

# Growing the Profession

A white paper prepared by the ASLA Council on Education  
April 2007

## Abstract

*A review of projections for growth in landscape architecture compared to the number of graduates from degree programs suggests that the profession is growing at a rate well below that needed to meet expected demand. In his inaugural address at the Annual ASLA Meeting in Minneapolis, President Patrick Caughey, FASLA, issued a challenge to the practice and academic communities to accelerate the expansion of existing programs and the creation of new programs to address the shortfall. To understand the current status of student enrollment, the ASLA Council on Education distributed a short survey to all programs that offered degrees in landscape architecture and/or environmental design requesting data on degrees offered, accreditation status, time to completion of the program, enrollment by year, capacity by year, limits to capacity, and efforts used to identify and recruit prospective students. This paper summarizes our findings, indicating that while growth has been limited and significant barriers do exist to expanding existing programs, there are indicators to suggest that increased growth is possible with support from the ASLA and professional practitioners.*

## INTRODUCTION

The general consensus is that times are good for the practice of landscape architecture. Since 1998, salaries have increased at an average rate of 7.4 % per year to a new high just above \$89,000. Membership in the American Society of Landscape Architects increased by approximately 6% annually over the same period to a current total of 17,142, and the US Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that the profession will experience higher than average growth for all occupations (18-26%) to the year 2014. All of these statistics suggest that the profession is experiencing wider recognition and greater demand for its services in creating environments that advance human health and well-being. But is the profession prepared to take utmost advantage of such promising prospects for our future?

With all signals pointing upward, one would expect to hear of parallel growth in the number of students entering and graduating from our professional degree programs. And while there has been some increase since 2000, there is considerable anecdotal evidence from offices and agencies looking to hire entry-level professionals that the pool is small to non-existent in some regions of the country. The 2006 ASLA graduating student survey indicated that a much higher than typical number received more than one offer of a position. This competition for graduates is clearly beneficial for landscape architecture students seeking employment, but what of the positions that remain unfilled? Several offices report making offers to graduates of architecture and engineering schools; others note that all other employees have to simply work harder and longer hours. And some have indicated a need to be more selective and cautious about accepting commissions. All of which are logical ways to deal with the current situation, but if such strategies persist, the impact on the profession could be quite detrimental.

