September 19, 2011

Action Plan for the School of Architecture

1] Retention and graduation rates
2] Native Hawaiian advancement
3] Quality of graduate education

There are many changes occurring at the School of Architecture [SoA] right now, and several will have direct impact on the above issues. First is the 4+3, which is changing the structure of the School of Architecture into a School that can offer a 4-year Bachelor of Environmental Design degree and a 3-year NAAB accredited Doctor of Architecture degree, instead of the current structure that only has one strategy: the 7-year degree. The other change is the implementation of our new Global Focus/China Track program in the Fall of 2012. Within architecture education, this program is unique in the world and will provide students with the opportunity to obtain an NBAA accredited Master of Architecture from highly acclaimed Tongji University’s College of Architecture and Urban Planning as well as a NAAB accredited Doctor of Architecture from the University of Hawaii’s School of Architecture.

1] Retention and Graduation Rates
The largest percentages of students coming in to the SoA are recent local high school graduates, and the current admissions standard accepts anyone into the School that requests it as their major. The School produces promotional material that can be sent out to those recent graduates. Many prospective students just out of high school apply to several schools and then determine which to attend based on who accepts them. By courting our prospective students with materials, our School can stand out as a destination for excellence. We are the only School of Architecture in the United States and Canada that offers a NAAB accredited Doctor of Architecture, and it is important that prospective students know and understand all that the School can offer them, especially when it is something they can’t get anywhere else.

There is a strong consensus within the School’s faculty and staff that timely and critical evaluation of students is required in order to determine if the path they have selected will be a successful one. In that regard, the SoA has implemented Undergraduate and Graduate Chairs who work closely with all students to help them in this regard. The faculty/staff of the SoA also have plans to review and make changes to the Portfolio Review process in order to provide standardized grading criteria for professors and stricter protocols for students. By allowing students to recognize early in the program whether or not they have high chances of success
they will be able to choose to stay in the program or investigate and develop alternate plans within the School or the University.

Recognizing that a 7-year commitment for incoming students is difficult at best to make, the new 4+3 structure will also allow for students to enter the program and if they decide that Architecture is not the right path for them, they can leave after 4 years with a Bachelors of Environmental Design degree. That was not an option before, and contributed to a number of students leaving the program. Some students in fact, when faced with portfolio review, would rather drop out of the School than attempting this daunting project. With the 4+3 in place, many students who might otherwise leave will be more likely to stay to achieve at least the 4-year degree.

The increased recognition that is certain to come to the School after the implementation of the Global Focus/China Track will make the School a wise choice for high-quality students. The United States and China are the two largest construction industries in the world, and the benefits offered by the Global Focus/China Track are unmatched in the world at this time. Successful students from this program will have unequaled opportunities, and will be among the most highly sought graduates for jobs in the international marketplace. As word of this spectacular Focus/Track spreads, the SoA will draw international attention as a leading prestigious world-class learning institution that students will want to attend.

2] Native Hawaiian Advancement
The School of Architecture attracts a number of native Hawaiian and Part-Hawaiian students [40 in AY 09/10, 49 in AY 10/11]. This could be in part due to the diverse classes offered that speak to native Hawaiian issues of concern such as land use and management, Asia-Pacific architecture history and theory, and more. Also, the SoA is the only architecture school in the United States that has declared an orientation to the Asia-Pacific region, as opposed to Europe. The SoA actively recruits at local high schools, and this practice would be facilitated with the implementation of the plan to send promotional materials to high school graduates. As recognition of the School grows, more native Hawaiian students will see the unique benefits of attending their local School of Architecture instead of traveling far away to pay more and receive less than a NAAB accredited Doctor of Architecture.

Sustainability is a crucial concept in an island environment, and the SoA is one of the on-campus leaders in the charge for sustainable practice. The SoA courses, shops, and labs all encourage thinking about the future while working in the present, and such ideas are important to native Hawaiian efforts to protect their precious island way of life. Preservation is in turn a part of sustainability, and is a critical portion of the work done at the SoA as far as ways of maintaining and safeguarding architectural treasures for future generations.

The Community Design Center provides an opportunity for students to work on problems that the local community identifies and then through collaboration with students the best solutions are found and implemented. The Design Center involves professional research and design on
outreach community projects that may include architectural design, technological innovation, historic preservation, urban design, or other topics that consults and benefits a specific community user group in Hawaii. This process allows for students to become actively engaged with the Hawaiian community and its unique problems and potentials, rather than leaving the islands to practice their trade. The design-build course does much the same thing, identifying projects within the local community that can be tackled and accomplished by a class within a semester.

3] Quality of Graduate Education
The SoA is unique in the United States and Canada for offering the Doctor of Architecture, as previously mentioned. Offering a truly unique degree draws the best students, and the best faculty. Our faculty is actively engaged with the students, as well as with international research and practice. Discriminating students can see the results of the SoA faculty in built design around the world, as well as a considerable body of published works in articles, books, and conferences. The higher the quality of the faculty within the SoA, the higher the quality of the students and their educational experience will be.

The implementation of the Global Focus/China Track will provide students with a singular opportunity to obtain degrees in the two largest construction economies in the world. Even students that are not in the program will benefit from the prestige of attending the SoA and being able to interact with students from China and many other parts of the world. The SoA also offers a unique Seoul Studio experience for graduate students, which allows them to work and learn in an architectural firm in Seoul, Korea. In addition, the SoA has a practicum, community design or alternative experience option for graduate students, and this allows for the student to learn here on the islands, on the mainland, or internationally at an architecture firm or community design center and provides real-life experience. These experiences can also lead to employment for graduates, as they have already established relationships with the professional community.