Master of Urban Design
University of Colorado Denver

Self-Study Report
for
Academic Program Review
2014-15

September 5, 2014
Introduction, overview and unit description

General unit description – organization, purpose, programs

The Master of Urban Design (MUD) in the College of Architecture and Planning (CAP) is an advanced post-professional degree program requiring 36 credits. The program is studio based with accompanying related topical and depth seminars. It culminates with a signature International Studio in the summer; this has recently been offered in the dynamic cities of Shanghai and Nanjing, China and Copenhagen, Denmark.

The MUD program draws students from backgrounds in professional programs in planning, architecture and landscape architecture. In addition to appealing to students seeking to cap their design experience in the College, the MUD program attracts students from across the U.S. and globally. It boasts a strong cadre of international students. Its reputation sustains this international appeal, which includes current students entering the program from the prestigious Fulbright International Exchange program.

MUD graduates have attained significant roles in professional design firms around the world, and include some of the most prestigious alumni in the College. Recent alumni of the program have entered not only academic positions and professional offices but also have taken jobs in government agencies and offices as well as in consulting and advising for the design and planning industries.

The Master of Urban Design program at CU Denver was initiated in the early 1970s and has been housed in various administrative iterations within CAP departments. Program Directors currently share part-time appointments as Co-Directors; they have assisted in the preparation of this document. The structure of the CAP MUD program is created to allow for flexibility; no faculty is assigned full-time to the program. MUD program faculty is drawn from the three affiliated departments in CAP: Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Urban and Regional Planning. MUD faculty lecturers are also hired from the local design and planning community, as befits this intensive professional curriculum. This interdisciplinary faculty is committed to implementing efficient and effective processes of assessment and evaluation to advance student learning, teaching effectiveness and program quality.

The financial basis for the MUD resides in the overall CAP budget, and is based on student enrollments. It benefits from a proportional allocation of the College’s budget to support initiatives and scholarships. The funds are used to enhance pedagogical and course delivery efforts as well as to support student success in the program. The program’s costs are comparable to other programs, with an advantage thanks to our participation in the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education-Western Regional Graduate Program (WICHE-
WRGP, [http://www.wiche.edu/wrgp](http://www.wiche.edu/wrgp), which allows residents of any of the 15 member states to pay Colorado resident tuition.

**Mission, Vision and Values, and Strategic Plan**

The MUD co-directors and faculty have developed four broad objectives and a series of measurable student learning outcomes that are shared by all faculty members delivering MUD courses and are introduced to the students through syllabi and rubrics. These specific learning outcomes describe the knowledge, skills and abilities that students are expected to have upon completion of MUD degree. The program is structured to address student learning as follows:

1) **Design excellence**: Students will be able to produce cohesive and comprehensive statements about the preferential design of the built environment, employing practices that lead to conceptual, analytical and formal transformation of existing problems into preferred solutions, while remaining attentive to germane content knowledge, professional and ethical criteria.

2) **Communication skills**: Students will be able to work individually or in groups to effectively and efficiently convey ideas using verbal, visual and graphic communication techniques appropriate for a wide variety of professional, academic and layperson audiences.

3) **Professional expertise**: Students will be able to defend the role of the urban designer in the built environment professions and evaluate the various methods and practices employed in the design field.

4) **Substantive knowledge**: Students will develop a critical understanding of the histories, theories and practices of urban design and its role in shaping both built environments and societal relations.

The CU Denver Outcomes and Assessment Office has provided the following feedback on the program’s process and progress towards achieving the learning outcomes:

“The department has put an excellent outcomes assessment system in place. The program has identified key learning outcomes, with each outcome described in detailed and measurable ways. There is an assessment matrix (outcomes by courses by assessment method) and multiple forms of direct assessments, including studio juries, papers, and exams. Scoring of the complex assessments, such as the studio juries, is guided by rubrics. As well, the faculty members meet to discuss the assessment results and then use the information to guide their program improvement recommendations (e.g., possible inclusion of a reflective component in the form of a portfolio).

