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SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW

This review examined the College of Architecture and Planning at the University of Colorado at Denver. Denver is the focus for professional education in the state. Three of the college’s programs—the masters in architecture, landscape architecture, and planning—are accredited programs and undergo external reviews through that process. One program—the bachelors of environmental design—is housed on the Boulder campus. Accordingly this review of the college focused on the two Denver-based non-accredited programs—the Masters of Urban Design (MUD) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD).

These programs provide important opportunities at the University of Colorado at Denver but also face a number of challenges requiring attention. The following report answers the charge given to the committee by the university administration and represents a joint report of both the internal and external review teams.

ROLE AND MISSION

The role and mission of the college are appropriate.

MUD
The MUD program is undergoing transition and could benefit from more clarity about its role and audience.

PHD
The PhD likewise faces an opportunity to redefine its mission to develop its curriculum to fill a national niche.

PROGRAM STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

STRENGTHS
The college as a whole has an excellent physical location in a fast growing region with a dynamic professional culture. It supports three accredited programs. It has a strong faculty who collaborate on two significant interdisciplinary and interdepartmental programs, the MUD and the PhD.

**MUD**
This program has had ups and downs but with the recent appointment of a new director and increased faculty interest it seems poised to attract more students. At present it has several strengths:
- It draws on all three departments for faculty and all three fields for students. It is not focused only on attracting architecture graduates, for example, as is the case with a number of programs at other universities.
- It is available as a dual degree option for students in other masters programs in the College and is much appreciated.

**PhD**
This program has been running for ten years and has attracted almost eighty students.
- The program has strong existing centers such as Children, Youth, and Environments.
- It has been successful in obtaining funding for students.

**Concerns**
Several concerns include:
- The dual campus locations have caused substantial tensions in the PhD program.
- The urban design program is being revitalized but could benefit from clearer definitions of roles, audiences, and faculty. Such redefinition is needed if the program is to grow enough to attract sufficient students to remain viable.
- The PhD curriculum has evolved but should be revisited. The nature of the program is, by design, relatively fluid and wide-ranging. This is one of its strengths, and the source of some of its structural problems.

**Strategic Opportunities**

**Dual Campuses**
- The dual campuses are a significant asset for the environmental design undergraduate degree and the doctoral program. They also provide a significant challenge, particularly for students in the first years of the doctoral program. The current situation has affected the students’ progress and experience. It must be resolved. Specific recommendations are listed later in this report.
- When institutions succeed in their initial stages as well as the PhD program of the College of Architecture and Planning has done, continued progress depends on the willingness and ability to develop structures and procedures able to sustain health and support growth. The CAP has clearly succeeded in the initial stage of establishing its PhD program during the last decade. A strong core of professors has proven able to attract students and funding. Their success both sets the stage and creates the need to formalize internal structures and student-oriented processes. This is also an excellent point at which to build up the Center for Sustainable Urbanism as a source of affiliation for PhD students in Denver and to explore the fundraising possibilities that it could offer. In this formalization process, it is especially important to relieve students of chronic
concerns regarding their support, curricula, and postgraduate options, insofar as that is possible. In part, this entails regularizing the criteria and procedures for support, so that all students have equal access to information and opportunities. It will also require mechanisms, such as those recommended elsewhere in this report, to enhance students’ identification with each other and with the college as a whole.

Research

Many faculty members engage in important research or significant applied practice. The centers provide a strong focus, particularly the Children, Youth, and Environments center. There is potential for more evolution in Denver where a sustainability focus could be well supported. PhD faculty must take the opportunity to increase the international visibility of faculty research through increased scholarly publication.

Recommendations

General

- 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.
- Create opportunities for students to contribute to college governance e.g. sitting on committees.
- Place college, departmental, and program policies and procedures on the web site.
- Allocate resources to further update the web site including an in-house web master.
- Provide stronger student advising to help students navigate such issues as cross-campus enrollment with less difficulty.

Dual Campuses

- Provide support for students to negotiate the various administrative problems that occur due to the dual campus e.g. enrolling in Boulder electives.
- Clarify governance issues between the two campuses across the various programs.
- Other recommendations are outlined below under “PhD Curriculum.”

MUD

Program Design: The college has many good existing resources (faculty, courses, student projects) in the broad area of urban design. However, the program is not clearly defined and its mission is not well communicated to the college and outside community. The program's flexibility is both appealing but also problematic, and a shift towards a more structured, high-profile program would enhance its quality and visibility. Specifically:

Program Faculty:

- 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.
- Create an explicit list of MUD faculty to help identity and governance.
- Simplify the program to make it more transparent. Currently, the program has a confusing multitude of different paths and credit requirements.
• Encourage the MUD faculty to meet regularly, and also examine other MUD programs around the country as possible models.

