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Dr. Steven Hyman, Provost
Office of the President and Provost
Harvard University

Dear Provost Hyman:

RE: Graduate School of Design Dean Search

EVERY GENERATION CLAIMS REVOLUTION; however, today design education hits a critical point of inflection: whereas current thesis students at GSD began their education drafting by hand, now first-year students start immediately building computer models--digital displaces physical and redefines the drawing. The GSD confronts transformational change: while faculty conceive of autonomous disciplines, students (having come of age in the age of hypertext and of multiplicity) see design as an integrative and interconnected project. For the new generations, landscape/architecture and urban planning dissolve into a globalized space of the contemporary, where (digital) design is popular culture. Simultaneously, recent trends toward energy-efficiency and sustainable economic-ecological systems demand renewed study of the role and techniques of the design disciplines.

IN A DEAN students seek two-fold leadership: administrative genius and creative vision. At present, total lack of communication cripples any effective, coordinated school-wide initiative. The Faculty Committee on School-Wide Instructional and Curriculum Issues reports:

...although the School is composed of several disciplines with the assumption that interaction is a good thing, the School is nonetheless deeply departmentalized, with no one "looking across the school." (Sep 19 2005, pp.6)

Rather than the committee's recommendation of "an entity charged with considering school-wide curricular initiatives...[that] could take the form of a faculty associate dean for academic affairs, a school-wide committee composed of the departmental chairs and program coordinators, or a separately appointed school-wide committee" (pp.7), *we maintain that this territory of the "school-wide" is the domain in which the dean must operate.* As Harvard's main site for arts and culture at the graduate level, the GSD must clarify its own internal strategy for simultaneously consolidating design leadership globally and repositioning the design fields as primary partners for interdisciplinary collaboration.

The GSD is organized according to semi-autonomous programs: **Department of Architecture** (Master of Architecture I, Master of Architecture I AP, Master of Architecture II, Master of Architecture II); **Department of Landscape Architecture** (Master of Landscape Architecture I, Master of Landscape Architecture I AP, Master of Landscape Architecture II); **Department of Urban Planning and Design** (Master of Urban Planning, Master of Architecture in Urban Design), **Advanced Studies Program** (Master of Design Studies, Doctor of Design). It is worth noting that the Advanced Studies Program has a somewhat compromised position within the school, given that it is not a department. In addition, although the GSD was founded on the concept that design is a function of dialog across disciplines, this pedagogical basis has a diminished presence at the school today.

STUDENT PRIORITIES fall under three headings: **Interdisciplinarity**; **Resources**; and **Faculty**.

INTERDISCIPLINARITY

new models | sustainable design | social responsibility | community involvement

From the student perspective, the future of the GSD hinges on interdisciplinary collaboration, both between programs internally within the School and externally in terms of a shared research-based platform that connects design more explicitly with applied science, public policy, social entrepreneurship, the arts and digital environments. Results from the 2007 Dean Search Survey, conducted by the Student Forum, show a strong student preference for incorporating dimensions of sustainability and social responsibility into the curriculum, especially core design studios. Students also would like to see a focused effort to make the GSD more research-oriented and as a school to become more involved in the Boston/Cambridge and Harvard communities. Requests to break down administrative and academic barriers shows students' interest in engaging other fields of study, particularly through collaboration across disciplines.

RESOURCES

solving the space crunch | technological resources | program funding | financial aid

As an alternative to accepting the GSD's relative "poverty" among graduate schools at Harvard, students advocate an aggressive campaign to discover new sources for development; innovative and sustained fundraising tactics are critical to promoting unprecedented technological resources and rebuilding an unparalleled faculty. Gund Hall is near capacity; students feel the adverse effects of overcrowding most directly (for example, MDes is severely underserved and final year students have to compete for desk space). In terms of reduced space allocation for technological resources, it is problematic that the number of computer labs has more than halved over recent years, at the same time that computer resources are increasingly central to our coursework. Fabrication technologies such as CAD/CAM are constantly changing and require a significant financial commitment to consistently upgrade cutting-edge equipment. Both Student Forum surveys and the findings of the Faculty Committee on School-Wide Instructional and Curriculum Issues confirm that the entire GSD community laments the loss of public/social space (and associated informal exchange between students and faculty). In addition, while we understand that funding for certain research centers have been suspended due to financial constraints, this has reduced the School's broader opportunities for research (with students in the advanced studies programs such as DDes being the most impacted). Current efforts to introduce a "render farm" (a computer cluster for remote processing power) suggests a positive model moving forward for including students in administrative discussions re: facility planning vis a vis a transparent and inclusive process.

In terms of fiscal solvency, there are numerous areas in which students would petition reform; these include improved financial aid for both domestic and foreign students, more funding for student research, community-design and social entrepreneurship projects, and funding for all options studios.

FACULTY

commitment to teaching | coherent pedagogy | global leadership | faculty diversity

Many students would argue that the GSD needs to establish an institutional structure that facilitates deeper interaction between students and faculty. At present, faculty advising exists in theory only, and there are insufficient fora for students to discuss pedagogy with faculty or to give feedback regarding courses. Some students feel that a fundamental commitment to teaching (as opposed to research or professional practice) is not shared universally by all faculty--but should be. A more concerted effort by the administration to discuss the School's pedagogy with faculty, especially younger or visiting professors, could help substantially in this regard. There is also growing sentiment among students that the GSD does not necessarily have the "world's best" teaching certain courses. The student push for faculty diversity (women, minorities) cannot be overstated and would likely satisfy some of the student drive for fresh voices in design.

It is imperative for faculty to think "school-wide" in addition to at the level of departments; to foster relationships that broaden the traditional boundaries of landscape/architecture and urban planning/design; and to forge stronger and more productive connections between the administration, faculty and students.