

FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

REPORT OF ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEE TO SENATE

January 24, 2012

PERIODIC PROGRAM REVIEW

BACHELOR OF INTERIOR DESIGN

1. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The School of Interior Design is housed within the Faculty of Communication & Design (FCAD). It offers the four-year Bachelor of Interior Design program which is accredited by CIDA, the Council for Interior Design Accreditation. The most recent accreditation of the Interior Design program was in 2010 for a term of six years.

The School's mission is to educate students for the dynamic, complex, and demanding practice of interior design in a learning environment that balances the theoretical and the practical, the experiential and the conceptual. The School prepares graduates for leadership in the interior design profession through understanding and consideration of the technological, aesthetic, ideological, environmental, cultural, and social dimensions of the built environment.

The school is one of three in Canada that offer a four-year undergraduate university degree. The interest in interior design as a career choice remains remarkably steady among applicants, even as downturns in the economy make the prospects of obtaining immediate employment more uncertain. The program was recently cited (March 2010) in *AZURE* magazine as one of the top three interior design schools in the world.

There are 12 full-time faculty and 16 part-time instructors. There has been a 44% increase in the number of students since 2001 from 273 students to 370 students. Intake has increased from 78 to 102 over the same period.

2. CURRICULUM

The Interior Design program provides students with a solid foundation of theoretical tools, social awareness and practical experience, including knowledge of professional practice and the business of interior design.

The curricular focus is for graduating students to:

- understand and interpret the relationships between the natural and built environments and the complexity and variety of human responses to them;
- recognize the broad impact of design interventions and develop responsible design solutions that respond to issues of ecological sustainability and global awareness;

- engage in critical thinking and research through the systematic application of the design process;
- respond to design challenges creatively, holistically, and spatially;
- translate design concepts into resolved spaces with an intended quality and character demonstrating entry-level skill and understanding of detailing and materials;
- articulate and defend the conceptual basis of their work;
- show an ability to effectively communicate design ideas using the graphic vocabulary of the profession;
- address clients' needs while designing for the health, safety, and welfare of all hypothetical users by applying regulations, codes, laws, and standards;
- recognize and understand the extent of an interior designer's professional responsibilities and commitments.

The detailed curriculum is described in the Self-Study report. As an overview, the program consists of 42 courses: 6 Liberal Studies, 3 Professional Electives, 2 Professionally-related Electives, 31 Core. The program review refers to 6 streams in describing the curriculum (Interior Design, Design Dynamics, Communication, Technology, Professional Practice, and Theory/Art & Design). The courses listed under these streams are all required; hence the term "stream" is actually used to describe the various curricular elements of the degree.

Curriculum Mapping to UDLEs: Curriculum has been mapped to the CIDA matrix of standards, indicators, and to UDLES. The CIDA mapping is descriptive and responds to 16 standards. The UDLES maps the content of each core course and professional electives to UDLES outcomes directly.

Admission Requirements: The School of Interior Design requires an OSSD or equivalent, with six Grade 12 U/M courses, including English (ENG4U/EAE4U preferred), Grade 11 U or M or Grade 12 U Mathematics (one of MCF3M, MCR3U, MCB4U, MGA4U, MDM4U), and one additional Grade 12 U or M course from: Visual Arts (AVI4M), Economics: Analyzing Current Economic Issues (CIA4U), Canadian and World Issues: A Geographical Analysis (CGW4U), Canada: History, Identity and Culture (CHI4U), Physics (SPH4U), Communications Technology (TGJ4M) or Technological Design (TDJ4M). Other Grade 12 U or M courses in Canadian and World Issues may be considered on an individual basis. A minimum grade of 60% or higher is required in each course. Students should select Physics (Grade 11 or higher) and the Art option in Grades 11 and 12 if available. Preference may be given to applicants who have included History or Visual Arts/Art History in their Grade 12 U/M studies. Subject to competition, candidates may be required to present averages/grades above the minimum.

All applicants are required to participate in a portfolio review. Typically, the portfolio review consists of an interview, a writing test and a drawing test. Mail-in candidates must complete a pre-determined design exercise and present a personal essay.

Internship:

In response to the need for an internship component, The School of Interior Design established three professional practice modules: a preparation course, a 400-hour internship in the summer between third and fourth year, and a fourth-year professional practice course. The internship program is now in its ninth year. An internship coordinator establishes contacts with prospective employers, prepares students and their portfolios for the interview process, supervises their hours, and evaluates an internship placement report.

