

The OU Division of Architecture Strategic Plan, 2022-2027

University Purpose: “We change lives.”

Division of Architecture Purpose:

The American School of Architecture cultivates designers known for balancing creativity and innovation with resourcefulness and pragmatism. Sensitive to the impacts of climate change, we draw lessons from Oklahoma’s cultural context and natural landscape. Our research and creative practices inspire students and faculty to work together to envision a future where communities are healthy, resilient, and just.

Introduction and Process Overview

In the fall of 2021, the faculty, students, staff and alumni of the OU division of architecture began the strategic planning process. As part of this process the faculty of the division, in collaboration with the division of interior design, explored how their work contributed to three higher level plans: the University’s OU Lead On Plan; the Vice Provost for Research Office’s Strategic Research Verticals; and the Gibbs College of Architecture Strategic Plan. In each case, faculty considered how their ideas and initiatives might contribute to defining the University and College’s goals. For faculty, a series of participatory meetings, surveys, and discussions sought to gather input on key issues and articulate a vision for the division. For students a participatory meeting, survey, and poster boards with questions in studios sought input. Alumni were engaged through discussions with the Professional Advisory Board and a survey.

In the spring of 2022, faculty worked collectively in teams to discuss strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities. Working in groups they defined and revised the objectives and strategies of the plan. The division’s leadership team developed the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and timelines for measures. The term of 2022 Division of Architecture Strategic Plan is July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2027. KPI measures are to be: annual (1Y), after two years (2Y), and/or after five years (5Y).

STRENGTHS:

- **The American School.** The architecture program has developed a strong and clear identity rooted in its American School history centered on the values of resourcefulness, experimentation and contextualism.
- **Ranked Program.** OU architecture was ranked #17 in the nation in the “Most Admired Architecture Programs” category by Design Intelligence.
- **Faculty Culture.** The division boasts a diverse faculty with a wide range of expertise and a supportive and collaborative culture.
- **Community partnerships.** The relatively small size of the state’s population and cities makes it easy to work with local communities and stakeholders across the state.

- **Strong and committed alumni base.** The division boasts highly successful graduates who are committed to helping the next generation of students succeed. This is most evident in the Professional Advisory Board that serves the division.

WEAKNESSES:

- **Pandemic impacts on studio culture.** The COVID-19 pandemic weakened the studio culture in the division.
- **Teaching Loads.** Due to rapid growth in enrollments and inadequate numbers of new faculty lines, many of the faculty have been teaching 18 credit hours per year without teaching overload pay. Teaching overloads negatively impacts both the quality of education provided to students and research productivity of faculty.

OPPORTUNITIES:

- **Tulsa Urban Design Studio and the Institute for Quality Communities.** Expanding collaborations with the Tulsa program and IQC could help deepen urban design and participatory design expertise among students and grow the profile of the program.
- **Affordable Land.** Relative to other states, the possibility for acquiring land for design build programs is affordable.
- **Creating_Making Lab.** The facilities in the CML offer faculty and students innumerable opportunities for research and design projects. The CML offers a chance to deepen the maker culture at all levels of our program.
- **Research Collaborations across GCA and OU.** Faculty across the college and campus are often eager to collaborate with architecture faculty on interdisciplinary research challenges.

THREATS:

- **Potential Enrollment Decline.** National projections for an enrollment drop in 2026 may undermine growth and financial stability.
- **Financial Autonomy.** As a division rather than a department, the architecture program is not a budgetary unit. Funding levels for the division are the purview of the dean who must balance needs against other divisions in the college.
- **Space limitations.** The division of architecture has outgrown spatial allocations in both Gould Hall and allocations for faculty research in the Creating_Making Lab.
- **Climate change and its impacts.**
- **Decreasing state funding.** The state of Oklahoma has steadily decreased allocations to higher education over the past few decades.
- **OU Resource Allocation Model.** OU operates under a resource allocation model that typically funds units at the same level each year. This has dramatically undermined our growing program by not ensuring resources keep pace with enrollments.

Objective 1: Grow our national reputation as the American School, become a program known for excellence in evidence-based design, research, and creative activity.

Strategy 1.1: Meet American Association of Universities architecture program peer benchmarks for student to faculty ratios and key student outcomes.

Tactic 1.1A: Secure the resources needed to ensure every student has the excellent, qualified faculty necessary for their success. Ensure that faculty have enough time to dedicate to excellence in design education.

1. KPI: Secure per student expenditures of dollars per credit hour on par with our AAU peers. (2Y, 5Y)
2. KPI: Ensure at least 2/3 of all design studio sections are taught by permanent full-time faculty defined as those holding a 5-year contract or longer. (2Y, 5Y)

Tactic 1.1B: Ensure physical resource allocations keep pace with aspirational peers.

