were drawing. Students with above proficient projects were able to match ideas and drawings. They discovered ways to invent and explore ideas. At all levels the persistent challenge is for students to develop the ability to use drawing as part of the iterative and imaginative process of design.

**Student Learning Outcome #3 – Ethics**

Students will be able to:
A. Understand, critique, integrate and articulate different sources, constructions and principles of ethics, including personal, professional, economical, social, cultural, and ecological concepts in their historic and present contexts.
B. Critically identify and assess personal and professional predispositions to reflectively participate in a discourse on the motivations, intents, reasons and effects of landscape architectural practices and of specific design proposals.
C. Critically develop and apply ethical frameworks to appropriately respond to culturally, socially and economically diverse conditions.
D. Critically identify and assess personal and professional predispositions to direct actions, recognize the influences on design decisions and be accountable for an ethical course of action.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Learning Outcome-Ethics</th>
<th>Below</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Above</th>
<th>Total number of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LA Studios 11/12 final semester</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results:
The weaker student projects ideas were proficient but they were not fully developed enough to critically evaluate them. Student projects above proficient had a better awareness of what they are proposing and what it will do to the place.

**Student Learning Outcome #4 – Content Knowledge**

Students should be able to:
A. Identify and understand the genesis and impacts of major movements and examples of built landscapes from antiquity to the present.
B. Identify and understand various formal, social, economic and political forces giving shape to the built environment.
C. Analyze and discuss in written, visual and oral form the relationship of a built work to the culture that produced it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Learning Outcome-Content Knowledge</th>
<th>Below</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Above</th>
<th>Total number of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LA History exam</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results:
The majority of the students scored proficient on the history class exam. Students who scored below proficient struggled because English is not their first language and they took this course in their first semester. No modifications to the course are recommended. However, student-run review session will be emphasized next fall.

Faculty Survey
A survey asking the faculty to evaluate student performance on the student learning outcomes as below proficient, proficient, above proficient was used to facilitate discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of the program. Below is a list of the main points discussed.

Student Weaknesses
- Formulating and constructing an argument
- Clearly communicating ideas verbally and in writing
- Developing and following through on quality research
- Understanding the legal responsibilities and framework of how landscape architecture is situated within other structures of society
- Developing an ethical framework
- Assessing personal and professional predispositions
- Evaluating and reconsidering outcomes
- Critiquing their own and work of others comfortably
- Following instructions

Student Strengths
- Identifying forces shaping the built environment
- Understanding major movements in LA history
- Graphic representation

3. Action Plan for the Coming Year
Based on the faculty discussion regarding the results of the design studio audits and faculty survey, the following plan of action was developed for the coming academic year. The goal of this action plan is to address several issues: a) a more complete assessment of ethics and content knowledge, b) a simpler, more effective way to collect assessment data, c) assistance for faculty in developing assessment methods, and d) address student weakness identified in the faculty survey. To accomplish these goals the following tasks will be implemented:

- Establishment of a department subgroup to continue with the development and evaluation of curriculum related to outcomes. The subgroup will continue discussions focused on the type and location of the key assessments, and make recommendations to the faculty for necessary adjustments to more closely align the curriculum with the revised learning outcomes. In addition, the subgroup is to help faculty members teaching the key courses integrate the data collection with student evaluations and develop assessment tools (rubrics) that are directly linked to the department learning outcomes.

- Refinement of the program assessment matrix which more clearly identifies key assessments, gives more specificity to which outcomes are required for core classes,
and identifies what methods are to be used to assess student learning. (The refined program matrix is attached at the end of this report.)

- Re-instate a revised version of the Faculty Course Evaluation (FCE). This revised FCE will be provided to the instructor at the beginning of the semester. At the end of the semester, each instructor would submit this self-assessment, the data collected, along with the syllabus for each course taught that semester. The completed faculty course evaluations would then be discussed during a faculty meeting at the end of each semester. The intent of these evaluations is to encourage a healthy discussion within the department about what outcomes are emphasized in which courses and how each individual course contributes to the sequence of the entire curriculum.

- Emphasize constructive criticism in the classroom especially during studio desk crits to help students develop the ability to critique their own and work of others. Also instructors are to set higher expectations and to be more rigorous.

- Explore creating a new course to strengthen students’ ability to research a topic, to construct an argument, and to understand the ethical and legal framework of how landscape architecture is situated within other structures of society.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DESIGN</th>
<th>COMMUNICATION AND REPRESENTATION</th>
<th>PROFESSIONAL ETHICS</th>
<th>CONTENT KNOWLEDGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Assess constraints and opportunities</td>
<td>A. Write an organized paper</td>
<td>A. Integrate principles of ethics</td>
<td>A. Understand major movements in LA history</td>
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<tr>
<td>B. Situate design problem in context</td>
<td>B. Present a professional verbal and visual argument</td>
<td>B. Assess personal and professional predispositions</td>
<td>B. Identify forces shaping the built environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Set-up and test strategies</td>
<td>C. Constructively critique work</td>
<td>C. Develop ethical framework</td>
<td>C. Discuss relationship of built work to culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Implement strategies</td>
<td>D. Effectively communicate design ideas</td>
<td>D. Recognize influences on design decisions</td>
<td>D. Apply design theory and methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Evaluate and reconsider outcomes</td>
<td>E. Evaluate and reconsider outcomes</td>
<td>E. Integrate principles of ethics</td>
<td>E. Understand LA legal responsibilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COMMUNICATION AND REPRESENTATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>D. Implement strategies</td>
<td>D. Apply design theory and methodology</td>
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<td>E. Evaluate and reconsider outcomes</td>
<td>E. Understand LA legal responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Understand LA construction standards</td>
<td>F. Understand construction standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Understand legal context to render professional services</td>
<td>G. Understand LA legal responsibilities</td>
</tr>
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