Minors:

In 2010-2011, the Curriculum Committee of Departmental Council, working independently of the announcement of the new curriculum framework, strategized some changes to curriculum that would enable Interior Design students to take minors. (This occurred before the announcement of the new Minors policy.) These changes were passed by Departmental Council and have been proposed for implementation in the fall of 2012. The curriculum objective was to introduce one additional course into the curriculum that was a professionally related elective bringing the total in the program from two to three electives.

5. THE PROGRAM REVIEW

The review provides comprehensive information about the program and the School, including student data, student and graduate surveys and a comparator review. As required by Senate policy 126 it provides a statement of the consistency of the goals, learning objectives and program expectations with various academic plans and the OCAV degree level expectations (See comments in the ASC Evaluation section, however).

Program Assessment of Strengths and Weaknesses

The assessment of program strengths and weaknesses, based on the Self-Study Report and the observations and comments made by the PRT is as follows:

Strengths:

Relevant and Up-to-Date Curriculum- Ryerson's interior design program fulfils all of the CIDA criteria as an accredited school and complies with all 12 standards now required by that body. The curriculum covers all required material in sufficient depth and breadth. It offers a solid foundation that enables graduates to find employment in all interior design specialization areas, as well as providing a broad design education that allows students to pursue related fields as well as graduate studies. Students have great success finding employment and are prepared for the workplace.

Outreach Opportunities- To broaden the curriculum opportunities to introduce students to more interdisciplinary thinking within a logical and global context, the school actively pursues projects with real clients and a community focus.

Provision of Opportunities for Experiential Learning- The majority of courses at the school have an experiential component. The types of activities include a work/study internship, international exchange opportunities, design studios, creative construction in the workshop, field trips (including a four-day field trip in first and second year), portfolio creation, labs and problem-based learning, and case-study analysis.

Strong Program for Incoming Students- Most students entering the school are selected through an extensive interview process that supplements their academic achievement. In order to help students hone their drawing and computer skills, the school offers a one-week Summer Quick Start program through the G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education two weeks before classes start. The School of Interior Design also has a three-day orientation program in the week before school starts. This extensive introduction of students to the faculty, the program, the workshop, studio life, the Student Council, and Ryerson Support Services helps build community and orients students to university life. The orientation also includes field trips, a mini-design problem, a special reception for parents of new students, and a welcome reception hosted by a prominent interior design firm.

New Learning Opportunities for Current Students- The School of Interior Design is actively pursuing a new collaborative degree and minor in Fibre and Textiles with the Schools of Theatre, Fashion, and Graphic Communication Management. While the school now offers liberal studies electives in art history for the university, it is pursuing the establishment of art history minors, interior design minors, and a module for the proposed degree in the creative industries. This involvement with other fields and other schools provides important learning opportunities for students. Students also take full advantage of Ryerson's exchange programs and currently go abroad regularly to ten schools. New partnerships are being sought in Scandinavia, Italy, and the Far East.

Connections to Practice- The school's location in Toronto, one of the most important design centres in North America, is attractive to prospective students, and the use of the resources of the city is one of the strengths of the program. The School has design leaders on its Advisory Council. The alumni, many of whom practice in Toronto at important interior design firms, return to the school as guest critics as well as to open up their offices for students to visit. This strong connection to alumni also enables students to obtain summer internships and ongoing work during the school year.

An active "Lunch and Learn" series speaks to the strength of the school's relationships with industry. At these weekly sessions, manufacturers, designers, service and other industry representatives visit the school to introduce students to their products and projects.

Faculty SRC Activities (Scholarly, Research and Creative Activities)- Faculty are engaged in scholarly, research and creative activities (SRC) that are innovative and often brought back into advanced interior design studios, as well as enhancing the reputation of the school among other scholars, students and the design community.

Weaknesses:

Graduate Satisfaction- Graduate satisfaction with the program, as expressed in survey results, has fluctuated over the years. For example, 38.9% of the class of 2000 were either satisfied or very satisfied with the program. This compares unfavourably with the 71.6% of FCAD graduates who felt this way about their programs. By 2006 the situation had improved with 78.5 RSID students feeling satisfied or very satisfied, compared to 86% of FCAD students. In 2009, however, the trend reversed with 47.6% RSID expressing a satisfied or very satisfied view, compared to 77.8% of FCAD graduates. In 2000, the graduating class was entering a workforce that had been affected by a recession. The school had just gone through a significant administrative change with a new chair, which also affected morale and the overall experience for the class. In times of industry uncertainty, students in the graduating class have been known to question the calibre of their education and their applicable skills, thus lowering their satisfaction.