Particularly notable is the careful analysis of student performance and recommendations for course and program improvements (e.g., Learning Outcomes Assessment for Urban Design 6610). As well, the format and forms for instructors to report on student performance for their
courses is an excellent design!” (July 8, 2014, Kenneth Wolf, Outcomes Assessment Committee, Re: Feedback on the 2013-2014 Assessment Report for the Master’s in Urban Design)

Progress since last review
The internal and external review team that conducted the Academic Program Review of the Master of Urban Design program in the College of Architecture and Planning in its March 14, 2008 report made general recommendations and four specific recommendations.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Use this period of reassessment of the PhD and MUD programs to evaluate offerings in the history of design and urbanism.** It may well be that rather than using lecturers to teach in these subjects, more tenured and tenure track faculty need to be hired in these areas.
  - A course on the history of design and urbanism is no longer required as a core offering because all MUD admits have a professional degree and, we assume, a substantial background in history and urbanism. Instead, we encourage students to take such courses from allied departments of architecture, landscape architecture, and urban and regional planning, most of which are taught by tenured and tenure track faculty.

- **Create opportunities for students to contribute to college governance, e.g., sitting on committees.**
  - Current MUD students have been invited to attend all MUD curriculum meetings, and a MUD student representative attends the CAP Executive Committee on a regular basis.

- **Place college, departmental, and program policies and procedures on the web site.**
  - College, departmental, program, and university policies and procedures are listed and linked on the college website.

- **Allocate resources to further update the web site including an in-house web master.**
  - The college website has undergone two major revisions since the last program review. Significant resources were invested in research, design and development to create a website specifically tailored to the Architecture and Planning audiences. The Director of Communications and Executive Assistant to the Dean has taken over the responsibilities of in-house web master, and is assisted by other staff members.

- **Provide stronger student advising to help students navigate such issues as cross-campus enrollment with less difficulty.** Provide support for students to negotiate the various
administrative problems that occur due to the dual campus, e.g., enrolling in Boulder electives.

- This recommendation primarily concerned PhD students, and the dual-campus issues were resolved with the termination of the Boulder arrangement in 2012. Student advising in the college has been strengthened, and there are now three student advisors on staff, including one assigned to work with all students in the MUD, MURP and MSHP programs.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MUD PROGRAM

- Provide a full-time faculty coordinator. The addition of a part-time director of the MUD program has been a good step. However, the program needs a tenure-line faculty member to coordinate it. This faculty member could work to clarify the degree programs and develop the curriculum.
  - Soon after the Program Review, the part-time Director was replaced by an Interim Director from the full time tenured/tenure track faculty. This Interim position converted to a permanent position in Spring 2009, and was held by Jeremy Németh, who is also our Chair of Planning and Design. Last year, we formed a Co-Directorship with Jeremy and Ann Komara, who is also the Chair of Landscape Architecture. We wished to encourage by this a more direct interaction between Landscape Architecture and Planning in an area in which each discipline makes distinct but related contributions. The program review report recommended reforming the MUD curriculum, to shift towards a more structured, high-profile program, simplifying the program to make it more transparent, reexamining the focus and perhaps broadening it, and having a stronger emphasis on national and global examples of design. The new Director worked with faculty to overhaul the curriculum in 2009. The current Co-Directors held a Visioning Workshop in November 2013 with design and planning professionals invited from the Denver metro area; this session was used to recalibrate the professional direction and scope of the MUD program curriculum, which is now in place.

- Create an explicit list of MUD faculty to help identity and governance.
  - The new Director put out call for all faculty interested in being involved in MUD program. These faculty members indicated they were all interested in being “designated” MUD faculty, and all are now listed on the MUD website.

- Simplify the program to make it more transparent. Currently, the program has a confusing multitude of different paths and credit requirements.
  - The MUD curriculum now explicitly lays out one path to graduation: a 36-credit plan. If students obtained their first professional degree in the College of Architecture and Planning at CU Denver, they qualify for up to 12 credits of advanced standing (decided
upon by MUD Co-Directors).

