Studio Culture Policy – Draft, August 2011

The dean, chairs and administration have developed written procedures and policies for core and option studios that are sent to all instructors before the semester begins. The intent of the procedures and policies is to provide clear guidelines and instruction to faculty and also to convey our philosophy about studio instruction; the goal of the studio teaching method is to achieve a free exchange of ideas in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Information is collected and posted to provide critical information to aid students in their option studio selection process; much effort has been made to clarify and communicate the costs and details of studio trips as well the studio’s schedule and milestones. We have worked with the Student Forum to develop these guidelines as well as provide additional academic support such as the “how to” workshops mentioned below.

Core Studios

The chairs are very involved with core studio planning. They meet regularly with the core coordinators and discuss the pedagogy of the core studio itself as well as attend their reviews.

Core studio coordinators should have syllabi posted prior to the semester which includes: detailed studio schedule (including anticipated field trips), dates of deliverables, software requirements (technologies used and technologies taught); and approximate material cost. Prior to each semester, the program director works with the core studio coordinator and instructors for non-studio courses to plan the semester schedule factoring in course and studio deadlines and time commitments.

“How to” workshops are scheduled in the evening throughout each semester on software such as Rhino and CATIA.

Option Studios

Substantial gains have been made in option studio planning and execution to provide accurate information and transparency to students to better aid them in choosing the most appropriate studio and also pick courses which will dovetail with the studio schedule and content.

Option studio instructors must provide a course description and a syllabus, and the studio must adhere to scheduling guidelines. The following information is sent to each studio option instructor prior to the semester so that it is available to students prior to their studio selection. As mentioned below, “course information listed should be viewed as contractual. “

Course descriptions should include:

- Topics to be Covered
- Course Objectives and Outcomes
- Course Format
- Method of Evaluation
- Prerequisites

Instructors are required to link a course syllabus to their course iSites. Course syllabi should include the following: detailed course schedule, dates of deliverables, software requirements (technologies used and technologies taught); approximate time expectation outside of class; and approximate material cost. Furthermore, any irregular course schedules should be clearly spelled out, and the roles and extent of availability for instructors for multiple-
instructor courses should be described. Students rely on the information you provide to plan their other courses; the course information listed should be viewed as contractual.

Scheduling Guidelines:  
An option studio instructor is responsible for eight instruction hours a week for the length of the semester (approx 13 weeks). Option Studios are scheduled two weekdays from 2-6 PM. Instructors from out of town generally offer their studio on consecutive days, while local instructors typically schedule non-consecutive days. Option studios should not be scheduled on Mondays in order to keep one afternoon free for electives. The class structure, including schedule, dates when the instructor will be in residence, and studio site visits, must be set and approved by the chair prior to the beginning of the semester. A visiting instructor who is traveling from out of town may prearrange with the department and chair to teach alternate weeks. In that case, the instructor should choose two afternoons during the week that are the official class times, and schedule the remainder of the time during the week at times that work for student schedules. This allows the students the flexibility to schedule their other courses. As mentioned, the dates when the instructor will be in residence should be approved by the chair and posted online prior to the start of the term so the students are fully aware of the schedule for the studio.

Studio Travel Information and Costs: Prior to the Option Studio Lottery, the following information is provided on the GSD website for each studio:

- Studio site or trip location
- Studio trip date
- Estimated cost to student for site visit (not to exceed $300 plus meals and incidentals). An effort has been made to smooth the studio costs across studios so that costs are not prohibitive for any given studio.

Studio Option Presentations: Instructors receive detailed requirements about the studio option presentation, such as: “It is important to explicitly state in your presentation the type of project(s) to be undertaken. All studio options are—in principle—open to all students in architecture, landscape architecture, urban design and urban planning. However, not all students will possess the capabilities necessary to undertake certain projects. Please indicate as part of your presentation whether the projects you propose require knowledge of a specific discipline.”

Mid-Term Warning Letters: 
All studio instructors are sent the following guideline regarding mid-term feedback. Additionally, the academic department staff reminds them to correspond to students close to mid-semester.

Each instructor of record for a course should send midterm warning letters to those students who are experiencing academic difficulty. The purpose of these letters is to inform such students that if their academic performance does not improve, they may receive a grade of Low Pass or Fail. If, later, a student appeals for review of a low grade, a midterm warning letter is evidence of communication between the instructor and the student.

Midterm warning letters should be sent no later than eight weeks into the term. A copy of the letter must be forwarded to the Registrar in the office of Student Services and to the Departmental Program Coordinator for inclusion in the student's file and to the student's Faculty Advisor. Copies of sample warning letters are available from the Program Coordinator.

Studio Evaluations:  
The fall 2011 semester will be the first semester we will utilize our on-line course evaluation system. The program directors, faculty and Student Forum officers have worked hard with administrative staff to revise the evaluation forms to make them more relevant for types of courses and studios. The data and comments are distributed to both the chair and the studio instructors. The chair uses the material in planning future studios.

Portfolio Reviews: 
In January 2011, the 3rd semester MLA I and MArch I students had the opportunity to have a private discussion with a few faculty members from each department to review a hard copy portfolio the student prepared of his/her work while at the GSD. We feel it is important that students know how to present their work and speak about it. Portfolios help students think about what they have accomplished during their tenure at the GSD, allow them to reflect on consistent threads in their work, and inform their remaining semesters. It was very successful and we will repeat the session this January.