The surveys in 2003 and 2006 showed a substantial increase in satisfaction as stability within the School's administration, along with a flourishing economy, allowed many of the graduates to be secure in their understanding of the curriculum and to be employed prior to graduation. The "new" curriculum (including the new professionally-related and professional electives) had been established and a cohesive mission statement and direction were clear to faculty and students alike.

The final survey in 2009 was reminiscent of that of 2000. With a recession underway, many students once again questioned whether they were prepared for entry into the practice of interior design. In addition, dissatisfaction within the graduating class was noted due to changes in focus within the curriculum in order to adhere to new CIDA standards.

High Student-to-Faculty Ratio- The last peer review (2000) indicated that the student-to-faculty ratio was too high. Larger-than-normal studio section sizes have meant group instruction rather than individual critiques. The combination of a 38% increase in the number of students and loss of three faculty members creates systemic curricular tensions.

Faculty SRC Output- Many of the faculty at the School of Interior Design are not career academics. Recruited from practice, they have "grown into" the SRC activities required by the university. Although some faculty members are engaged and productive in their SRC endeavours, there are faculty whose real strength lies in teaching rather than SRC.

Integration of Technology and the Teaching of Computer Programs- BIM (Building Information Modelling) as a technology and Revit as a software program may be required in some areas of practice. The use of Revit is not as extensive in Canada as it is in the United States; estimates put Canada at two years behind. Nevertheless, research points to a need for this content area to be part of the program. Using the computer as a design generator has been pushed into the background as the School works to keep its communications curriculum current and relevant to the changing needs of practise. The school has had no dedicated computer lab since the shared FCAD lab was moved to Kerr Hall; it has subsisted on 'hand-me-downs' from that lab, placed in the design studio and Design Centre. As well, the school does not have an IT technician.

6. PEER REVIEW TEAM (PRT) REPORT

The Peer Review Team¹ (PRT) report and the Department's response to it (see section 7.2, below) provide further insight into the program.

Strengths identified by the PRT:

1. The program identity is well articulated with a clear mission and goals.
2. There is excellent student integration both within the school and with one another. A community environment is developed through the common spaces, student inter-year interactions and the high-density nature of the school environment. Clear benchmarks are set and rigour is imposed with students from the outset in terms of program expectations.
3. This program gives excellent value for the tuition paid. Facilities are generally excellent and the emphasis on craft and building materiality is a plus and would be the envy of many schools of this caliber.
4. Students are given ample opportunities for "experiential" learning and the program promotes the studio as a fundamental component of learning, where design process is experientially taught. Students get both hands-on experiences and conceptual development of projects. Problem-based learning is at the heart of many of the design studio projects.
5. There has been an effort to develop a diversity of program options, including the initiative to create interdisciplinary electives.
6. The Interior Design program clearly complies with the high standards set by CIDA, and also with Ryerson curriculum standards.
7. The program has a strong identity and reputation for high quality in North America.
8. The full time faculty engage in scholarly activity and most are dedicated to advancing interior design as a discipline through an examination of teaching and learning processes.
9. The program has high standards and quality in terms of curriculum and expectations of both professors and students.

Weaknesses identified by the PRT :

1. The extremely strong emphasis on studio projects developed from the outset as a set curriculum leaves very little room for student decision-making within the earlier stages of their development.
2. In the final project, the extremely complex nature and smaller scale of the project does not allow for a freer range of development by the student or the development of critical thinking skills that build autonomy.
3. Few NCIDQ qualified professors
4. The core curriculum does not allow for extensive student exploration of allied or interdisciplinary alternatives that would complement their interests. There are few electives;

¹ Members of the PRT were Profs. Tiiu Poldma (PhD, IDEC) and Rachel Pike (ASID, IDEC, IIDA).

students would like to be able to develop a broader expertise in aligned subjects or in a complementary discipline, or explore topics that interest them which may not be covered within the core curriculum.