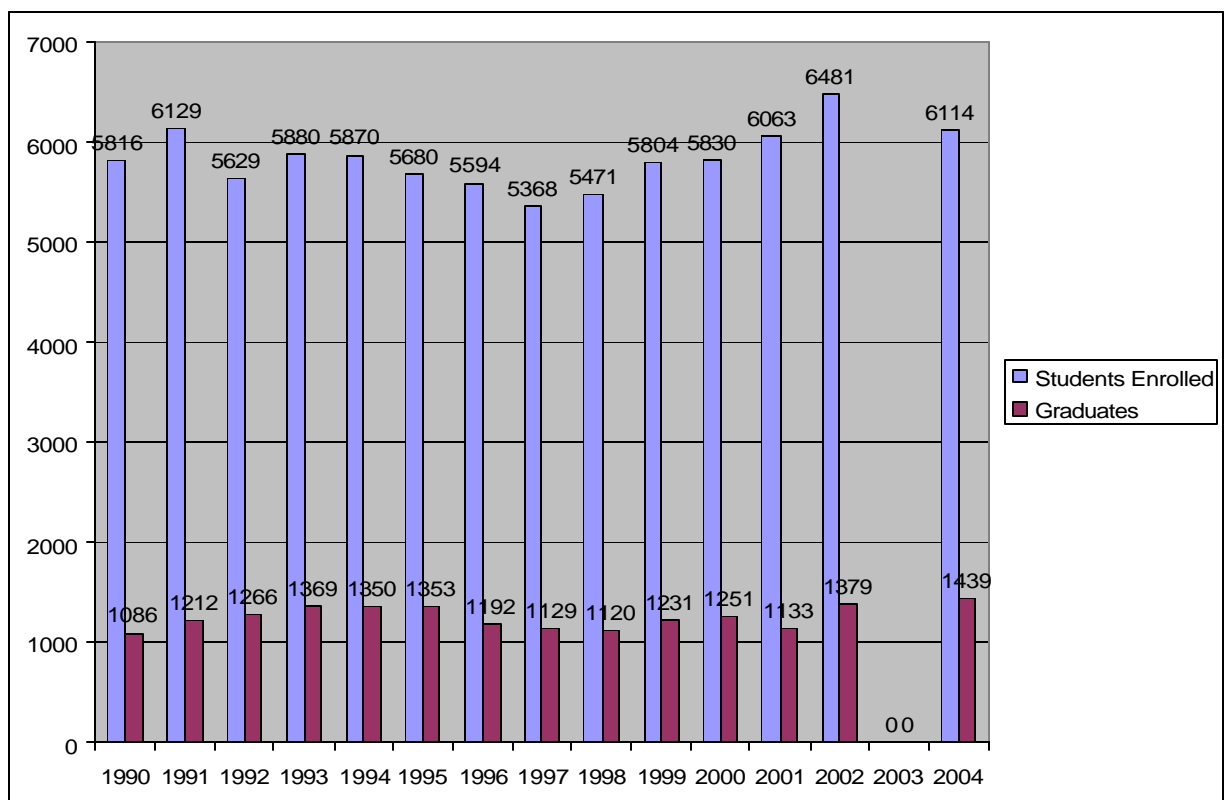
Studies conducted by the late Professor Jot Carpenter, FASLA (LAM - July 1999) and Professor Horst Schach, FASLA (LAM- Aug 2001) warned of an impending shortfall of graduates to meet anticipated demand for landscape architectural services. An examination of data collected by the LAAB reveals that between 1991 and 2004 the total number of graduates from professional BLA and MLA programs has grown only slightly, at a pace averaging just above 2.5% per year (see figure 1). Carpenter predicted in 1998 that 2% would be necessary to replace just those baby boomer practitioners that would be retiring from practice in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It should be noted, however, that the challenge facing the profession of landscape architecture is not unique. A Nov 24 article in the New York Times indicates that by 2012 the US work force will be losing more than 2 workers for every one that it gains, which simply points to the increasingly competitive environment we will face as we endeavor to attract more and better students to our profession. In the November 2006 issue of LAM, Professor Brian Orland described current circumstances as the "0.1% dilemma". Citing statistics from 10 major undergraduate programs, Orland revealed that LA programs are receiving applications from on average only .1% of the graduating high school student population in their state. Compared to other professional programs such as Architecture and Engineering that attract a greater percentage of applicants, the conclusion was that the profession must advance its efforts to expand the pool of applicants. For many years, however, academic practitioners have expressed concerns about the capacity of our programs to admit more students even if they are successful with increasing applications. It is also true at some institutions that the academic records of students applying to landscape architecture are not as strong as those applying to other professional programs on campus. So the dilemma in fact becomes more complex. The goal for the profession needs to be increasing both the pool and quality of applicants, and finding ways to create more seats in programs without compromising current standards for quality of instruction.

## CURRENT STATUS OF ENROLLMENT AND CAPACITY

In September 2006, the ASLA Council on Education distributed a ten-question survey (Appendix A) to Department Chairs at all institutions offering degrees in landscape architecture and environmental design to investigate issues of capacity, recruiting strategies, and potential barriers to increasing enrollment. Responses were received from 55 schools out of 63 that received the survey. 35 of the programs are situated administratively in Colleges or Schools of Architecture, Design and the Arts, and 20 reside in Colleges or Schools of Agriculture and Environmental Planning.

**Figure 1. Total Students and Degrees 1990-2004 (Source LAAB)**  
*(no data for academic year 2003)*



Data was collected for both accredited and non-accredited BSLA and MLA degrees, as well as PhD programs. A breakdown by degree type and the number of programs responding with data for each is summarized in Figure 2. Also included in this figure is data regarding the advertised duration to graduation as compared to the actual number of years needed to complete all degree requirements. It is encouraging to see that the actual tracks fairly close to the advertised duration, the exception being the few PhD programs that currently exist in Landscape Architecture. However, these numbers should be viewed in the context that some programs are experiencing pressure to eliminate undergraduate degrees in favor of 5 year master's degrees, and some campuses that only offer the BSLA or BSLA are working to limit the time required to complete all undergraduate curricula to a maximum of 4 years. Of the 55 institutions responding, 36 indicated they offer accredited BSLA and BSLA programs and 23 offer accredited first

professional MLA degrees. Data was also provided for a significant number of non-accredited master's degrees, while relatively few provide non-accredited degrees in Landscape Architecture or BS curricula in Environmental Design or Planning. 10 institutions reported data for Ph.D programs in Landscape Architecture or related areas of study at the doctoral level.

