WSU Architecture Assessment Project/ 2013

Assessment meetings with architects were held in Seattle on Tuesday, January 29, 2013, at WSU West (901 Fifth Avenue between Madison and Marion in downtown Seattle). The architects in Seattle were selected because they taught at, graduated from or lectured/reviewed at WSU in the past. This assessment project was inaugurated in 2013 and is expected to continue annually in different Northwest locations.

Moderators – Taiji Miyasaka, Paul Hirzel

Schedule:

Meeting 1 (11:00am to 12:30pm)

Edward Lalonde (Olson Kundig Architects)

Jennifer Milliron (NBBJ)

Yuki Seda (Olson Kundig Architects)

Meeting 2 (1:00pm to 2:30pm)

Mike Jobes (Miller Hull Partnership)

Prentis Hale (SHED Architecture & Design)

Thomas Schaer (SHED Architecture & Design)

Meeting 3 (3:00pm to 4:30pm)

Suzan Jones (Atelierjones)

Steve Rainville (Olson Kundig Architects)

Meeting 4 (5:00pm to 6:30pm)

James Steel (Steel Architects)

Forest Payne (Mahlum)

Maria Llobet (Walsh Construction Co)

 Agenda:

1   To learn outside perceptions of both strengths and weaknesses of WSU undergraduate and graduate architecture programs as they compare to regional university architecture programs such as University of Oregon, University of Washington, and so on, in the following areas:

        A   technical knowledge – structures, mechanical/electrical systems

B	computer skills – BIM, Photoshop, Illustrator, Rhino, and so on

C	imagination/exploration – creativity

D	contextual design – geographical influence

E	presentation skills

2	To seek suggestions for improvements in WSU undergraduate and graduate architecture programs in the areas outlined above

Summary:

1	Graduate school selection in the Northwest

Architects' comments:

The WSU graduate architecture program in Pullman (a small rural town) has difficulty competing with more urban graduate program in the Northwest. We started the meetings by asking architects which graduate program they would choose if they were accepted by University of Oregon, University of Washington, and WSU. None of the attendees chose WSU. Most chose University of Washington because of its urban context. It was also mentioned that this is not necessarily because the graduate programs of the other universities are better than the WSU graduate program; however, universities situated in and near an urban context can bring more practitioners to the programs, and naturally, create more opportunities for students to be exposed to professional environment for networking purposes. As discussed above, the architecture program at WSU seems to have a geographical disadvantage compared to universities in urban areas. However, it was mentioned that WSU should consider its geographic location as an advantage. For example, because WSU is surrounded by agriculture, we might research and develop agricultural building design in collaboration with agriculture programs. Another natural possibility might be to focus on design-build projects given that the program has facilities and space to accommodate such an endeavor. Because the architecture program belongs to the College of Engineering and Architecture, the program should pursue more opportunities to integrate with Construction Management, Civil Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, as well as the Composite Materials and Engineering Center (CMEC) by potentially providing specific degrees such as architectural engineering, or architecture + landscape.

Moderators' conclusions:

The WSU graduate architecture program may need to create specialty areas such as rural design, architectural engineering, and design-build. Also, the program needs to increase career planning opportunities to compensate for the remote location.

2	Relationship between undergraduate and graduate programs

Architects' comments:

Developing a seamless WSU undergraduate-graduate architecture program may be more attractive than maintaining a graduate program independent from the undergraduate program. One group mentioned that in contrast to the graduate program at WSU, the undergraduate program seems to attract more applicants. One of the reasons for this is that University of Washington students start architecture courses from the third year while WSU students start architecture courses from the first year. The group liked the fact that students at WSU are exposed to architecture education longer. Until five years ago, WSU offered a 5-year Bachelor of Architecture program. Some attendees chose the WSU program over University of Washington because of these professional degree opportunities. It takes seven years to earn a professional degree at the University of Washington including the undergraduate education. At present, it takes five and a half years to earn a professional degree (M. Arch) at WSU from the freshman year.

Moderators' conclusions:

WSU has not been able to attract a large number of graduate applicants from outside the program. As mentioned above, creating niches for the graduate program may attract applicants, but until then, the program may want to consider encouraging WSU undergraduate students to complete the M. Arch at WSU instead of graduating with a Bachelor of Science, which is not a professional degree. (Only 10 % of the undergraduates who graduated from WSU in May 2013 enrolled in the 1 ½-year graduate program this year.) A 5-year accelerated M. Arch program, similar to the previous Bachelor of Architecture degree, may be a possibility worth considering.

3   <u>Reinforcing technical knowledge</u>

Architects' comments:

A majority of architects mentioned that WSU architecture graduates used to have a reputation of being knowledgeable about technical and practical (constructability/ economics) aspects of architecture. The program was considered to be "the nuts &bolts school" as there used to be architecture courses taught by civil and mechanical engineers. A couple of architects mentioned that University of Washington and University of Oregon seem to be more practical oriented at present. However, one architect mentioned that practical knowledge about the profession must be taught in a well-crafted and innovative manner, as WSU is not a vocational school. He mentioned that teaching of practical knowledge should not undermine creativity.

Moderators' conclusions:

Some technical knowledge may be reinforced in design studios as assignments or in seminars such as a detailing course. Technical knowledge may be taught by finding opportunities to share materials among courses. For example, students might produce a certain design work in their studios, and in the following semester, this design work would be used in structure, Environmental Control System, and material courses to deepen their practical knowledge. Also,

the program should make high priorities to hire faculty with expertise of environmental control and structural design plus continue overlapping with architecture and construction management.

4   Computer skills

Architects' comments:

None of the attendees mentioned WSU graduates' computer skills in comparison to graduates of other universities. Most of them thought that familiarity with BIM prior to graduation is essential for students to find jobs; however, some of them were concerned about when students learn BIM, as BIM constrains design. A few of the architects emphasized the importance of the ability to draw diagrams and to draw by hand.

Moderators' conclusions:

The School needs to decide which computer software is to be taught at what level and in which course(s). A software committee should be formed to investigate further.

5   Confidence

Architects' comments:

Two of the architects in the first meeting used words such as "insecure" and "not confident" to describe WSU students in architecture offices. In general, the graduates work hard in offices, but are not very good at verbal and graphic presentation. The students need to be more skillful and confident in presenting their work in the office setting and in public. A couple of the architects encouraged an expansion of the internship program at the undergraduate level where students would gain valuable experience and confidence.

Moderators' conclusions:

Research undergraduate internship programs in other universities and encourage student presentations in public, such as at architecture offices.