

**FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY**  
**ARCHITECTURE PROGRAM**  
**2013-14 ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW**

**MEMORANDUM**

Date February 14, 2014

To Dr. Diane Alperin, Assistant Provost  
Dr. Michelle Hawkins, Vice Provost for Assessment  
Dr. Ed Pratt, Dean for Undergraduate Studies  
Dr. Rosalyn Carter, Dean, College of Design & Social Inquiry (CDSI)  
Dr. F. Cory Scruggs, Associate Dean, CDSI  
Dr. Hugh Miller, Associate Dean, CDSI  
Dr. Gerry Clinton, Assistant Dean, CDSI

Copy Prof. Deirdre Hardy, Director, School of Architecture  
Assoc. Prof. John Sandell, School of Architecture

From Stephanie Cunningham, Professor of Graphic Design  
Florida Atlantic University  
Department of Visual Arts & Art History

Mitra Kanaani, Professor of Architecture  
New School University  
Architecture Department  
San Diego, CA

Stephen Vogel, Professor of Architecture  
University of Detroit Mercy  
School of Architecture  
Detroit, MI

Re Florida Atlantic University Architecture Program  
2013-14 Academic Program Review

## INTRODUCTION

This report is the result of an external review of the architecture program by three evaluators, Professor Stephanie Cunningham from FAU as well as Professors Mitra Kanaani and Stephen Vogel as external evaluators. The review is based on the 2013-14 Academic Program Review Self-Study, the 2011 Architecture Program Report and Visiting Team Report for accreditation and on-campus interviews and observation during a two-day visit on January 27-28, 2014. The architecture program is a five-year, professional B.Arch consisting of 159 credit hours. Graduates of the program are eligible to take the architecture licensing examination after an approved internship working for a licensed architect.

Our report looked at the Self-Study through the three lenses of education: program, students and faculty with administration being the element that brings coherency among these three constituencies.

## GENERAL COMMENTS

### Program

- 1 Our review confirms the National Architectural Accrediting Board accreditation evaluation in 2011 that the architecture program is a comprehensive program that meets the vast majority of the conditions and student performance criteria for accreditation. As such, architecture graduates are generally well prepared for the profession.
- 2 FAU is a well-established academic institution within a unique geographical setting that offers great opportunity in attracting interested students, educators and scholars in the field of architecture. This is evidenced by the capacity enrollment in the architecture program while many programs across the country are in enrollment declines (presumably due to economic conditions in the field of architecture and related fields).
- 3 Two members of the team (Professor Kanaai and Professor Vogel) are seasoned accreditation evaluators and the best work produced by FAU architecture students is equal to or better than the best work from highly regarded programs across the country.
- 4 The five-year B.Arch curriculum is generally well constructed and is comparable to other B.Arch curriculums nation-wide. The program has processes in place to evaluate the curriculum on a semester-by-semester basis with a view to continuous improvement in course outcomes. From this process

the curriculum has been “tweaked” through time. Although the majority of professional degree programs across the country are B.Arch programs, there has been a general trend to move to M.Arch programs, including a five-year M.Arch and a recommendation below will address this aspect of the FAU program.

- 5 In general the current facilities provided for the program accommodate the needs of the program, as it currently exists. However, the program is restrained from further growth and diversification of program offerings based on space limitations. The current facilities would benefit from a first floor yard build area.
- 6 The program has significant potential for further expansion with regards to interdisciplinary certificates, minors, dual degrees and graduate degrees. The “tightness” of the 5-year curriculum generally makes these ideas infeasible unless a student is willing to spend extra time in obtaining their professional degree. There is also considerable potential for collaboration with other departments and colleges within FAU and other universities outside of FAU.

#### Students

- 1 The architecture program has a diverse student body of traditional, working adult and married students. Depending upon their circumstances, some students achieve their education part-time and through late afternoon and evening studios. These students are particularly happy that the five-year program allows for this flexibility and were the reason they selected FAU for their education.
- 2 The students are very positive about the competency of the faculty and their eagerness to assist students in attaining their educational and professional goals. They feel that faculty go above and beyond minimum teaching requirements and connect with students on many levels.
- 3 Students are eager for more rigorous coursework and ready for “raising the bar” academically. They have a perception that students who under perform are passed through their classes and are frustrated that faculty may be too lenient on weaker students. It should be noted that the faculty counter-argued that students don’t recognize what goes on behind the scene and the process for ultimately dealing with under-performing students.
- 4 Students seem to receive training about the practice side of architecture, and are appropriately situated on a path to become life-long learners and inquisitive-minded individuals who, as stated in the mission, are expected to work for the betterment of society.

