

## Unit Plan for Assessing and Improving Student Learning in Degree Programs

Unit: Department of Landscape Architecture  
Unit Head approval:

Date: 9 May 2008

### SECTION 1: PAST ASSESSMENT RESULTS

**Brief description of changes or improvements made in your unit as the result of assessment results since 2000.**

The Department of Landscape Architecture has made numerous changes to the undergraduate and graduate curricula since 2000. Many of these were in response to the Accreditation Reviews of the BLA and MLA programs in conducted in 2002. At the BLA level, a Landscape Studies minor and a Business Specialization are now offered. Students are required to complete a portfolio of graphic and written work at the end of the sophomore year.

The MLA thesis process has been improved in response to low completion rates. A new specialization, Cultural Heritage Design, was added. Student progress is now tracked on a data base. The capstone MLA studio was moved from the third year to the second year in the program to strengthen professional skills prior to the final, thesis year.

A required internship will be required of all BLA and MLA students entering in fall, 2008. The professionally accredited BLA and MLA programs were reviewed by the Landscape Architectural Accreditation Board in March, 2008.

The PhD program in Landscape Architecture and Architecture admitted its first students in 2000. In 2006 a new PhD concentration in Environment and Technology was established.

### SECTION 2: REVISED ASSESSMENT PLAN

**(a) PROCESS: Brief description of the process followed to develop or revise this assessment plan.**

The 1999 Student Outcomes Assessment Plan was reviewed and updated based on information from the 2007-2008 CTE workshops. Some portions of the 1999 assessment plan are still appropriate, specifically the student outcomes, which are taken from the Department's Strategic Plan. The Coordinator also met with the Assessment

Coordinator in the School of Architecture to discuss assessment measures specific to professional design programs.

**(b) STUDENT OUTCOMES: List Unit's student learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, and attitudes).**

The BLA program prepares students for professional practice. While most MLA graduates enter professional practice, some teach at the community college or university levels. PhD students are expected to conduct advanced research and teach at the university-level after graduation.

The Department's Strategic Plan identifies the following competencies desired of all graduates:

**Outcome 1**

Students will develop creative and analytical skills which foster self-motivation, curiosity, and concern for society and the environment.

**Outcome 2**

BLA and MLA students will be prepared to apply knowledge of natural, behavioral, and cultural systems in professional practice.

**Outcome 3**

BLA and MLA students will be prepared to pass the Landscape Architecture Registration Exam (LARE) allowing them to practice as licensed landscape architects.

**Outcome 4**

MLA and PhD students will develop advanced knowledge in specializations that will prepare them for practice and teaching.

**Outcome 5**

PhD students will be prepared to conduct scholarly research that will contribute to the advancement of the profession.

## **(c) MEASURES AND METHODS USED TO MEASURE OUTCOMES:**

### **Outcome 1**

Student design projects and portfolios are reviewed by practitioners and guest faculty on a regular basis, beginning with the first semester in the programs. Internal and external design competitions allow for the assessment of creativity. Student papers demonstrate critical analytical skills.

### **Outcome 2**

Preparation for professional practice is assessed by internship and job placement rates, employer evaluations of interns, practitioner feedback from accreditation surveys, and feedback from practitioners who attend the annual Career Expo (jointly sponsored with the School of Architecture). “Real world” student projects are evaluated by the clients served. In addition, the Head meets regularly with the department’s Resource Committee (an advisory group consisting of practitioners, many of whom are alumni) for advice on career preparation.

BLA and MLA programs are reviewed every six years by the Landscape Architecture Accreditation Board (LAAB). Visiting teams, one for each professional program, consist of a practitioner, an academic, and a university administrator. Teams assess student work (as presented in an exhibit), interview alumni and practitioners, and review results of a survey sent to recent graduates (which specifically addresses preparation for practice).

### **Outcome 3**

A passing score on all parts of the Landscape Architecture Registration Exam (LARE) is required for professional licensure. Pass rates are not available, so it is difficult to evaluate the performance of our graduates (except anecdotally).

### **Outcome 4**

MLA and PhD students complete a final, comprehensive project (thesis or dissertation). PhD student knowledge is also assessed through preliminary exams and final defense of dissertations.

### **Outcome 5**

Publications and presentations to scholarly groups are means of measuring the quality of the specialized research conducted by PhD students. Although only one PhD in Landscape Architecture has been awarded, it will be important to monitor the success of these graduates in securing employment in the scholarly arena.

### SECTION 3 : PLANS FOR USING RESULTS

**(a) PLANS Brief description of plans to use assessment results for program improvement.**

Curriculum and programmatic issues are considered throughout the academic year. Program coordinators are in frequent consultation with the Head and faculty. Information from the Senior Survey, accreditation reviews, design reviews, and employers are shared with all faculty members. Results from the outcome assessment measures identified in this plan will be shared with the Head, faculty, and Resource Committee.

**(b) TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

Many of the assessment measures identified in this plan are already in place. These may be modified to response to suggestions identified in the LAAB Report of the 2008 Accreditation reviews. One year after receipt of the final Report the Department will submit a response which outlines modifications and outcomes. The new Department Head, who will hopefully begin in August, will review the Assessment Plan in fall semester.