- **Encourage the MUD faculty to meet regularly, and also examine other MUD programs around the country as possible models.**
  - MUD faculty now meet regularly during the academic year.
  - At one of the meetings early in Dr. Németh’s tenure as Director, a comprehensive spreadsheet was created reviewing the central characteristics (credits required, focus, studio progression, etc.) of 12 existing MUD programs around the world. This review helped to develop the new MUD curriculum that both comports with peer institution offerings but sets us apart and develops the CU Denver MUD as a distinct program.

- **Program Identity: Provide an explicit description of the MUD in the college literature and web pages.**
  - The website provides a clear description of the MUD program, curriculum overview, course sequence, admissions requirements, and affiliated faculty. A printed brochure for the MUD program was created in 2012.

- **Reexamine the current focus of the program, perhaps broadening it. Although the emphasis on implementation (through form-based regulations and infrastructure) can provide useful definition for the program, this emphasis may be too narrowly focused. In addition, while a regional identity has many benefits, it would be worth exploring whether to have a stronger emphasis on national and global examples of design.**
  - The revised MUD program has a broadened focus, recognizing the exercise of urban design as an inherently interdisciplinary field with a necessary balance between theory and implementation. The explicit goal of the program is to train students to become “reflective practitioners”: as such, we instill students with the theoretical grounding while ensuring their future success as practitioners. Besides the three required studios, the new MUD program introduces four seminars with a distinct urban design focus: Design Process, Design Policy, Design Practice, and Design Seminar.

The optional Urban Design Internship is designed to provide professional practice experience in urban design. Students work 10-20 hours/week in professional firms in the Denver metro region. Firms in the MUD Internship Program have included: AECOM, Civitas, Design Workshop, Norris Design, RNL Design, OZ Architecture, studioINSITE, and Tryba Architects. College units including the Colorado Center for Community Development (CCCD) frequently hire MUD students as research assistants (RAs) and the Departments of Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Planning and Design hire teaching assistants (TAs) from our incoming MUD students.
With regard to the geographical emphasis, we now include an explicit focus on national and international contexts, while retaining our ties with the exciting projects occurring in the City and County of Denver – our core studio instructor is the former Director of Community Planning and Development. In addition, we now require all MUD students to take an International Studio that immerses them in a significant urban international location; it has recently been offered in the dynamic cities of Shanghai and Nanjing, China and Copenhagen, Denmark.

- **Consider having the MUD students move through the program in synch (through a series of studios over a 2-3 semester period) to provide greater cohesiveness and solidarity between students and faculty. This may, however, require more rigidity in the curriculum than is possible.**
  - The MUD curriculum now takes one calendar year to complete, a change we made in order to have a “cohort” of students move through the program together. Along these same lines, we are not currently accepting applications for Spring semester entry. A cadre of entering MUD students in the Fall ranges from 12-16 students.

- **Consider creating an urban design certificate within the College's masters programs. This would not require additional coursework and as such would not confer a separate MUD degree. However, it could provide more options for students. An additional option is a stand-alone certificate offered externally.**
  - While we strongly considered this option, we decided instead to tighten up the existing program by creating an intensive, 36-credit, calendar year MUD.

- **Consider creating an advisory board of alumni and professionals, both local and national. They can provide advice on community and employer needs in the area of urban design. They can also potentially provide mentorship opportunities.**
  - We have yet to create an explicit “advisory board,” but a number of prominent local and national professionals and academics have played advisory roles while we developed our new focus, curriculum and course progression. We retain our strong relationships with a cadre of local practitioners, who frequently participate as studio jurors or provide desk critiques.

**Academic programs and the educational experience**

The MUD program is a post-professional graduate program which requires 36 credits; of this, six credits are taken in electives offered broadly from the College. No courses are offered online, and all current courses have allocated classroom space. Program funding is generated with CAP through student credit hours. Some students enter the program with full external funding from their government or through the Fulbright. The unique Study Abroad Studio is
funded through student tuition and program fees in concert with parameters established in the Office of Global Education at CU Denver.