**Figure 2: Degrees Offered with Advertised and Actual Years to Completion**

| Number | Degree   | Advertised Years to Completion | Actual Years to Completion |
|--------|--|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 2      | BS in Environmental Design or Planning, accredited     | 4                              | 4                          |
| 2      | BS in Environmental Design or Planning, non-accredited | 4                              | 4.33                       |
| 13     | BSLA accredited  | 4.23                           | 4.36                       |
| 1      | BSLA non-accredited                                    | 4                              | 4                          |
| 23     | BLA accredited   | 4.65                           | 4.77                       |
| 2      | BLA non-accredited                                     | 5                              | 4.67                       |
| 0      | First Professional MSLA accredited                     |                                |                            |
| 2      | First Professional MSLA, non accredited                | 3                              | 3                          |
| 23     | First Professional MLA accredited                      | 3                              | 3.09                       |
| 8      | First Professional MLA non accredited                  | 3                              | 3                          |
| 15     | Post Professional MLA accredited                       | 2                              | 2                          |
| 12     | Post Professional MLA non-accredited                   | 2                              | 2.13                       |
| 3      | Ph.D in Landscape Architecture                         | 3.33                           | 5.3                        |
| 3      | Ph.D in Environmental Design and Planning              | 4.33                           | 4.5                        |
| 4      | Ph.D. Program with Landscape Arch Focus                | 4                              | 5.25                       |

For each degree, programs provided AY 2005-06 data on enrollment and capacity for each year in the program. (For a complete table of this data, see Appendix B). The summary analysis shown in Figure 3 presents data for BSLA and BLA programs from years 2 through 5 only, since undergraduate programs vary widely with how first year students are included in their counts. In several cases, students do not officially enter the major and begin taking studio courses in landscape architecture until the second year. For all other programs, data for all years is included in the totals.

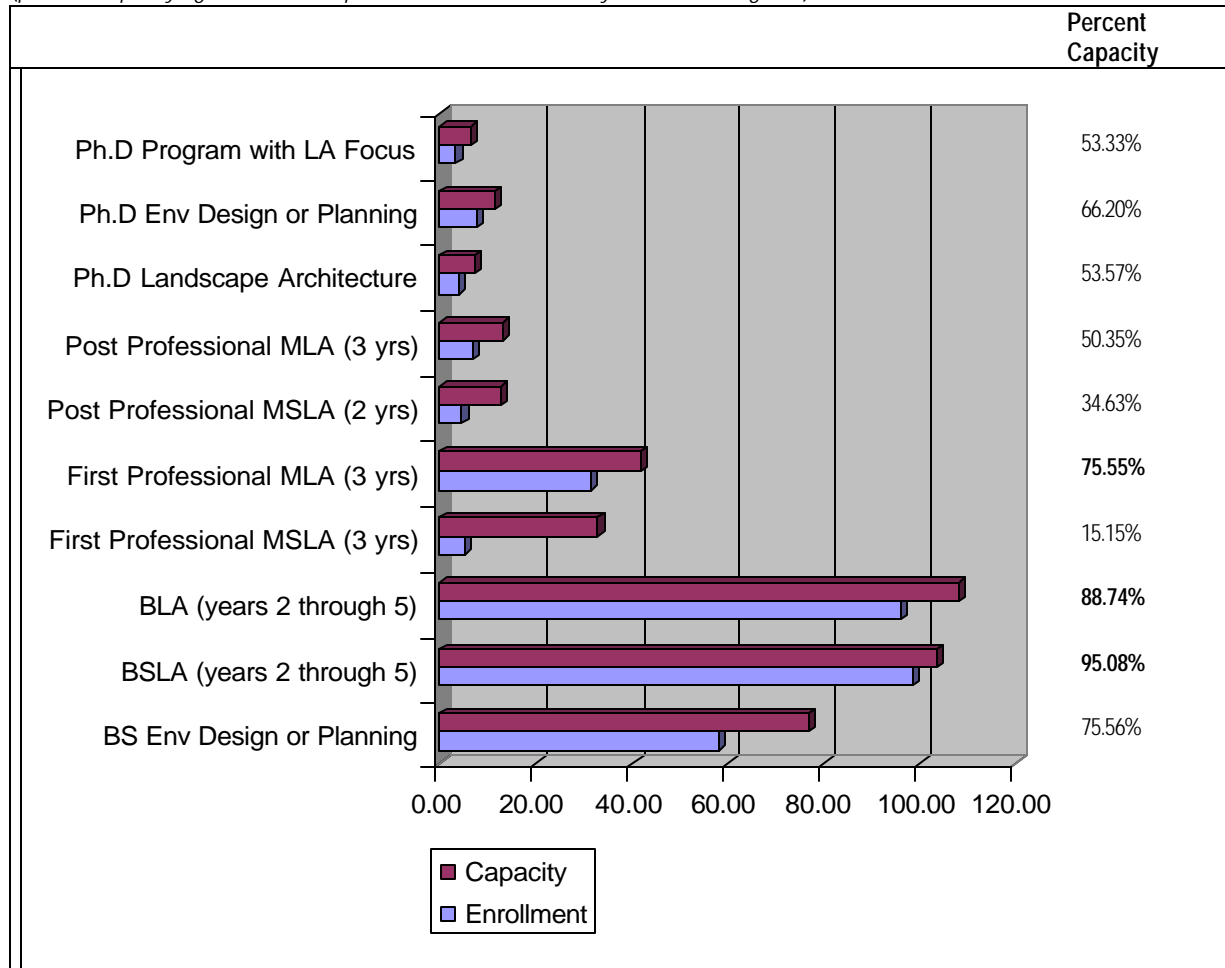
In 2000, Schach reported that undergraduate landscape architecture programs were operating at 91% of capacity and first professional graduate programs at 86%. This study reveals that five years later bachelor's programs are operating at a slightly higher capacity (91.83% for BSLA and BLA), while first professional MLA programs have decreased more than 10% (75.55%). Other programs, such as Environmental Design or Planning and non-accredited landscape architecture programs, offer the availability of considerably more seats, but it is not known how many graduates of these curricula enter practice directly, pursue professional degrees in landscape architecture, or continue in other related disciplines.

