FACULTY EARLY INPUT REPORT – SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

Faculty Senate Planning and Resources Committee
October 24, 2003

Objective

To set forth observations and suggestions of faculty in the Rensselaer School of Architecture at an early stage in the annual performance planning process.

Overview

Rensselaer is in the midst of four highly advertised thrusts: a major commitment of resources to biotechnology, a well-developed program in nano-technology, a less-focused effort in information technology, and a very large building program in support of the arts. Work in these areas is unstinting, even in the face of an uncertain investment market. Indeed, the September 19, 2003 report to the Board of Trustees Finance Committee concluded that:

“FY03 Financial Activity is indicative of Rensselaer Plan momentum despite current economic conditions.”

It is a problem that the concentration of resources in the Rensselaer Plan thrust areas appears to be omitting or threatening resources needed for faculty to carry on a Rensselaer program in a manner and at a standard to which they have been accustomed.

Beyond this, there have been many staff additions to the administrative branches at Rensselaer, and a general expansion of the roles of these branches vis-à-vis line administration within the Schools. This has led to confusing and sometimes impractical implementations of elements of the Rensselaer plan, compromising faculty, departmental and school efficiencies.

In this context, faculty input reflects the following:

a) Many faculty sense little involvement with the Rensselaer Plan, except for unpredictable and constraining diversions of their professional practice resources.
b) There appears to be little or no budget flexibility at the Department and School levels. While substantial resource growth may be cited, it seems generally devoted to new staffing and related facilities in the thrust areas. As far as mainstream Rensselaer activity is concerned, budgets are cited as “flat”, at best. Last year’s Faculty Senate Planning and Resources Committee published Remarks on Rensselaer Performance Planning, addressing this dilemma, with emphasis on faculty inability to react to and take advantage of work-a-day opportunities.

c) Finally, there is a widespread concern amongst faculty that the current diversion of resources to the thrust areas threatens the survival of Rensselaer’s foundations in such areas as undergraduate education, and graduate program advising and administration.

School of Architecture Faculty Input

The Faculty Senate Planning and Resources Committee received a number of comments and questions from faculty regarding the School of Architecture, in response to the solicitation from Cheryl Geisler, president of the Faculty Senate. These inputs have been consolidated and summarized below.

1) The School of Architecture is hiring faculty and expanding operations in disciplines that do not involve or require the traditional undergraduate or graduate degrees in architecture. Are adequate resource allocations being devoted to teaching the fundamentals of professional practice in architecture?

2) The School of Architecture is expanding its graduate program in both scope and numbers and adding a Ph.D. program. The primary responsibility for funding these programs appears to rest on individual faculty efforts to secure funded research and to grow program enrollments. What line items will be included in the budget to address “seed” funding for new programs, travel for exploratory discussions, proposal writing, student recruitment, contract administration, and related new course development? It is important that faculty see that support is available, and that the administration knows that there are costs associated with the desired program development.

3) Is the ranking of the School of Architecture heading up or down over time? All of the planning efforts, research initiatives, school marketing programs, new hires, PR initiatives and outreach programs have happened largely because of the ratings. The ratings issue is the elephant in the living room. It’s an issue the whole institute has to face directly.

4) What planning is being done to increase external resource development?

5) Why do our present students come to the Rensselaer School of Architecture, and what are their desires? Where do they go afterward? Are we assessing this in our planning?
Remarks from the Office of the Dean of Architecture

Dean Balfour was invited to address the School of Architecture Faculty Early Input Forum on Wednesday, October 1. He was not able to be present, and remarks were made by Associate Dean Mark Mistur. A copy of his presentation slides is attached to this report. Dean Mistur summarized a number of key accomplishments in the current year. A major focus was new graduate programs and research, including new faculty hires in the areas of acoustics and lighting, a new Ph.D. program in Architectural Sciences, and several new research facilities and funded research programs. Another major focus was enhancement of undergraduate and graduate professional education, including strong enrollment and retention, preparations for an accreditation visit, and facility improvements.

Regarding FY05 planning, Dean Mistur noted the following key initiatives:

• strengthening and growth of graduate programs, in general;
• improving faculty diversity;
• hiring new faculty;
• establishing the Ph.D. in Architectural Sciences;
• transitioning workplace design to BSR;
• developing “Computation in Design” to complement the “Informatics and Architecture” Masters program;
• developing graduate fellowship resources;
• building and strengthening research initiatives, in general;
• changing from a 5 year BArch to a 4 year BArch plus a 1 year MArch;
• achieving re-accreditation;
• filling the Bedford Chair.