CENTRAL THEMES

The Urban Design program is organized around three central themes reinforced by core studios and seminars:

_Sustainable Cities_

We take a holistic approach to designing the livable city. Since more than half the world’s population lives in cities, with that number set to increase to two-thirds by 2030, we must anticipate the ecological impacts of our design decisions. In preparation for a post-carbon era, we address concerns related to climate change, energy usage, public health, food production and resource availability through an integrated approach to the design of urban settlements. Our students re-imagine and re-interpret urban systems – from transportation networks to hydrological systems to zoning codes to social movements – with the goal of creating cities that are at once socially just, economically diverse and ecologically resilient. These challenges are unprecedented and must be urgently addressed: we believe that urban designers are best positioned to meet them head on.

_Local to Global_

We believe urban designers must recognize the interrelated local and global impacts of their actions and understand the interdisciplinary nature of urban problems. We address design issues at all scales, from the individual public space to the neighborhood, city, region, nation and world. This approach acknowledges that all sites are embedded within larger systems, a concept we engage in all our studios.

In the Fall and Spring, students examine the Denver metropolitan area, a progressive, yet prototypical, urban laboratory experiencing significant growth and development and home to every urban condition imaginable, from dense downtown infill to sprawling edge cities to the New Urbanism-inspired Stapleton airport brownfield redevelopment. The Front Range is a national leader in design and planning innovation, as represented by the multi-billion dollar Fastracks transit project, Denver’s groundbreaking new citywide form-based code, Boulder’s open space acquisition policies and energy municipalization effort, Arvada’s GEOS net-zero energy neighborhood, and Fort Collins’s closed-loop brewery-oriented development. Students apply the skills and knowledge gained in their local study in the summer term in a studio set in Copenhagen, Denmark with faculty and students at the Danish Institute for Study Abroad (DIS).

_Innovations in Practice_

We train our students to become critical, reflective professionals with a workable understanding of urban design theory and practice. All our graduates possess knowledge of contemporary
urban thinking as well as technical, verbal and graphic communication skills. Our curriculum is informed by innovations in current practice: we undertake real projects with real clients, and studios are taught by leading practitioners from the top design firms in the region. Each year, we bring in a renowned practitioner-in-residence to teach a core course, give lectures, and serve as a juror in all MUD studios. To address the most complex social-ecological problems of our time, we see high demand for graduates who possess multiple talents, a broad understanding of urban planning, architecture, landscape, real estate development, and urban politics and economics, and the ability to work not only with design professionals but also engineers, policy makers, environmental scientists and the public.

Students take collaborative, multidisciplinary studios with College of Architecture and Planning students in an environment that more accurately reflects professional practice, with shorter studios, team projects, and design charrettes. Importantly, our MUD Internship Program aims to place incoming students into an internship with the region’s top design firms.

Trend data on students
Here are the demographic details of the Urban Design Students:
Curriculum

The post-professional Master of Urban Design is a 36-credit, calendar-year program. Many students partner the MUD with the MArch, MLA or MURP degree programs, which can reduce required MUD coursework by up to 12 credits.

CORE COURSES

_ Studios_
- **URBN 6610: Urban Design Studio I** (6 semester hours)
  Introduces urban structure and morphology, presenting city as complex, ecological organism comprised of interrelated systems. Working on urban/metropolitan scale, students deconstruct city into series of infrastructural layers, then recompose and restructure it in a more integrated fashion.
  - 2013: [Denver TOD Studio](#)
  - 2012: [I-70 Realignment Studio](#)
  - 2011: Layers of the City: Integrative Urban Design
  - 2010: [Vacant Land as Infrastructure](#)
  - 2009: [RiNo Arts District: Alternative Futures](#)