How capacity is measured varies from school to school, but the most common methods reported included space/desk availability, desirable faculty/student ratios, applicant pool, number of teaching assistant appointments possible to support studio instruction, ratio of students to square feet of space allocated to

program. Other factors that are considered include funds available for appointment of adjunct faculty and the amount of computer lab space available for use by students in the program.

**Figure 3. Enrollment and Capacity for Bachelors, Masters, and Ph.D Programs**

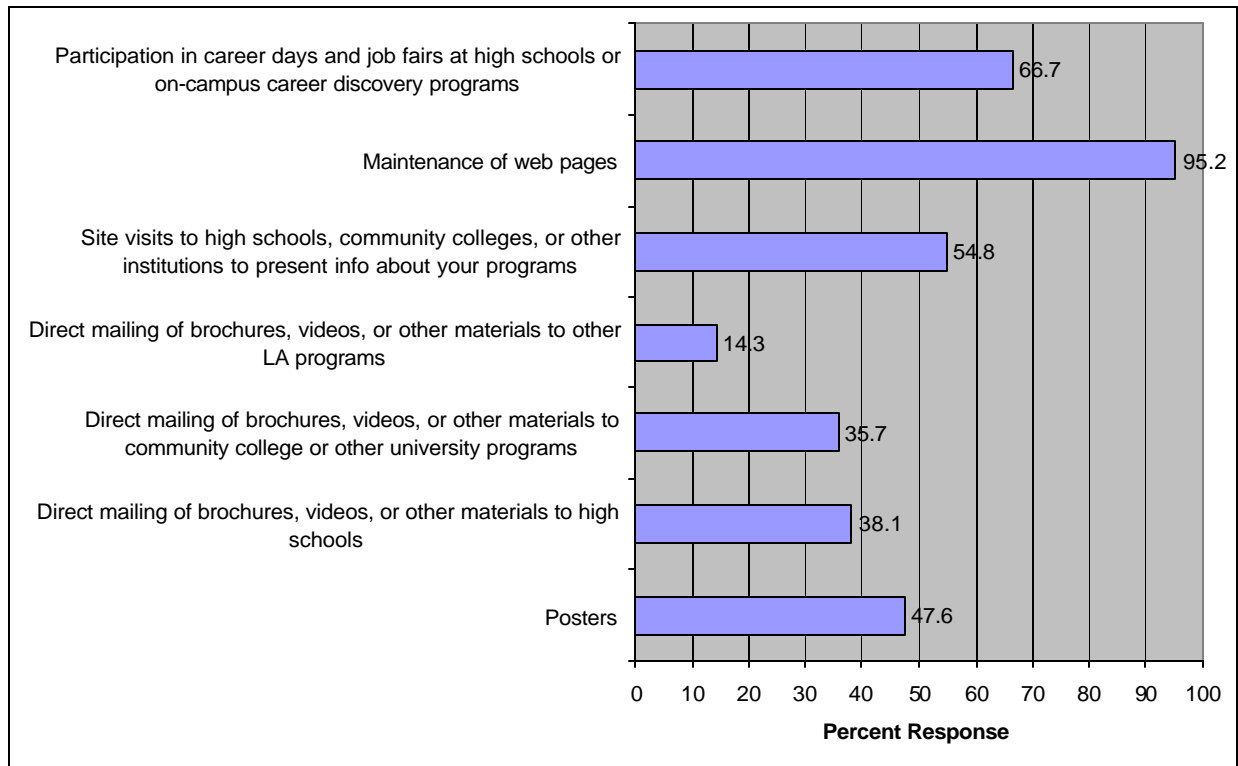
*(percent capacity figures in bold represent the most commonly accredited degrees)*