- 5 Students select FAU for their architectural education for various reasons including proximity to their southeastern Florida home, the relatively low cost of public education, small faculty-student ratio, the diversity of the faculty and the flexibility of the five-year program. As an Atlantic coast university, the architecture program seems ripe for attracting students from outside the US, particularly the Caribbean and Central and South America who are very desirous of an American degree, particularly in Architecture.

#### Faculty

- 1 The faculty is of high caliber and well established in their field of expertise. It was noted that 61 applications have been received to fill one position and this attests to the attractiveness of the FAU School of Architecture to outside academicians in architecture.
- 2 The faculty is engaged in a diverse range of activities and research initiatives. However, it was difficult to ascertain the thread that ties these research activities together as well as a structured level of accountability and demand for scholarly activities.
- 3 The faculty is very collegial and respectful of their peers. We noted this in our meeting with faculty and additionally, students also commented on this aspect of the faculty.
- 4 Faculty as well as administration creates a supportive environment for teaching and learning.

#### Administration

- 1 The department has a Director who has come from the faculty and recently an Assistant Director position has been created and filled by a full-time faculty member. Both the Director and Assistant Director teach, but with a reduced teaching load.
- 2 The Director, who has a long history of academic and professional service, has announced that she is stepping down this summer. According to the Dean, it has yet to be determined whether the new Director will come from within the school or from a national search.
- 3 The Director and Assistant Director provide positive contributions to the supportive student environment mentioned above.

- 4 The program is uniquely situated within a College for Design and Social Inquiry that is administered from the Boca Raton campus. This configuration presents both challenges and opportunities. The Dean is seen as someone who should advocate for the School.
- 5 The transition in leadership at multiple levels of the university opens the door to pursue long-range planning for the SOA.

#### **CAUSES OF CONCERN**

- 1 The Mission Statement of the School of Architecture does not align with the FAU mission and lacks an aspirational vision and identity for the school. The School of Architecture prides itself on the diverse backgrounds of the faculty. However, there is not clarity of vision or mission beyond producing good architects and serving society i.e. an identifying marker for the school. With the existing opportunities for the architecture program, there is an urgent need for development of a distinctive vision and marked mission for the School of Architecture within the context of FAU that will make it unique and identifiable from its competitors in Florida and elsewhere.
- 2 The current program provides limited opportunity for students to expand their breadth of knowledge in interdisciplinary fields related to their selected field of architecture due in part to its campus isolation and lack of curricular flexibility. With the recent moving of programs from the Ft. Lauderdale campus, faculty and students have a sense of isolation from the rest of the university. In spite of the existence of known barriers and problems due to the separation of the school from the main campus and the remote access to its available amenities and resources, the faculty has been demonstrating commendable strides in cooperation with other departments on other campuses. However, the remoteness of the program does not promote interdisciplinary work and is an obstacle toward taking advantage of existing opportunities within FAU. There are obvious collaborators within the university for research, certificate programs or dual degrees in engineering, urban planning, graphic design, multi media and other related fields.
- 3 As noted above, the program is at maximum for its current facilities preventing the development of other programs within the School. There are many allied disciplines related to architecture that could fall under the umbrella of an architecture or “design” program including landscape architecture, interior design, historic preservation or urban design. The opportunity might be available for developing such programs and making the school mirror the growing number of multi-disciplinary practices.

- 4 There is a lack of accessibility to use the library even though it is within easy walking distance. This is because of a multi-year renovation of the library that has caused limited hours of operation. Although architecture students increasingly use electronic media, there is still a desire on the part of the faculty that the perusing of architecture collections and the “tactile” view of highly visual architecture books is still a necessity. This issue demands serious and immediate attention and may be resolved by providing an architecture library within the school.
- 5 As was pointed out in the 2011 accreditation report, there is still a concern about communications between faculty, students and administrators especially in regards to time sensitive dissemination of news and announcements. This is an issue that should be easily resolved through social-media or other methods, but like the accreditation team we found that students and faculty were often not aware of what was going on in the School. Faculty expressed frustration with low student attendance at certain School events. Students counter that time constraint and timely communication are the main hindrances.
- 6 The shared space multi-story building lacks an external image to relate to and identify the School of Architecture to the community at large. This is a necessity for the creation of an appropriate architectural or design campus within the community. The recent year’s addition of the ground floor Metro-lab helps but at a minimum appropriate and legible signage above the entry door of the multi-story building would make a big difference in developing a sense of identity for the SOA
- 7 The Self-Study did not contain budget information for the program and it is clear, especially among faculty and administrators, that there is a lack of knowledge about non-personnel budget lines. More transparency regarding budget allocations is required.
- 8 The School requires more support personnel to use social media or other means to communicate with students.
- 9 There is a lack of gender diversity among the faculty. This is caused by circumstances including faculty leaving for other positions and not for any reasons related to bias or discrimination on the part of faculty.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the information above, the team offers these recommendations for consideration by the program and by the university. It is understood that they require “buy in” by the faculty and the feasibility of each needs to be investigated. This review team, in a short two-day visit or review of the self-study, the team was able to assess certain potentials, opportunities and causes of concern and thus arrive at certain recommendations.