- **URBN 6611: Urban Design Studio II** (6 semester hours)
  Advances understanding of tools, methods and practice of urban design. Operating on neighborhood scale, studio emphasizes proactive role designers play in shaping regulations. Students consider real estate development economics, aesthetic criteria, historic preservation, and methods of effective community participation.
  - 2014: [The Neo-Industrial City](#)
  - 2013: [Auraria Studio](#)
  - 2012: Globeville/Elyria-Swansea Revitalization Plan
  - 2011: [Arapahoe Square: Code Calibration](#)
  - 2010: [RiNo Arts District: Regulation in Practice](#)

- **URBN 6612: International Studio** (6 semester hours)
  Immerses students in rapidly urbanizing international location. Primary focus on complexities of approaching international design practice from foreign perspective. Studio operates within network of professionals involved in contemporary urbanization projects. Students develop complete project and consider politics, economics and regulation.
  - 2014: Carlsburg Industrial Redevelopment, Copenhagen
  - 2013: [Xiaguan Nanjing Studio](#)
  - 2011: Global Design Practice: Nanjing Adaptive Intervention
  - 2010: [Design Proposals for the Shanghai Expo 2010 Site](#)
Seminars

- URBN 6641: Design Process (3 semester hours)
  Advances current practice by exploring innovative methods of design analysis, production, representation, and communication. Community participation and civic engagement are integral components of seminar, and students are introduced to business of urban design through contact with prominent urban design professionals.

- URBN 6642: Design Policy (3 semester hours)
  Argues that a role of urban designers is to shape built environment through combination of physical intervention and policy development. Students review urban economic and real estate trends and assess zoning/land use regulations to understand impacts on built environment quality.

- URBN 6651: Design Practice (3 semester hours)
  Introduces students to the business of urban design through contact with prominent and innovative urban design professionals. Examines issues of design implementation; project management; communication, negotiation and facilitation; leadership; and finance. Restrictions: Restricted to ARUR-MUD majors in the College of Architecture and Planning.

- URBN 6652: Design Seminar (3 semester hours)
  Investigates topical issues in urban design, typically within the framework of a theme running through an entire course of study. Focus is on critical evaluation of theory, process and methods.

Internship

- URBN 6930: Urban Design Internship (3 semester hours)
  Designed to provide professional practice experience in urban design. Students work 10-20 hours/week in professional firms in the Denver metro region. Firms in the MUD Internship Program have included: AECOM, Civitas, Design Workshop, Norris Design, RNL Design, OZ Architecture, studioINSITE, and Tryba Architects. College units including the Colorado Center for Community Development (CCCD) frequently hire MUD students as research assistants (RAs) and the Departments of Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Planning and Design often hire teaching assistants (TAs) from our incoming MUD students.

The MUD program held a Visioning Workshop in November 2013 with design and planning professionals invited from the Denver metro area; this session was used to recalibrate the professional direction and scope of the MUD program curriculum, which is now in place.
Curricular overlap with the other disciplines in CAP is intentional and created to enhance this post-professional program’s mission and pedagogical requirements to advance the training and preparedness for each student. A few MUD seminar courses are open to students in CAP on a cross-listed basis; this creates a learning environment that consciously integrates students throughout the design and planning disciplines and enhances the College’s mission. Further, elective courses are required outside of the MUD program; students enroll in such classes offered across the College, which furthers this integrative mission.

MUD faculty review the goals and outcomes of the curriculum in design reviews as well as annually in a faculty retreat. External peers drawn from the design and planning professions are invited to design studio reviews where they comment on the materials produced by students in the program and provide reflection on the quality of the project work. These professionals also participate in the review of design portfolios. Professional internships, an optional opportunity in the program, ask the professional host to evaluate the individual performance, which is then reviewed by the Co-directors to assess their preparation and ability to meet professional expectations. Job placement also indirectly reflects the quality of the curriculum.

To assist students with problems, support options include direct access to both directors of the program, who are both Department Chairs and quite able to provide referrals to the numerous supports infrastructure available in CU Denver; Office of Global Education for international students; direct access to the Student Academic Advisor for MUD housed in CAP.

