Proposition for Program Realignment 9-11-2020

In response to the reiterion of the College of Engineering and School of Architecture combination let me offer the following:

Three discussion sessions with the School of Architecture faculty have indicated overwhelming opposition to the connection with Engineering. Only one faculty member has shown an interest. Two others, who have worked with Engineering faculty members, have explained that they felt the approaches and “temperament” of the two units are incompatible. There is also opposition in the broader architecture community.

The School of Architecture has a long history at UHM. The story (in the minds of alumni, faculty, and the community) is one of gradual growth and independence. A survey of the 136 NAAB accredited programs indicates that only eight have a connection with engineering programs. Even with these, the connection is tenuous: Tuskegee Institute has a College of Engineering, Architecture, and Physical Sciences, which would suggest this is a mere administrative grouping, not one with any degree of collaboration. Since the last published list, only five programs now of 136 have an engineering connection. Clearly this is not the direction that architecture programs are taking around the country. In the 1980s, in fact, NAAB specifically cautioned against architecture programs associated with engineering colleges, putting them on notice for accreditation.

The typical connection is in fact: Architecture and Planning; or Architecture, Planning and the Arts.

The School of Architecture’s proposal is still the following:

The Department of Urban Regional Planning returns to the School of Architecture where it began. This is consistent with nearly every other architecture and planning program in the country. For many years the UHM Department of Planning had a very strong policy-focused program. This has changed in recent years towards a focus on design and the environment. Many of the international students in the planning graduate program come with architecture degrees. Some have been surprised to find that the planning options did not meet their needs; the present offerings and faculty have changed this. Presently, Planning has no undergraduate degree, a healthy MURP degree and a small Ph.D. degree. A combined Planning and Architecture college would offer numerous opportunities for collaboration and interdisciplinary research.

There is significant precedence also for an alignment with the Fine Arts programs, including art history, painting, sculpture and graphic arts. An excellent model is Cornell: The College of Architecture, Planning and Arts.

This combination would genuinely benefit all three areas. It doesn’t eliminate a school but provides a more manageable unit with a significant critical mass and numerous opportunities for collaboration. A platform such as this would facilitate the development
of other degrees: an urban design degree; an interior design program; historic preservation (beyond the certificate program). It would fill a number of state needs and those for expanding our reach beyond Hawai‘i.

The School of Architecture has prepared a draft ATP for the MArch degree, which we reduce the time to a professional degree from 1 ½ to 2 years beyond the four-year preprofessional BEnvD. I have also brought our leadership team together about the creation of a Doctor of Design program to meet the needs professionals in a number of design fields, including architects with BArchs or MArchs. I’m thinking of a research or design-based, non-residential program that would bring mid-career professionals to UHM for two summer sessions, but they would continue to work from home and maintain their careers where they are. I think this would be a popular that would not conflict with our existing design focused professional DArch.

I believe both the planning and the fine arts programs would be compatible with architecture. Planning, like architecture, is a strongly applied discipline. Many of our faculty already work with planning faculty. The Department of Planning has nine faculty members and is located near the School of Architecture (as is the Art Department). The art historians could contribute strongly to our required history courses. The ceramics, glass, painting, and graphics programs are all very much “creative” fields, as is architecture.

Failing this kind of organizational realignment, a stopgap might be a School of Architecture and Planning with administrative link to the College of Engineering. This would at least put Architecture in a stronger position (a bigger stepchild, so to speak) and would represent at least something of a move forward. An adjustment to School of Architecture salary scales might also take some of the sting out of a new alignment. Presently, the College of Engineering brings in new assistant professors at around $90,000. A newly tenured Associate Professor in Architecture makes just $86,000.

Unless we can carve out something of a positive improvement out of the realignment, there will be great unhappiness among the faculty and the architecture community. I genuinely want any change in administrative structure to serve the present School of Architecture and the state.