### RECRUITING METHODS AND ISSUES

Most programs report having limited resources allocated to student recruiting. In some instances, recruiting is done by administrative staff above the level of a department on behalf of all academic units within a School or College. Rarely are staff resources available at the program level adequate for recruiting; at best some funds may be allocated for preparation and printing of promotional materials, maintenance of web pages, or release time for faculty or a portion of a staff member's time to meet with visiting prospective students and respond to queries. Figure 4 shows the distribution of responses to how programs recruit, with maintenance of web pages well established as a common practice. It is not surprising that direct mailings of materials has fallen as use of the web for distributing information has grown, to the point that many institutions now encourage students to submit applications on line. In-person visits to career days and job fairs are also widely used, and often done using current students or in partnership with program alumni or local practitioners.

Figure 4. Recruiting Methods



Other methods of recruiting reported by programs included hosting on-campus open houses, faculty offering lectures in classes to non-majors, developing introduction to LA and general education course offerings for non-majors, contributing to continuing education programs, conducting design exercises with secondary schools and community groups, and contacting directly students on PSAT- derived lists who have indicated an interest in design.

The result of such efforts to attract students to our programs does appear to be generating more applications, with the most significant growth at the master's level (Figure 5). This makes sense as programs at the master's level have seen the greatest increase, from 14 in 1985 to 34 in 2000 (Figure 6). Only 7 programs have been added at the undergraduate level over the same time period. But with many of our existing programs reporting that they are at capacity and prospects for adding faculty and/or space are poor, it seems that considerably more attention will need to be given to *creating new programs* if we are to produce more graduates at the rate deemed necessary to meet demand.

A concern, however, with growing the number of schools and increasing applications revolves around the issue of student quality. Many campuses do not have selective admissions, and as competition grows among programs for applicants, may be required to accept less qualified students. Conversely, programs that do have selective admissions may come under pressure to reduce standards to meet campus enrollment goals. Further, some programs that co-exist with other professional degrees such as Architecture and Engineering which typically receive more applications and have entry standards that are higher than Landscape Architecture, may in fact be vulnerable to pressure to increase entry standards and scale back student admissions. Or, as a few programs have experienced, the BLA degree may be phased out in favor of focusing resources at the master's level only.

Yield rates for accredited degree programs are provided in figure 5 showing the percentage of applicants that actually accept offers of admission. At the BLA level, the number of applications has remained flat and yield rates have also remained constant, tracking at approximately 60%. BSLA programs show higher yield rates, while our MLA programs are enrolling 46-47% of applicants. The fact that these rates have remained consistent may be an indicator that programs have been able to maintain their standards for admission, especially at the master's level where applications have increased the most.