5. The high student-teacher ratios are well above the standard within most design and architecture programs of a similar caliber; teaching loads are considered very high for a program of this type and caliber in North America.
6. The facilities appear to be understaffed in some areas, such as the workshop. The Interior Design building was renovated to accommodate a student population of around 250; current enrollment is around 370.
7. The emphasis on the professional development of students limits the student exposure to more critical inquiry-based modes of thought and research skills required for academic advancement into masters' or doctoral levels.
8. The number of technical staff in the 3-D Workshop and Materials Lab that has been reduced in recent years from two full time and one half time to one full and one part time, creates a potential safety problem

Priorities identified by the PRT:

1. Heavy teaching loads and high student to faculty ratios, and lack of support personnel undermine the ability to sustain the program's international reputation for innovation and the quality of its graduates. Heavy teaching loads result in less one-on-one contact in studio classes and large classes in the woodshop can compromise safety as well as lessen the impact of this very strong component of a Ryerson education. Heavy teaching loads can affect the quality of faculty productivity in scholarly research and creative activities.

2. The need to keep up with constantly changing technology, which is especially difficult for programs tied so strongly to the professions. To get quality placements for internship and permanent employment, students must be proficient with the most current hardware and software. This requires having both at ready access to the studio for project design and production, having faculty who are trained and accessible not just in class time, and having accessible IT support for students and faculty.

3. The lack of feedback available to the administration and faculty concerning student assessment of teaching. Although it does appear that the chair has a very good understanding of the concerns of the students through an "open door" policy and "Town Hall" events, blind assessments of individual faculty can be very powerful tools to improve teaching.

7. DEVELOPMENTAL PLAN AND RESPONSE TO PRT REPORT

7.1 Developmental Plan- The school has developed the following goals:

Goal 1: Build Excellence- To build on high-quality interior design practice in Canada through: Exemplary education; Current professional practice; Acknowledgement of and engagement with societal issues; Diverse critical approaches to design.

Goal 2: Expand Multiple Approaches to Teaching and Learning- Two key areas for development are the first-year student and the fourth-year student. New initiatives for engaging the fourth-year student include enlisting the Advisory Council to hold panel discussions and lectures about making the transition between school and practice and workshops on graduate school choices and the graduate application process. First-year students need help in making the transition from high school to university. While the school has initiated some programs such as the Quick Start and orientation week to target incoming students, they are often at sea during that important first six weeks of school. Counselling will be strengthened for this group to provide in-house workshops and support. Also a critique simulation is planned to help students understand this very important part of the design process. To this end work has begun with the Interpersonal Skills Teaching Centre.

A new first-year curriculum has conceptualized to “liberalize” the first-year experience by working with the Arts and Contemporary Studies platform to introduce students to ideas and concepts that would broaden their thinking. The issue of section sizes will also be addressed by negotiating additional resources.

There is a need to refine the final interior design project to be able to maintain interest without the burnout factor now experienced by students. Strategies for independent study modules have been proposed to resolve some of these curricular issues.

The School also wants to explore a co-op program (required or optional) as part of a strategy for greater student engagement with practice and as a way to alleviate some of the pressure of too many students in a building designed for 130 fewer students.

One of the program’s challenges has been to balance the need to educate students who are creative, innovative, curious, and skilled in communication, both graphically and orally, with the needs of the profession to have entry-level graduates with technological skills that are rapidly changing as the profession itself responds to external changes in related building professions. Thus, incorporating BIM technologies by teaching Revit in the program would fill a gap that has been identified in the self-study.

Goal 3: Establish a Master of Interior Design Program- The introduction of a master’s level program is important for the future of the profession of interior design in Ontario as well as vital for the support of research interests of the faculty.

Goal 4: Promote Excellence through SRC - This involves strategic hiring for two or three positions that are currently vacant. Given the school’s aspirations for a graduate program, it is especially important that new faculty have a strong research interest already in place when they are hired.

Goal 5: Engage Students in Diverse Cultural and Professional Communities- At the moment, the Vertical Studio and the IDE special topics courses provide the curricular vehicle. The school wants to

create more opportunities with the FCAD schools, as well as other schools at Ryerson, and part of these collaborations will involve making Interior Design curriculum accessible to these schools.

Goal 6: Make Current Students' Achievements Public- The year-end show has allowed the school to connect with prospective employers and the public at large to promote the school to the broader community. The School also plans to start to publish the work of the studios, both electronically and in print format.

