

**Request for Authorization to Establish a
Master of Fine Arts in Interior Architecture program at University of North Carolina at Greensboro**

University of North Carolina at Greensboro requests authorization to establish a Master of Fine Arts in Interior Architecture degree program (CIP 04.0501).

Program Description

The Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.) in Interior Architecture is a post-professional degree that will prepare students for careers in teaching, research and specialized practice in the design of architectural interiors. University of North Carolina at Greensboro currently offers a 44-hour Master of Science (M.S.) in Interior Architecture degree program. The proposed M.F.A. builds upon and expands the M.S. curriculum to include four elective courses in an area of specialization and an internship. The resulting 60-hour M.F.A. will replace the existing M.S. degree program and is consistent with other post-professional masters degrees in interior architecture offered throughout the country. The M.F.A. would not limit students to the two areas of specialization that exist in the current M.S. program (Historic Preservation and Museum Studies, and Interior Product Design and Interior Architecture); rather, students will have more latitude in the M.F.A. to pursue diverse areas of research and specialization under faculty guidance.

Mission Relevance

The M.F.A. in Interior Architecture program aligns with the mission of University of North Carolina at Greensboro to support collaborative scholarship and creative activity in a learner-centered community. The program aligns with several goals of the UNCG Strategic Plan 2009-2014, including to create interdisciplinary initiatives that focus on quality of life for individuals across the life span (Strategic Area 2.4) and to offer transformational graduate education experiences (Strategic Areas 3.1, 3.2, 3.6).

Student Demand

University of North Carolina at Greensboro surveyed current graduate students and recent alumni of the M.S. program regarding demand for the M.F.A. Over 83% of respondents indicated that the change to the M.F.A. would be advantageous. Qualitative survey responses indicated that the change to the M.F.A. would be particularly advantageous for program graduates interested in teaching at a higher education institution; approximately 30% of M.S. program graduates since 2000 have chosen to teach, but they can encounter barriers when seeking tenure and promotion without the terminal M.F.A. degree. Over 83% of respondents also indicated that the increased course load and studio work would not have affected their decision to pursue the program, and 100% of respondents expressed interest in more elective classes.

Societal Demand and Opportunities for Program Graduates

Employment opportunities for the M.F.A. graduates will be similar to those available to current M.S. program graduates, many of whom find work with interior architecture, architecture, engineering, and interior design firms. A 2008 survey of the American Society of Interior Designers names North Carolina as a top ten state for number of design firms. Since 2000, approximately 30% of the M.S. program graduates have chosen to teach at institutions of higher education. Indeed, the Interior Design Educators Council reports a shortage of design educators across the country. A recent assessment of the IDEC website yielded 44 entry-level assistant professor positions available in interior architecture/interior design for Fall 2013. Of these, over half (23 of 44) required applicants to hold a M.F.A. or terminal / advanced degree in interior architecture or interior design. Without the M.F.A., program graduates would be at a clear disadvantage when competing for such positions.

Resource Implications

Existing resources in place to support the existing M.S. degree program will be used to support the proposed M.F.A. Existing faculty and staff, library, facilities, and information technology resources are adequate for the launch of the program.

Collaborative Opportunities

University of North Carolina at Greensboro currently offers the only graduate degree program in interior architecture or interior design in the state. Even so, the Department of Interior Architecture collaborates with several other programs both within UNC Greensboro and at other institutions and continues to seek such opportunities. For example, students in the UNC Chapel Hill Department of City and Regional Planning regularly enroll in the Interior Architecture Department's courses on historic preservation and architectural conservation. Additionally, UNC Greensboro students have collaborated on several studio projects with UNC Charlotte students in their School of Architecture.

Outcome of Consultation with Disciplinary Experts

The proposal was reviewed by nineteen faculty and graduate program administrators from seven UNC campuses. Reviewers consistently noted the uniqueness of the program within the system and the strong evidence presented that enrollment would not be adversely affected by the addition of hours to the current M.S. curriculum. UNC Graduate Council reviewers requested additional information on how the program would resource the additional graduate student support needed to accommodate the extended length of the program. The Department of Interior Architecture seeks to maintain support for 40% of its students and will pursue additional needed assistantships and stipends from campus units outside of the Interior Architecture department and through external funding organizations. The Department has demonstrated success with both of these strategies in the past. UNC Graduate Council reviewers also sought additional information on how elective choices and internships would be managed. The Department shared several plans of study that faculty have proposed based on their expertise (for example, digital fabrication, interior lighting, or aging and wellness); these plans of study will guide the elective choices for students. In cooperation with the Internship Coordinator and Director of Graduate Studies, individual students are responsible for arranging their internships at locations such as at architecture firms, with designers, at historical sites, or in the retail environment. Past internship venues have been located in Greensboro and many other cities, including Charlotte, New York City, Atlanta, San Francisco, and London. Reviewers encouraged the program to continue its pursuit of stronger ties to architecture schools in the system, which should further distinguish the program nationally and broaden opportunities for students.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Governors approve University of North Carolina at Greensboro's request to establish a Master of Fine Arts in Interior Architecture degree program (CIP 04.0501) effective August 2013.