**Figure 5. Applications and Acceptance to Accredited Degree Programs (source LAAB)\***

| YEAR    | Degree        | Total Applications | Total Accepts | Yield Rate    |
|---------|---------------|--------------------|---------------|---------------|
| 2001-02 | BLA           | 1135               | 680           | 59.91%        |
|         | BSLA          | 500                | 371           | 74.20%        |
|         | MLA           | 957                | 459           | 47.96%        |
|         | <b>TOTALS</b> | <b>2592</b>        | <b>1510</b>   | <b>58.26%</b> |
| 2002-03 | BLA           | 1185               | 730           | 61.60%        |
|         | BSLA          | 528                | 372           | 70.45%        |
|         | MLA           | 1233               | 571           | 46.30%        |
|         | <b>TOTALS</b> | <b>2946</b>        | <b>1673</b>   | <b>56.79%</b> |
| 2003-04 | BLA           | 1132               | 677           | 59.80%        |
|         | BSLA          | 583                | 432           | 74.10%        |
|         | MLA           | 1281               | 592           | 46.21%        |
|         | <b>TOTALS</b> | <b>2996</b>        | <b>1701</b>   | <b>56.78%</b> |

\* data does not take into account that many students make multiple applications, especially at the master's level.

**Figure 6. Number of Degree Programs (source LAAB)**

| Landscape Architecture Program Information |                          |                |                       |                    |
|--|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Year                                       | # Undergraduate Programs | # MLA Programs | Total Degree Programs | Total Institutions |
| 1985 (US only)                             | 37                       | 14             | 51                    | 44                 |
| 1985*                                      | 39                       | 14             | 53                    | 46                 |
| 1991**                                     | 42                       | 22             | 64                    |                    |
| 1996**                                     | 44                       | 29             | 73                    |                    |
| 2004                                       | 45                       | 32             | 77                    | 59                 |
| 2005                                       | 44                       | 34             | 78                    | 60                 |

\* Two undergraduate programs in Canada at 2 institutions; LAAB no longer reviewed Canadian programs beginning in 1997

\*\* Three programs in Canada at 2 institutions; 1 MLA and 2 undergrad

## Possible Additional Accredited Programs

Current candidacy programs:

|                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| Chatham College              | MLA  |
| University of Texas Austin   | MLA ( <i>just received accreditation</i> ) |
| Boston Architectural College | BLA  |
| Philadelphia University      | BLA  |
| City College of New York     | MLA (phasing out BLA)                      |

Other Programs

|                                 |     |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| University of Nebraska          | BLA |
| University of Southern Cal      | MLA |
| Illinois Inst of Technology     | MLA |
| Puerto Rico Poly Tech Institute | MLA |

Schools with One Program Adding Another

|                                  |     |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| Clemson University               | MLA |
| Florida International University | BLA |

Other Potential Schools

University of Tennessee

Certificate Programs (currently not eligible for accreditation)

UCLA and UC-Berkeley

## POTENTIAL ACTION ITEMS IDENTIFIED BY ACADEMIC LEADERS

The survey concluded by asking respondents to provide comments or suggestions for actions that the ASLA might take to address the growing demand for landscape architects. These are proposed by academic leaders so inevitably focus on initiatives involving universities--less on the wide range of initiatives that might be central to the concerns and interests of other segments of the profession. In reviewing the many suggestions provided, it is also clear that some offer more potential to certain schools than others, leading us to recognize that the development of strategic initiatives and action plans involving academic programs must be specific to programs and their institutions.

Similar surveys conducted among other segments of the profession would yield different but overlapping lists. It is our observation, though, that the ideas suggested cluster around the following four themes that will have resonance for all in the profession:

- The need to nurture leaders and spokespersons who can articulate broadly the role of landscape architects in society
- The need to garner more visibility for the profession and its viability as a career choice
- Approaches to increasing the number of new and capacity of existing degree programs.
- Strategies for increasing access to degree programs.

