

Letter from the Dean



Photo by Ralph Stern. Navajo Nation, between Round Rock and Lukachukai.

By Ralph Stern | The past five years have seen great progress in the Faculty of Architecture, progress marked by many “firsts”. We have created the FabLab, a digital fabrication facility comparable to any in Canada. Here our students learn essential skills that will enable them to be successful in competitive marketplaces. We have established important relationships with local industry, foremost of which is our work with Manitoba Hydro. This includes the Permafrost TestBox currently on the front lawn of the John. A. Russell Building where innovative materials, lightweight and high performance, are being tested. Such innovations will play essential roles in the future of the design professions.

The Faculty of Architecture has played instrumental roles in facilitating the University of Manitoba’s first international design competition, a competition

addressing long-range master planning for the Fort Garry Campus. We have our first Indigenous alumnus serving as Chair of the Partners Program Advisory Committee and have realigned the Partners Program to better support the Faculty in moving forward, including the creation of a new Partner-in-Residence Program. Our first Partner-in-Residence, an alumnus of the Engineering Faculty and an engineer with Manitoba Hydro who brings with him essential knowledge and international experience working for Germany’s Transsolar, is invigorating our CAST facility with new materials research such as those mentioned above.

The Faculty of Architecture has established a “first” relationship with the Technical University Munich and Bavaria’s prestigious Oskar von Miller Forum in supporting faculty members in

international exchanges in the area of energy efficiency research. At the same time that we have been positioning ourselves in an international arena, we have worked closely with the University of Manitoba’s Faculty of Engineering and Faculty of Health Sciences in exploring new avenues for productive collaboration. With the successful facilitation of two Past Presidents of the Manitoba Association of Architects, we have completed our first overhaul of the Faculty Endowment Fund in more than twenty years, enabling streamlined access to students while increasing accountability. Also after more than twenty years of attempts, the Faculty has succeeded in bringing a coffee service to the JAR Building, opening with the beginning of the fall semester on September 14, 2015. Although this may sound like a small gesture, the opportunities for intellectual exchange around a café, central

to the life of most schools of architecture, will be a productive addition to the life of the Faculty.

Generally, we have continued on an ambitious program of upgrading our Faculty infrastructure and facilities that, over the past years, has seen an investment of over ten million dollars in the Faculty while maintaining a balanced budget throughout. Given the budgetary constraints that the University finds itself in, this is a significant accomplishment.

This past year has in itself been an exceptionally productive and important year for the Faculty, one also marked by many “firsts”. Through Faculty Council, the Faculty completed its first (ever) Strategic Plan, one aligning Faculty goals with the University of Manitoba Strategic Plan for the period of 2015-2020. This Strategic Plan will assist the Faculty in making essential decisions

regarding resource allocation, the hiring of new faculty members, and the continuing reassessment of program delivery in relation to changing professional needs. Supporting the Strategic Plan, the Faculty (again through Faculty Council) has implemented another first: the Faculty Workload Allocation Matrix. This has allowed for, among other issues, a resolution with regard to sessional remuneration for architecture studio instruction and an effective 50% increase in salary for sessional instructors; a particularly important support for active professionals interested in teaching in the Faculty.

Another important “first” is the Undergraduate Program Review of the Environmental Design Program. The ED Program encompasses ED1 through ED4, and all successful graduates of the undergraduate program receive the same degree: the Bachelor of Environmental

Design. Such reviews are “internal”, i.e. they are initiated by the University and include both internal and external reviewers. These are not professional accreditation reviews, they complement accreditation reviews. With regard to Environmental Design, this is the very first such review undertaken since 1966 when, under Dean John A. Russell, the Faculty of Architecture created the Department of Environmental Studies. In the early 1990s this department was renamed the Department of Environmental Design and in the late 1990s, the Department was de-departmentalized, a change undertaken in response to financial pressures. It was at this time that it became the Environmental Design Program.

In 2007-2008 the ED Program was further modified through the Environmental Design Program Reform. These modifications were intended in part to remedy areas of



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concern identified in the 2004 Architecture Accreditation Report, concerns including the governance of the Environmental Design Program. This projected three-phase reform gave departments a significantly greater role in the ED Program by creating the three “ED Options”: Architecture, Interior Environments, and Landscape + Urbanism. The second phase of this projected Reform was to include an Environmental Design Option, the third an Aboriginal Design Option. This reform also foresaw a 50% increase in Environmental Design Program student enrolment.

Ultimately only the first phase was implemented; even this phase was not completely implemented and student enrolment has not increased. Following concerns raised in accreditation reports and in the Faculty around issues of governance, equity, transparency, student enrolment and student mobility as well as ongoing concerns around resource allocation, the University initiated the Undergraduate Program Review. Results by the reviewers were submitted to the University in June 2014. The trenchant observations, conclusions, and recommendations of the review have clearly caused concern and stress within the Faculty. Given that this is the first review of its kind in the almost half-century of the programs’ existence, perhaps this response was to be anticipated. Currently the review is in the hands of the Senate Committee for Academic Review (SCAR) and recommendations from this committee are expected shortly.