**Faculty activities**

**Faculty List**

Faculty may be drawn from the following CAP faculty and lecturers:

Richard Epstein, Lecturer
Kevin Kemp, Lecturer
Ann Komara, Associate Professor and Chair of Landscape Architecture & Co-Director, MUD Program
Joern Langhorst, Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture
Taisto Mäkelä, Associate Professor of Architecture
Heath Mizer, Lecturer
Jeremy Németh, Associate Professor and Chair of Planning & Co-Director, MUD Program
Korkut Onaran, Assistant Professor Adjunct of Planning
Peter Park, Associate Professor Adjunct of Planning
Matt Shawaker, Lecturer
Leila Tolderlund, Senior Instructor
Todd Wenskoski, Lecturer
Faculty Data
Professor – 0
Associate Professor – 2 (Co-directors, who do not always teach in the program)
Assistant Professor – 0
Associate Professor Adjunct – .25 (Peter Park)
Assistant Professor Adjunct – .25 (Korkut Onaran)
Senior Instructor – 0 (varies – may be hired from another department in CAP)
Instructor – 0 (varies – may be hired from another department in CAP)
Lecturer – 3-5 classes/year, depending on co-teaching assignments for studios and Study Abroad

No faculty are assigned full-time to the MUD program.

There are approximately ten Urban Design programs nationally, with no outright Departments of Urban Design. Thus, faculty data is difficult to compare in any substantive manner. Directors or co-directors are appointed by the CAP Dean. As leaders for the MUD program, the co-directors work to create a collaborative and inclusive environment for faculty teaching in the MUD program, including periodic faculty meetings, with support for their teaching and development of teaching practices and discussions of program goals and learning outcomes.

In terms of professional competence, those who teach in the program are either already on the faculty of the College of Architecture and Planning and have thus met the necessary criteria for professional design and planning expertise and competence, or they are hired as lecturers, who are screened through the application process. Any lecturer teaching in the MUD program has achieved the required professional status associated with the architecture, landscape architecture, and planning and urban design.

Regarding faculty research and creative work, since faculty are rostered in other departments in CAP, their research and creative work would be reflected in their department and would be vetted through standard University channels. Lecturers are not required to have research and creative activities, although as practicing professionals they certainly possess a body of design and planning work.

As for faculty service, a large proportion of the MUD faculty (lecturers) is drawn from and are active in the professional design and planning community. They are on boards, win design and planning awards, serve the professional organizations and community groups, and participate on reviews for the evaluation of design and planning projects. MUD faculty who are members of other departments in CAP meet their service obligations through the department in which they are rostered.
In terms of teaching, ratings are assessed through standard FCQ scores. MUD faculty are generally performing at or above CAP averages. A low performance on the FCQ ratings would require the faculty member to meet with the co-directors to assess the circumstances. If warranted, coaching for advancing their teaching practices would be implemented. If this is persistent, the lecturer would probably be released and a new lecturer hired for the class.

**Diversity**

Our student body is extremely diverse, with recent students from Bangladesh, China, Colombia, India, Iran, Japan, Libya and Saudi Arabia. These students join our domestic students to examine contemporary urbanism and design practice through an interdisciplinary, studio-based curriculum taught by a multi-disciplinary faculty. Coursework is capped off by the International Studio held each summer.

We are contacting the Chairs and Directors of design and planning programs all over the nation to solicit candidates for application to the MUD program. The MUD program holds WICHE status, which further allows for drawing a diverse student population. MUD’s international student population offers a very specific population of diverse students.

We meet individually with students and deal with any diversity issues as they arise. Faculty meetings address issues of Title IX as a framework for equality and the treatment of students. Students have a voice regarding their treatment by faculty in the FCQ and also through the MUD student leader, who attends CAP Executive Committee meetings and meets with the co-directors.

Faculty engage with students from diverse communities and with diverse perspectives apparently pretty well, especially faculty teaching in the Study Abroad Studio who by default are required to interface with other cultures and situations. Faculty as a whole are invited to express and questions of concerns about their work with students to the co-directors, who would then support them by finding teaching resources on campus or by coaching them to navigate sensitive issues. We also work closely with new faculty, whose classroom experience is less developed.