We provide a sampling of suggested action items, organized around those themes. While they are suggested by academics, many imply or assume the engagement of the profession at large:

### *Leadership in Society*

- Work with academic departments to improve the "political climate" on campuses where the cost of providing design education is viewed as too high
- Promote public awareness of environmental, social, and urban issues
- Widely publicize demand for landscape architects, salary trends, and the contributions LAs are prepared to make to society

- Update data on demand and prepare fact sheets for presentation to university presidents and state legislators on the need to expand LA education
- Develop strategies for national visibility (such as series on HGTV about the profession) to promote landscape architecture to a broad audience.
- Strengthen alliances with allied professions

#### *Visibility of the Profession*

- Give more attention to attracting greater diversity of students to the profession
- Continue to develop/improve career discovery materials including pages on ASLA website (which are proving to be quite useful)
- Produce and offer free of charge to programs promotional materials including posters and brochures
- Provide pages on ASLA web site for department profiles to include mission statements, goals, etc.
- Develop materials and program for greater involvement of practitioners in high school classes, career days, etc. Target teachers working in likely feeder areas such as geography, environmental science, ecology, fine arts, architecture and planning
- Broaden public exposure to the first professional MLA degree for folks interested in career change
- Develop a funding pool to seed grants specifically in support of recruiting
- Facilitate collaboration between state chapters and schools

#### *Increase Capacity of Degree Programs*

- Encourage universities to invest in facilities and staff to accommodate growth in landscape architecture
- Provide greater opportunities for internships and co-op programs
- Facilitate dialogue among academic units to share insights and practices regarding budgetary issues, availability of funds for fellowships and assistantships, institutional support, etc.
- Encourage campaigns among firms and practitioners to create endowed faculty chairs and studio spaces
- Facilitate the attraction of higher quality students

#### *Increase Access to Programs*

- Develop more programs in underserved regions of high population
- Increase endowments for scholarships
- Examine alternative models for delivering courses including distance education which may make degree programs more accessible

## CONCLUSION

As the action items suggest, the issue of growing the profession is complex and will require involvement of all professionals. Based on predictions by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics a target of graduating 2000 students each year by 2020 (from 1439 in 2004) has been recommended, but other leaders in the field have questioned whether such modest growth (averaging approximately 3% annually) will in fact meet demand, suggesting that we must know more about the market forces that will influence the profession's future. There is consensus, however, in acknowledging that the issue must be addressed holistically; successful outcomes will require effectively engaging multiple organizations, offices, chapters, departments and the general membership if we are to meet the determined goals. It is simply not reasonable to expect that academic units or any single group or organization can solve this problem on its own.

## APPENDIX A

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2006 ASLA Council on Education Survey of Program Enrollment and Capacity  
(Department Chairs were asked to respond to the following questions via SurveyMonkey)

1. Name of your institution
2. School or college in which your program(s) reside
3. Academic unit or department in which your program(s) reside
4. Please indicate the published duration to completion in years for each program that you offer
  - BS in Environmental Design or Planning, accredited
  - BS in Environmental Design or Planning, non-accredited
  - BSLA, accredited
  - BLA, accredited
  - First Professional MSLA, accredited
  - BLA, non-accredited
  - First Professional MSLA, accredited
  - First Professional MSLA, non-accredited
  - First Professional MLA, accredited
  - First Professional MLA, non-accredited
  - Post Professional MSLA, accredited
  - Post Professional MSLA, non-accredited
  - Post Professional MLA, accredited
  - Post Professional MLA, non-accredited
  - Ph.D in Landscape Architecture
  - Ph.D in Environmental Design or Planning
  - Ph.D Program with Landscape Architecture Focus
5. Please indicate the actual average duration to completion in years for each program you offer
6. Please indicate the number of students enrolled in each category during 2005-2006
7. Please indicate your programs' current capacity for students in each category
8. Please indicate all methods you use to calculate your program's capacity (such as but not limited to student/teacher ratios, desk/space availability, applicant pool)
9. Please indicate all methods your program uses to recruit students to your programs
  - Posters
  - Direct mailings of brochures, videos, or other materials to high schools
  - Direct mailings of brochures, videos, or other materials to community colleges or other university programs
  - Direct mailings of brochures, videos, or other materials to other LA programs
  - Site visits to high schools, community colleges, or other institutions to present information about your programs
  - Maintenance of web pages
  - Participation in career days and job fairs at high schools or on-campus summer career discovery programs
  - Other (please specify)
10. Please provide any comments or suggestions for actions the ASLA Council on Education might take to address the demand for future landscape architects.