3. KPI: Increase amount of faculty lab spaces dedicated to research.
4. KPI: Increase pin up and exhibition space.

Tactic 1.1C: Increase division financial autonomy to be on par with OU peer departments to better plan and manage the programs.

- Advocate for continued increase in transparency and predictability of course fees allocations measured by regular commitments and proportion of fees generated by the division that are allocated to the division.
- Advocate for greater financial autonomy through promotion to a department by 2024.

DivA Strategy 1.2: Recruit, develop and retain outstanding and diverse faculty and staff with comparable faculty and staff to student ratios to AAU peers.

Tactic 1.2A: Recruit, develop, support, and retain outstanding faculty.

5. KPI: Grow faculty salary averages by rank to align with regional and aspirational peers. (2Y, 5Y)
- Maintain incentives and rewards for excellence in research, service, and teaching with bonuses, Professorships, award nominations, and Gibbs Research Fellowships.
 - Advocate for clear partner hire policies aligned with aspirational peers.
 - Advocate for start-up funding and competitive start-up salaries comparable to AAU peers.
 - Advocate for summer stipends for research comparable to those in the OU College of Arts & Sciences.

Tactic 1.2C: Establish and maintain division support to reduce administrative burdens of faculty.

6. KPI: Secure staff support that grows in proportion to enrollments and faculty and relative to peers.
- Maintain course releases and stipend for the Graduate Liaison that recognize the complexity of our programs and number of students served.

- Maintain permanent support for three associate directors with course releases and/or stipends.
- Advocate for staff retention, compensation, raises, and promotions relative to peers and inflation.

Tactic 1.2D: Continue to cultivate a positive and inclusive work environment for all faculty and staff.

- Maintain incentives and rewards for behavior that is kind, supportive and helpful through awards such as the Jim Kudrna Award for Professionalism and staff merit awards and nominations.
- Maintain faculty development events annually, which range from orientations to social events.
- Advocate for the OU Faculty Senate to establish clearer guidelines and consequences for faculty or staff who engage in bullying or harassment.
- Advocate for greater fairness in faculty evaluations across the GCA in partnership with the Faculty Evaluation Working Group.

Strategy 1.3: Enhance and promote the American School identity and Oklahoma context through communications, exhibitions, and events.

Tactic 1.3A: Support GCA communications efforts through submissions to Oculus.

7. KPI: Grow the number of blog and social media posts about DivA faculty and students by at least 10% each year. (2Y, 5Y)

Tactic: 1.3B: Increase the American School Archive profile by securing long-term support through grants or an endowment for postdoctoral or emerging scholars to develop research and exhibition projects using the American School Archives. Develop a book series showcasing the work of American School architects.

8. KPI: Grow endowment funds, archive, and scholarship on the American School. (2Y, 5Y)

Objective 2: To graduate students who are creative, collaborative, and resourceful with an awareness of how the decisions they make as designers impact communities near and far and the environment today and centuries from now.

Strategy 2.1: Ensure students develop critical thinking skills, cultural competencies, media literacy, data and software skills, and an awareness of how design decisions impact communities and the environment.

Tactic 2.1A: Maintain the Curriculum Committee’s charge of reviewing and improving the curriculum with regard to design skills as well as broader student development aims listed above.

Tactic 2.1 B: Maintain practices to regularly review and assess areas of the curriculum every 3-4 years relative to internal curricular goals as well as NAAB criteria.

Strategy 2.2: Grow the division's student-centered culture by improving student bonds, and a strong sense of culture and identity.

Tactic 2.2 A: Grow student activism, organizations, and advocacy work.

9. KPI: Grow the percent of students who are members of OU student government or GCA and DivA student organizations. (1Y)
10. KPI: Grow the number of Gibbs Design Activism Award projects each year. (1Y)

Tactic 2.2 B: Maintain a peer-to-peer mentoring system in which students mentor one another in the architecture program.

Tactic 2.2 C: Maintain town hall meetings with students at least once per semester.

Strategy 2.3: To enhance the global awareness of students by ensuring every student has an opportunity to participate in travel study programs.

Tactic 2.3 A: Advocate for need-based aid for travel study.

Tactic 2.3 B: Maintain incentives, recognition, and rewards for faculty efforts to organize field trips through the annual evaluation process.

Tactic 2.3 C: Maintain the semester long study abroad program in Rome, develop other travel study opportunities, and grow participant numbers.

Strategy 2.4: Provide every student with opportunities to gain project experience via summer internships, community engaged projects and/or cooperative education experience.

Tactic 2.4 A: Strengthen and maintain the cooperative education program, career development workshops and events, and ARE preparation.

