

Proposal to Name New School in the College of Design, Construction and Planning

Background

The impetus for this proposal was the mandate flowing from the University of Florida budget reductions enacted on July 1, 2008. In response to recommendations from the Dean, Provost and President, the Board of Trustees directed the College of Design, Construction and Planning to merge several existing departments into a new school. While the initial proposal included the Department of Landscape Architecture, the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, and the freestanding program in Historic Preservation, ultimately only landscape architecture and urban and regional planning were included in the merger. It was determined that Historic Preservation, which draws its faculty from all of the College units (not just Landscape Architecture and Planning) would be hampered by locating within just one of the College units. (The consensus was to keep it a College-level program. Subsequently, the Board of Trustees approved a new Masters of Historic Preservation based upon the model of a College-level program.) The purpose of this proposal is to seek approval of the new School name so we may initiate necessary adjustments to university websites, documents, etc. as well as staffing and governance policies and procedures beginning with the 2009-2010 academic year.

Immediately following the Board of Trustees action in July 2008, DCP formed a Task Force, chaired by Dr. Margaret Portillo, Interior Design, with representation from all College units, including two student members. The task force conducted interviews with administrators from respected programs nationwide with a variety of combined structures containing both disciplines, conducted departmental and joint meetings with the affected units, interviewed the primary support staff from the affected units, and solicited input from the external advisory boards of both departments. The final report of the Task Force is attached, along with a Time Line indicating the steps toward implementation that were followed since July 2008.

Even though it is common (but not universal) practice at leading universities to house landscape architecture and urban and regional planning under either a single department or school, each of these disciplines have unique and distinctly different professional accreditation processes that must be respected and protected through the merger. Votes were conducted by the faculties of both affected units, with no expressions of dissent regarding the merger. The Task Force report was presented to the DCP Faculty Council and that body supported moving ahead with the merger.

Rationale for Merger into a New School

Discussions of some sort of collaboration between the Landscape Architecture and Urban and Regional Planning programs have been underway for nearly a decade. Indeed, the origins of both programs here at the University of Florida stem from a common source and only in the 1970s did separate departments form. Both programs focus on professional education and applied research relating to the natural and built environments, and the impacts of these on human settlements (and vice versa). They

share a longstanding history of community outreach and service, and have consistently drawn upon each other, albeit in a somewhat fragmented and haphazard manner, to deliver quality professional education. A fundamental difference between the two is their primary form of instructional delivery, with Landscape Architecture utilizing numerous required studios, and Urban and Regional Planning employing more fully the lecture/seminar approach, with one applied practicum comparable to a design studio. One of the intents, and significant benefits, behind merging these programs under a single school is expanded opportunities to cross-train students using all methods of instructional delivery.

In addition, the Landscape Architecture program has concentrated largely on its professional undergraduate program (the only accredited program in Florida) but has sought to expand its graduate cohort. Urban and Regional Planning is exclusively taught at the masters and Ph.D. levels (with a variety of undergraduate service courses). Offerings in Urban and Regional Planning can help to support graduate education in Landscape Architecture, and at the same time increase opportunities for planning students to gain more significant exposure to design skills. In addition, both of these faculties provide critical support to the newly created Bachelor of Science in Sustainability and the Built Environment. As evidenced through a targeted faculty hire this year in support of this program, it is possible to strengthen both programs when they are acting in concert not only on course delivery but in faculty recruitment. As discovered during the faculty discussions of the merger over the past year, there is a strong desire and, through the merger, the capability to initiate important new graduate offerings in Environmental Design and in Urban Design.

The proposed name of the merged units is: School of Landscape Architecture and Planning

Consultation

There was a yearlong process of consultation, beginning with a discussion at the full faculty meeting in Fall 2008 (following the Board of Trustee action). The task force was created in September 2008 and completed its work in late November, providing (as noted above) substantial input from all of the affected constituencies. It was during these deliberations that the faculties of the two departments voted in favor of the concept of the merger. That was reaffirmed through deliberations with the faculty of both units following release of the task force report. The DCP Faculty Council received the Task Force report and expressed its support for the new School. They noted the need for some potential changes to the DCP Constitution given the change in the organizational structure that would affect representation on various committees and in the composition of the Faculty Council. These will be taken up through a constitutional revision process led by the Faculty Council in 09-10. A vote among the affected faculty concerning the name of the new School was conducted during July-August 2009.

Leadership

The new School initially retains the two existing departments of Landscape Architecture and Urban and Regional Planning. The masters program in Urban and Regional Planning, and both the bachelors and masters programs in Landscape Architecture have been accredited based upon the department organizational model. While it is likely that reaccreditation will not be negatively impacted by the proposed organizational change, the retention of the current departmental structure for the short run (2-3 years) will allow components of the merger (staff assignments, financial management, recruitment and admissions, governance, research, and development activities) to occur without creating any problems with the accrediting bodies. The plan is for Dr. Paul Zwick, the current Associate Dean for Graduate Affairs, to add to his responsibilities the position of Interim Director, working with the current department chairs to implement the merger. The search for a permanent director would begin within the next two years and, assuming there were no constraints from the accrediting bodies, the departmental structure would evolve into a program structure.

Impacts on Faculty, Students and Staff:

The merger did not contemplate any reductions in faculty or staff. In fact, the Department of Urban and Regional Planning filled a vacant faculty line in 08-09, and recruited another new faculty member (through the special hiring afforded by the tuition differential) beginning 09-10. No staff cut was contemplated under the proposed merger, but there is an opportunity to redefine the responsibilities of the existing staff in such a way as to serve all programs more efficiently. These changes have already been set in motion, and are necessitated as much by the overall reduction in staff in DCP as the merger itself. There are no anticipated negative impacts for students in any of these affected programs. Indeed, the assumption is that students will benefit from access to enhanced course opportunities and better coordinated curricula.

Summary:

Due to the budget reduction process undertaken at the close of AY 07-8, the College of Design, Construction and Planning was directed to identify opportunities to strengthen its programs in light of an overall reduction in resources for the College. Discussions among the administrative council, and subsequent input from the affected units, identified the creation of a new School out of the merger of two departments as an opportunity to create a positive outcome from a challenging situation. There were other possible mergers contemplated, but all the other options would have created more problems than advantages. The proposed School of Landscape Architecture and Planning should only strengthen already top professional programs.