7.2 Response to PRT Report

a) Issues with fourth-year projects. Proposed curriculum changes to the fourth year major project may address the visiting team's remarks regarding balancing the need for graduates with a professional emphasis and providing students with more critical inquiry-based modes of thought and research skills required for advancement into master or doctoral levels. Current students who do choose to pursue graduate studies have been highly successful in a variety of programs in North America and beyond. Preparation for postgraduate work in the existing curriculum does not seem to be an issue. The changes proposed for the fourth year project combine the length of a full-year project while maintaining the studio model rather than the thesis model (this latter to be part of the planned graduate program).

b) Set Core Curriculum/Limited Choices. More courses can be added to the published list in the PR table to address the issue of breadth. The new undergraduate curriculum model approved by Senate as a response to these concerns should allow for greater student choice and help prepare students for an increasingly multidisciplinary professional world. The call to greater choice has to be balanced with maintaining the program's distinctiveness.

c) High Student-Faculty Ratio/High Teaching Loads (Identified as a Priority by the PRT). The extensive curriculum adjustments and initiatives undertaken by the school cannot by themselves solve systemic problems of too large classes, decreasing student contact, too many stand-up hours impacting negatively on the faculty's ability to negotiate teaching, service and SRC and inevitable faculty burn-out. Maintaining the academic environment which fosters creative output at a high level is dependent on many factors not the least of which are interaction with students and a strong studio environment. In order to promote excellence, we count on faculty to deliver the hand-on workshops in the curriculum, and also to provide important learning opportunities outside the classroom through charrettes, interactions with the design profession and community partners and it is faculty's decreasing ability and willingness to participate in these activities (given the aforementioned burnout) that are causes for concern. Remaining among the top three interior design schools in the world should be a priority for the university.

d) Lack of Staffing/Dated Infrastructure. Investment in upgrades to facilities and additional staff are called for. Sharing of technical staff with other FCAD Schools helps, but it is not a long-term solution. Safety in the workshop is currently being addressed by better training of lab monitors and more

thorough shop orientation for every first year student. The School has also created a faculty coordinator position for the workshop to act as a liaison between faculty and the workshop staff.

e) To Keep Current with Technology (Identified as a Priority by the PRT). The School's response has been to hire CUPE instructors who are still intimately involved day-to-day basis with the profession. However this practice has increased the knowledge gap between the full-time faculty and the students and the CUPE instructors. Full-time faculty should be trained in new technology as well. This is especially true given the fact that computer technology is now being increasingly used as a design tool rather than as a technical or communication tool.

8. The PRT REPORT- RESPONSE FROM THE DEAN

Ryerson's revised program review policy (IQAP) requires that Faculty Deans also provide a response to the PRT report. The following comments come from the Dean of FCAD's response to the Interior Design PRT. The Dean has indicated that these recommendations should ideally be addressed in the three to five year time frame.

Recommendations from the Dean:

1. The School should develop a five-year plan to update its technological infrastructure and keep it at levels of currency required by the industry.
2. Faculty should be encouraged in the strongest possible terms to familiarize themselves with the latest technologies.
3. The School should pursue its nascent plan to develop a Master program in Interior Design with greater urgency. It is suggested that the next two faculty hires have credentials consistent with offering graduate-level education.
4. The School should consider introducing challenging "general interest courses" in Interior Design that might attract students from other Schools and Faculties on campus.
5. The School should consider introducing a broader range of professionally-related electives to provide students with a broader range of courses that can be aligned with the program's core courses.
6. Subject to available funding, the University should hire an IT/Lab technician to reduce the student to staff ratio and counteract possible safety hazards resulting from overcrowding. This should also free up faculty from additional supervision of students and reduce burnout.
7. Subject to available funding, the University should dedicate one of its future faculty hires to Interior Design, ideally for the 2013/14 hiring cycle.

ASC Evaluation

The ASC assessment of the periodic program review of the *Bachelor of Interior Design* and its recommendations are as follows:

While the School of Interior Design has mapped the content of its courses to UDLEs, it has by-passed a vital step on the curriculum development pathway; the definition of program curriculum goals and the mapping of these both to course content and to the UDLEs statements. Experience has shown that the effort of a program to define clearly its curricular goals, in terms of learning outcomes, has great value for ensuring curricular coherence, avoiding redundancy, and for identifying flexibility. In light of this, ASC recommends that a full UDLEs analysis of the program be completed and presented in a follow-up report.

While the School has identified a number of possible reasons why graduate satisfaction with the BID program is low, ASC recommends that the sources of this low satisfaction be further explored. The School may wish to hold focus group sessions for recent graduates, for example. In addition, the ASC asks that the School identify additional strategies that might improve the program's performance in this context and present these in a follow-up report.

Follow-up Report

In keeping with usual procedure, a follow-up report which addresses the recommendations stated in the ASC Evaluation Section is to be submitted to the Dean of the Faculty of Communication and Design and the Provost and Vice President Academic by the end of June, 2013.