Tactic 2.4B: Develop and implement initiatives to better prepare students for the ARE.

11. KPI: ARE pass rates relative to AAU peers. (2Y, 5Y)

Objective 3: Broaden the reach of the educational opportunities offered by the Division of Architecture to ensure greater affordability and accessibility as the need for higher education expands.

Strategy 3.1: Implement proactive recruiting and retention efforts to support the American Institute of Architects goal of broadening the pathways to architecture.¹

Tactic 3.1 A: Improve recruitment, retention, and support for students with financial need and underrepresented groups through better communications about aid and increased funding.

12. KPI: Double the dollar amount of need based scholarships awarded annually by 2027. (5Y)

Strategy 3.2: Broaden our prospective student base to include adult learners seeking career pivots, additional trainings, or certifications as well as a greater number of prospective undergraduates.

Tactic 3.2 A: Develop and implement transfer agreements with Community Colleges such as but not limited to: Francis Tuttle, Moore Norman, and Navajo Tech.

13. KPI: Secure support for faculty and staff to develop this effort. Develop and implement transfer agreements. (2Y, 5Y)

OBJECTIVE 4: Foster a culture of belonging for all students, faculty, and staff so that the future of our professions better represent the range of communities they serve.

Strategy 4.1: Promote the American School tradition of celebrating differences by making our intellectual and cultural diversity central to our program experience.

Tactic 4.1A: Promote college and campus-wide trainings, workshops, groups, and events that foster diversity, equity and inclusion including the GCA Anti-Racist Action Plan and OU's DEI Strategic Plan.

Tactic 4.1 B: Update and promote studio culture policy focused on inclusion and belonging.

Tactic 4.1 C: Maintain the faculty's focus on fostering a culture of inclusion and belonging and challenge exclusionary practices associated with traditional studio culture.

14. KPI: Goal for responses to Learning Environment section questions in the Student Experience Survey related to belonging from each course is 90% or more choose "frequently, very helpful or always." (1Y)

Tactic 4.1 D: Advocate for appointing a DEI Leader for the college to create and lead DEI initiatives.

Strategy 4.2: Identify points in the curriculum where greater student support is needed and develop initiatives to help students at risk through targeted interventions and support.

¹ <https://www.aia.org/landing-pages/6436693-pathways-to-architecture>

Tactic 4.2 A: Develop and implement a comprehensive program to help first generation and students from groups underrepresented in architecture gain the mentoring and support needed to succeed. (2Y, 5Y) (SDC)

15. KPI: Secure financial and human resources needed to launch support initiatives for students. Grow the percent of first-generation students and students from underrepresented groups in our programs, their retention and graduation rates. (2Y, 5Y)

Objective 5: Grow interdisciplinary research and creative activity to address global challenges and foster social and environmental resiliency, health, and justice.

Strategy 5.1: Draw on OU’s internationally recognized expertise in climate, weather, international studies, and more, to collaboratively imagine and plan for a future that is resilient, healthy, and just.

Tactic 5.1 A: Incentivize and support faculty working in interdisciplinary teams and research centers through grants, course releases and/or 12 credit hour teaching loads, graduate research support, award nominations and other means.

16. KPI: Grow number of external funding applications and total dollar amounts for collaborative research by 5% annually for 5 years. (1Y)

Tactic 5.1 B: Develop campus and community collaborations that draw on the Oklahoma context and expertise such as the man-made climate disaster history of the dustbowl, and the indigenous history and culture in the state.

17. KPI: Grow the number of service-learning courses, IQC collaborations, and research initiatives that focus on Oklahoma communities. (2Y, 5Y)

Strategy 5.2: Grow teaching initiatives that are interdisciplinary and engage global challenges such as those listed by the UN as Global Issues.

Tactic 5.2 A: Incentivize and reward teaching efforts that take on global challenges by prioritizing Special Topics Studio applications and seminar courses that engage a global challenge, draw on interdisciplinary expertise on campus, or have a community partner such as a city, tribal nation, or other community.

18. KPI: Aim to have 1-3 Special Topics Studios and 1-3 elective seminars annually dedicated to global challenges and/or community partnerships. (2Y, 5Y)

Strategy 5.3: Secure research support at levels comparable to our AAU peers.

Tactic 5.3 A: Advocate for staff support for: grant writing; managing external grant funds and reporting requirements; coordination with ORS; publication development and editing; and research project and writing coaching.

Tactic 5.3 B: Fundraise to increase endowments dedicated to supporting research and creative activity.

19. KPI: Grow Division endowment funds dedicated to faculty research and creative activity support from \$30,000 in 2022 to \$100,000 by 2027. (2Y, 5Y)
20. KPI: Secure competitive three-year funding packages for at least two doctoral students each year. (1Y)