It is the sense of the Faculty Senate Planning and Resources Committee that the School of Architecture planning effort is assessing what can realistically be achieved in the context of overall Rensselaer goals. There seem to be clear differences between the objectives of building a major research complement and improving or even maintaining a solid professional school program. For example, it is understood that recent hiring has involved faculty without even a degree in architecture. This emerging bifurcation of faculty poses a number of challenges, not unlike those faced, in the past, by certain Rensselaer “marriages of convenience”.

There is a clear need, as in the case of most schools, for robust student support. In this regard, the general absence of teaching assistants places the School of Architecture at a distinct disadvantage.
Emerging Criteria for Performance Plan Evaluation from School Of Architecture

In this context, the following criteria are set forth for continuing School of Architecture performance plan evaluation.

1. How does this performance plan enhance the participation of faculty in the planning process, particularly in such areas as faculty hiring and curriculum innovation?

2. How does this performance plan provide some measure of flexibility to take advantage of unanticipated opportunities?

3. How does this performance plan allocate adequate resources for teaching the fundamentals of professional practice in architecture?

4. How does this performance plan allocate adequate resources for the anticipated faculty efforts to secure funded research and grow program enrollments?

5. How does this performance plan improve opportunities for external resource development?

6. How does this performance plan address the ranking of the School of Architecture?

7. How does this performance plan respond to the actual needs and ambitions of our students?

The Faculty Senate Planning and Resources Committee expects to see consideration of the above concerns in the development of the School of Architecture Performance Plan for this year. The Committee expects continuing dialog on these matters, and hopes that this report can be a reference for such discussions.

It is particularly important that a reasonable balance be created between a) the use of resources for the Rensselaer thrust areas, and b) the requirements for maintaining a strong central program.
ARCHITECTURE
PERFORMANCE PLAN

I. School of Architecture Key Accomplishments: 2003
   Submitted 9/12/03

II. School of Architecture Key Initiatives: 2004
    Submitted 9/12/03

I. Key Accomplishments – 2003
   Submitted 9/12/03

   Develop and Grow Graduate Programs and Research
      The School of Architecture maintained its graduate enrollment numbers – graduate programs stronger then ever.

   Enhance Undergraduate and Graduate Professional Education
      Undergraduate enrollment is very strong and retention rates highest ever.
1. New Tenure/Tenure Track Faculty

Two new faculty hires with advanced degrees in acoustics program
- Dr. Mendel Kleiner
- Dr. Ning Xiang
  (joint appointment with Engineering)

New faculty hire with advanced degree in lighting program
- Dr. Nadarajah Narendran

2. New Degrees

Doctor of Philosophy in Architectural Sciences
PhD in Architectural Sciences pending
NYS approval

Three PhD students currently enrolled

More Students Interested
3. Developed Facilities

Synthetics Environment Lab

Secured capital funding for a section of the SEL

Reorganization to create additional graduate and research spaces

Labs reorganized into central location

4. Build Research

Continued Strength in LRC

SoA faculty secured $600,000 in new research grants over the next 3 years

+ recently announced NSF
I. Key Accomplishments – 2003
Submitted 9/12/03

Enhance Undergraduate and Graduate Professional Education
Undergraduate enrollment is very strong and retention rates highest ever.

Enhance Undergraduate and Graduate Professional Education

Prepare for Accreditation Visit by the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB)

Accreditation report submitted to NAAB, site visit scheduled for spring 2004
Enhance Undergraduate and Graduate Professional Education

Improve Facilities:

Refurnish Studios Appropriately to Accommodate Laptops, and Increase Flexibility, Collaboration and Efficiency of Space Utilization

- Renovations made to first year studio
- Renovated Design Development studio
- Added CNC manufacturing devices – laser cutter and milling machine

II. Key Initiatives: 2004

Submitted 9/12/03

1. Strengthen and Grow Graduate Programs
2. Build and Strengthen Research Initiatives
3. Enhance Undergraduate Education
4. Fill Bedford Chair in Building Systems Research (BSR)
Key Initiatives: 2004

1. Strengthen and Grow Graduate Programs
   Faculty Diversity
   Increase gender and under represented minority diversity
   New Tenure/Tenure Track Faculty
   1 new, 1 replacement
   (Building Systems Research (BSR)
   Objective: Diverse candidates with PhD degrees
   Establish PhD in Architectural Sciences
   Resources, Space, Administration
   Transition Workplace Design to BSR
   Master’s and PhD Concentration
   Refocus and rename Informatics in Architecture to Computation in Design
   Masters and PhD Concentration
   Resources to support Graduate Fellowship

Key Initiatives: 2004

2. Build and Strengthen Research Initiatives

3. Enhance Undergraduate Education
   Move from 5 year BArch to 4 year BS + 1 year MArch
   Achieve re-accreditation

4. Fill Bedford Chair in BSR