Other significant “firsts” are two Graduate Program Reviews; one in Architecture (just

completed) and another in Interior Design. As with the Undergraduate Program Review, these complement professional accreditations. Importantly, these graduate reviews are initiated by the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS). The Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies is responsible for all graduate programs (Masters and PhD) and curricula. The FGS also approves departmental supplemental regulations, reviews graduate student progress reports, and assesses time-to-completion rates. The Graduate Program Review in Architecture has been submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and has pointed out significant program strengths as well as weaknesses. Following procedures governing such review processes, a response and corresponding implementation timeline of corrective measures was submitted by the Acting Department Head in July. A similar process will be followed for the Interior Design Program Review scheduled for this coming fall.

Professional accreditation is essential to any program and the Faculty this past spring hosted three Visiting Teams examining Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and City Planning. These all occur on pre-determined cycles and, particularly with regard to Architecture and Landscape Architecture, are accompanied by extensive written and visual documentation provided through the accreditation process as having an exceptional program and has been given a six-year accreditation. City Planning has been identified as a strong program, and

has also been given a six-year accreditation. Architecture has been granted a three-year accreditation and the accreditation team has underscored long-standing issues concerning comprehensive design and governance, again most particularly around the Environmental Design Program. It has been assessed that the reform of 2007-2008 appears to have exacerbated the issues identified in the 2004 Accreditation Report and before.

Today the architecture program has the great benefit—and the corresponding challenge—of not only an extensive history of attempted solutions, but of three new and almost simultaneous reviews: Undergraduate, Graduate, and Professional. Between these three reviews and their recommendations there are gaps, contradictions, and conflicts as well as marked continuities. These must be met in an open, inclusive and synthetic manner that includes working with the Dean of the Faculty of Architecture as well as the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies. These challenges will be encountered at a moment of significant budget reductions. Therefore, rather than localized tactical and interim solutions, strategic planning is emphatically called for and it is essential that this planning include the professional community. Importantly, the architecture department has also successfully completed an external search for a new Department Head. He will be charged with unraveling and understanding longstanding issues that must be addressed and resolved in an efficient and timely manner. Another success is that the President of the MAA serves as a member

of the Search Committee, ensuring that the professional association has a significant voice in determining the future trajectory of the architecture program.

In addition to a professional voice, future trajectories for the program should include the continued support for three areas in which the Faculty has made significant strides in recent years: 1) digital fabrication technologies in relation to design, 2) energy efficient, sustainable and performance-driven design, and 3) Indigenous design. The Faculty’s FabLab, under Instructor Kim Wiese and Jason Hare, continues to make great strides and gain significance for the Faculty’s students. Assistant Professor Dr. Mohamad Araji has had a successful sojourn in Munich, intersecting with various partners involved with energy-efficient and performance drive design and spearheaded the first “Environmental Design Workshop with support from Manitoba Hydro and featuring luminaries Professor Thomas Auer (TransSolar and the Technical University Munich) and Professor Dr. Ing. Ulrich Knaack (Technical University Delft). Indigenous design has been central to several events focusing on the Campus Master Plan, on the University’s Indigenous Awareness Week, the Arctic Adaptions project featured at the Venice Biennale (spearheaded in the Faculty by Associate Professor Lancelot Coar and Adjunct Professor Ralph Glor), and on various initiatives intersecting the University’s Office of the Executive Lead on Indigenous Achievement.

Indigenizing the Curriculum has also advanced markedly over the past year. Another “first” is working with Navajo

Nation, which we will be undertaking this fall in conjunction with the University of New Mexico. This is an exciting and important opportunity for our students and follows a successful studio undertaken by Associate Professor Dr. Marcella Eaton and Adjunct Professor Dr. Rob Zonneveld this past winter. Images taken from the studio’s excursion into Chaco Canyon as well as from summer research on Navajo Nation are included in this introduction.

And, on a final note of “firsts”, it is also essential to elaborate on what was briefly mentioned at the opening of this report: on the Partners Program successful completion of a long-term rethinking of its goals and objectives, resulting in the creation of the Partner-in-Residence Program. As its first “PiR”, it selected Mark Pauls, a alumnus of the Faculty of Engineering who continued his education in Austria (Environmental Design) and at TransSolar (Stuttgart) under Thomas Auer. Mark has brought an amazing amount of energy and input to the Faculty, particularly to the architecture program. His knowledge and engagement has been very well received by the students, substantially increasing capacity in the areas of sustainable and energy efficient design. Further, the Partners Program Advisory Board has chosen Mike Robertson as its Chair. Mike brings to the Board not only his professional expertise, but also his very valuable perspective on Indigenous issues. Finally, this fall the Partners Advisory Board will also add Manitoba Hydro’s Tom Akerstream to its important list of members. The efforts of the past five years, and in particular those of the past year, have

been dedicated to setting the stage for professional focus and pedagogical renewal. With the stage thus set, we see this as a moment of exceptional opportunity for the Faculty of Architecture to reflect on its place within the academy, the design community and the professional communities, charting a future trajectory truly worthy of the Faculty’s significant history in Manitoba, Canada and the global community. ■

Sincerely,

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umanitoba.ca/faculties/architecture/facstaff/faclist/Stern.html