These recommendations are presented with the intent to stimulate stakeholders in developing ideas and initiate further dialogues to overcome constraints and weaknesses while taking advantage of opportunities inherent in the program. We also understand that implementation of some of these initiatives are time consuming and yet sensitive. However it requires direct faculty involvement and prioritization. It does not exempt the faculty and administration from assertively pursuing concerted proactive initiatives and taking full custody of the destiny of their program.

- 1 The School should take a new look at their Mission Statement to make it more aligned with the University Mission as well as the demands of the profession. This investigation should lead to a strong statement of identity and direction for the program that the faculty can support and upon which decisions by the program moving forward can be bench-marked. The Mission should be aspirational and provide uniqueness to the FAU SOA that clearly separates it from competing programs in the region. As part of the alignment with the university mission the SOA needs to identify the strategies to implement the university’s four goals within the context of the School of Architecture.
- 2 The SOA also needs to establish a direct means of meeting the university goals to create a vital contribution to the economic development of SE Florida as related to the needs of the local architectural workforce. This can begin by strengthening the Dean’s Advisory Council of local practitioners and understanding the rapidly changing needs of the profession and in particular the research requirements of the profession.
- 3 Based on the University goal #2 to serve the aspiration of becoming a high-level research university, the definition of research within the school and should be expanded to include professional practice, creative activity and traditional scholarship. Student participation in faculty research, whether graduate or undergraduate, should be part of the expanded definition. High-level contemporary architectural firms are focusing more and more on re-



search as practice as well as scholarship and students need to be prepared for this as they enter the world of practice.

- 4 If the mission emphasis on practice continues then consideration should be given to hiring more U.S. licensed architects. In the hiring of faculty a priority should be given to qualified women. The face of the profession is changing and students should be able to find among the faculty mentors that they can closely identify and associate with.
- 5 Considering the direction that architectural education is taking and the emerging trends in academia and practice, the School should consider transforming the existing program to a 5+ or six-year graduate program that has an imbedded practice and research component. Additionally, consideration should be given for one year specialized Master of Science degrees to both define a program unique to the Atlantic coast as well as attract international students.
- 6 The School should consider opportunities for dual degree, minors and specialized certificate programs. Ideally, these programs would be aligned with a new mission statement. FAU should consider as a longer-term goal the creation of a facility that is befitting a robust and nationally recognized architecture and design program and that expresses outreach to the local community. The Ft. Lauderdale community should be made more aware that a quality architecture program is within its midst and readily accessible.
- 7 As the current “face” of the program to the community, the new Metro-lab needs to be supported with permanent funding so that robust programs can occur in this location.
- 8 Whether or not a graduate program is created, the SOA needs to find support for a rigorous grant writing and fund raising program for theoretical and applied research to support the mission and to align with university goals. As noted above, the faculty are involved in a diverse range of research and this research needs to be supported. Additionally, a new research program in support of a more defined direction for the School can also be addressed. For example, if the School wants to be known for sub-tropical design principles and investigations, funding should be sought that would support this.
- 9 It is critical in architectural education and its global perspective that a structured program for study abroad be pursued. Students should be encouraged to get out of their “comfort zone” and participate in these programs. A well-conceived program is “life changing” for students and will open their eyes to


the broader world of architecture and culture. Funding should be sought to support a program through student travel scholarships.

10 In regards to recommendation #7, the university should as a long-term goal consider developing a “center for design” at the Ft. Lauderdale campus as a vibrant creative community for artists, designers and architects and thereby resolving the issue of “isolation” of the architecture program. The team understands that this reverses some of the university decisions in recent years, but architects need in some way be part of an urban environment and not only part of a suburban campus life. There are pros and cons to the idea of moving architecture to the Boca Raton campus, but in some format an urban presence should be maintained.

## **CONCLUSION**

This concludes our report. We wish to thank the FAU administration and the School of Architecture for their confidence in our expertise and for the opportunity to be instrumental in such an unprecedented event for the institution. We hope that sincere and candid recommendations will be useful factors in creating a turning point in the future of the architecture program and towards the overall goals of the university. The administration, faculty, staff and students' willingness and enthusiasm to enter into a dialogue with the evaluators of the program was very productive and effective in looking to the potential future of the program.

Respectfully Submitted:



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Professor Stephanie Cunningham

Feb.14, 2014

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Date

*Mitra Kanaani*

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Professor Mitra Kanaani

Feb.14, 2014

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Date



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Professor Stephen Vogel

Feb.14, 2014

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Date