## APPENDIX B

### DEGREE ENROLLMENT AND CAPACITY:

Total Responses: 54

6. Please indicate the number of students enrolled in each category during 2005-2006.

7. Please indicate your programs' current capacity for students in each category.

|   | Enrollment<br>05-06 | Estimated<br>Capacity | Potential<br>Additional<br>Students |
|---|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| BS in Environmental Design or Planning 1st year     | 23.75               | 16.25                 | -7.5                                |
| BS in Environmental Design or Planning 2nd year     | 14.5                | 20.5                  | 6                                   |
| BS in Environmental Design or Planning 3rd year     | 10.5                | 20.17                 | 9.67                                |
| BS in Environmental Design or Planning 4th year     | 9.5                 | 20.17                 | 10.67                               |
| BS in Environmental Design or Planning 5th year     | 0                   | 0                     | 0                                   |
| <b>TOTAL BS in Environmental Design or Planning</b> | <b>58.25</b>        | <b>77.09</b>          | <b>18.84</b>                        |
| BSLA 1st year                                       | 31.85               | 43.67                 | 11.82                               |
| BSLA 2nd year                                       | 29                  | 32.73                 | 3.73                                |
| BSLA 3rd year                                       | 25.36               | 26.8                  | 1.44                                |
| BSLA 4th year                                       | 25.14               | 26.27                 | 1.13                                |
| BSLA 5th year                                       | 19                  | 17.8                  | -1.2                                |
| <b>TOTAL BSLA</b>                                   | <b>130.35</b>       | <b>147.27</b>         | <b>16.92</b>                        |
| BLA 1st year  | 22.76               | 32.04                 | 8.72                                |
| BLA 2nd year  | 26.041              | 29.92                 | 3.44                                |
| BLA 3rd year  | 22.82               | 26.59                 | 3.98                                |
| BLA 4th year  | 23.07               | 25.38                 | 2.47                                |
| BLA 5th year  | 23.85               | 26.47                 | 2.96                                |
| <b>TOTAL BLA</b>                                    | <b>118.91</b>       | <b>140.40</b>         | <b>21.09</b>                        |
| <b>TOTAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDY</b>                    | <b>305.51</b>       | <b>364.76</b>         | <b>56.85</b>                        |
| First Professional MSLA 1st year                    | 0.5                 | 10.33                 | 9.83                                |
| First Professional MSLA 2nd year                    | 2                   | 10                    | 8                                   |
| First Professional MSLA 3rd year                    | 2.5                 | 12.67                 | 10.17                               |
| <b>TOTAL First Professional MSLA</b>                | <b>5</b>            | <b>33</b>             | <b>28</b>                           |
| First Professional MLA 1st year                     | 10.13               | 14.14                 | 4.18                                |
| First Professional MLA 2nd year                     | 10.87               | 13.46                 | 2.57                                |
| First Professional MLA 3rd year                     | 10.62               | 14.22                 | 3.46                                |
| <b>TOTAL First Professional MLA</b>                 | <b>31.52</b>        | <b>41.72</b>          | <b>10.21</b>                        |
| Post Professional MSLA 1st year                     | 1.83                | 6.16                  | 4.33                                |
| Post Professional MSLA 2nd year                     | 2.44                | 6.17                  | 3.73                                |
| Post Professional MSLA 3rd year                     | 0                   | 0                     | 0                                   |
| <b>TOTAL Post Professional MSLA</b>                 | <b>4.27</b>         | <b>12.33</b>          | <b>8.06</b>                         |
| Post Professional MLA 1st year                      | 2.93                | 5.63                  | 2.7                                 |
| Post Professional MLA 2nd year                      | 2.77                | 5.35                  | 2.59                                |
| Post Professional MLA 3rd year                      | 0.71                | 1.75                  | 1.25                                |
| <b>TOTAL Post Professional MLA</b>                  | <b>6.41</b>         | <b>12.73</b>          | <b>6.54</b>                         |
| <b>TOTAL MASTERS STUDY</b>                          | <b>47.20</b>        | <b>99.78</b>          | <b>52.81</b>                        |
| <b>TOTAL PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE PREPARATION</b>      | <b>352.71</b>       | <b>464.54</b>         | <b>109.66</b>                       |
| Ph.D in Landscape Architecture                      | 3.75                | 7                     | 3.25                                |
| Ph.D in Environmental Design or Planning            | 7.5                 | 11.33                 | 3.83                                |
| Ph.D Program with Landscape Architecture Focus      | 3.2                 | 6                     | 2.8                                 |
| <b>TOTAL Ph.D</b>                                   | <b>14.45</b>        | <b>24.33</b>          | <b>9.88</b>                         |

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