Program Identity:
• Provide an explicit description of the MUD in the college literature and web pages.
• 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.
• 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.

Structure:
• 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.
• 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.

PHD

PHD Students Admissions, Funding, and Progress

Application Process:
• Admit students to program that would then take collective responsibility for students. This would involve forming a rotating admissions committee elected by the doctoral faculty with student representation. Admissions procedures would be clearly outlined. Individual faculty sponsorship/support ought to be considered as only one of several factors informing the admission decision.

Fellowships:
• Consider establishing a fixed number of fellowships, free of work, for first year students in program.

Letters of Admission:
• Limit the time period of funding offers—for example three or four years. Funding should also be tied to progress that is assessed annually. Letters need to clearly explain the nature of the support and expectations for both paid work and progress through the program.

Funding Administration:
• Refine the funding process to remove confusion and help student progress:
  o A formal, centralized, transparent process for allocating students to assistantships each year.
  o A limit on the number of hours of support each student receives, for example a maximum of 15 or 20 hours, in order to help them progress more quickly and allow more students to be supported. Many students seem to undertake far more than this.
  o Limits on being instructor of record before passing the comprehensive examination.
Use of Funding:
Consider allocating some research assistant funding that could be used as a match for external funding providing incentives for funding more doctoral students. The pool of funding currently provides free research assistants but a matching system could leverage more funds. Student Progress:

- Institute a rigorous annual review of progress by PhD program faculty. Students who are not performing should be asked to leave. While those students who finish the program do so in a reasonable time on average (5.5 years), many students drop out after a long period of time.

PHD CURRICULAR ISSUES

Location of Core Courses: As the program is located in Denver, and as the university has required that all of its core courses be offered there, the debate over location is overdrawn. Moreover, with the now long-established advances in digitally based distance learning, it seems that this problem may also be moot. The program may wish to consider some options:

- Consider scheduling student assistantships on the Denver campus in the first year when core classes are being taught. The College might consider seed money investment in the Denver-based Centers to increase external funding leading to support for graduate students on the Denver campus.
- Some members of the internal and external review team suggested that the university consider using real-time video-classrooms for some of the PhD core course work if more flexibility is needed for Boulder-based students. Using the proper up-to-date digital interface would permit students to freely participate in seminar discussions remotely, from the Boulder Campus, with the faculty and students in Denver. However, other members of the review team felt that having face-to-face instruction in Denver during the first year of the PhD was an important requirement.

Revisiting the Core Classes: The core has been updated several times and students in more recent cohorts reported improvement. However, it could be reconsidered again. It is difficult in a program that is designed to be cross-disciplinary — spanning from the speculative to applications-based models — to have a single core curriculum suitable to all students.

- Review the present Core Curriculum to consider its relation to the mission of the program and the essential needs of new doctoral students.
  - For example, rather than requiring all students to take the complete core they might have one class in common—potentially a solid research design course—and then take different tracks with a menu of “directed electives,” perhaps humanities and social sciences or some other logical set of tracks.
  - The program, students, and faculty, would all profit from establishing this small but focused series of “directed electives” for doctoral students that may also include Masters Degree students. At present, the reverse seems to be the standard. Developing more course work for doctoral students will help further establish the program’s curricular breadth as well as create new learning opportunities for students and faculty.

The Place of Architecture: As demonstrated by the program documentation of doctoral candidate advisers, it remains unclear how much support there is among the faculty for continuing a concentration in “architecture,” particularly when the term “architecture” is so often used interchangeably with “history, theory, and criticism (HTC).” The division of HTC from the other concentrations seems artificial and unproductive as all of the various concentrations have their own histories, theories, and criticality.
• Reconsider the efficacy of dividing students and faculty by concentration rather than letting them have more individualized interests or dividing by department. Alternatively, the PhD program could work at more clearly defining the architecture concentration.

Role of Centers:
• Examine the structural relation of the various centers (some well-established and others still developing) to curriculum.

OTHER

Communication with Students:
• Improve communication with students regarding changes to the program, from curriculum to hiring of new faculty and staff.

Students/Candidates Serving on Committees:
• Establish doctoral student/candidate representation on some of the PhD program’s committees – particularly curricular reform, admissions, and searches for new faculty. The faculty should consider the possibility of students having a vote in the process.

Placement of PhD Students: It is unclear how students are being prepared for traditional academic positions and high level research and policy positions in government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector.
• Obtain better data on placements to date.
• Create a process for ensuring that students learn how to teach, do research, publish, go to conferences, and apply for the first academic job. This is especially important given the lack of a significant doctoral student culture at the Denver campus.

Space:
• Allocate space for PhD students in Denver.

QUESTION RE PROGRAM DISCONTINUANCE

None of the programs need to be discontinued.