

Promoting the Culture of Research in the Designed Environment Disciplines

Research is an integral component of the design field – architecture, landscape architecture, and the allied disciplines. It is an important dimension of the design profession as a variety of projects are realized and developed through research, albeit unconsciously at times.

The faculty, staff, and graduate students of the UP College of Architecture (UPCA) are encouraged to pursue their own research studies. Research has been the main driving force of the College to produce topnotch research papers and studies that have been either presented in various local and international conferences such as the Inter-University Seminar on Asian Megacities (IUSAM), Annual Conference on Architectural Research and Education (ACARE), Sustainable Buildings Conference (SB), International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA), and others or published in peer-reviewed and academic journals.

The graduate students of the Architecture and Landscape Architecture Graduate Programs have been trained and honed to develop their research skills through their academic courses. They engage in field works, trainings, seminars, lectures and conferences, not only for their learning but also for their contribution in the promotion of the culture of research beyond the university. Graduate students are also trained to come up with researches that deal with real-life issues and topics to supplement the ever-growing body of knowledge in their respective topics of interest. They have developed research papers on urban design issues, environmental hazards, flooding, heritage sites, religious grounds, crime parks, open spaces, natural waterways, rural communities, and design professional practices, to mention a few.



Figure 1. Municipality of Palo Mayor Remedios Petilla welcomed the faculty and students from the University of the Philippines College of Architecture and the University of Cincinnati during their visit last September 2015.

The Master of Architecture (M Arch) program of the college offers various specializations in its graduate studies: Urban Design, Architectural Heritage Conservation, Hospital Design, Building Science and Housing. These tracks have been actively contributing to the growing research database of the College with the help of the Studio Laboratories concerned or involved.

Several collaborations of the M Arch program with foreign universities were realized in the past few years. These include joint field works with visiting professors and students from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) for the proposed development of the lakeshore communities in Muntinlupa City, the University of Cincinnati (UC) for the rehabilitation of cities and communities affected by Typhoon Haiyan in Eastern Visayas, and the Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II (UN) for the post-earthquake reconstruction of churches in Bohol. The outputs were then recommended as proposals to the local government units and other agencies concerned in addressing the issues of the people and environment in these communities. These types of academic engagement ensure the exchange in knowledge and information among different countries and cultures, as well as the continued growth and development of students and faculty through alternative learning, field exposures and experiences on site.



Figure 2. Participants from UPCA and University of Naples conducted ocular visits and on-site interviews in several communities affected by the October 2015 earthquake in the island province of Bohol.

Projects given by the faculty to the graduate students are mostly responsive to the current issues in relation to their tracks of specialization. In Hospital Design, for example, projects required research in the creation of Hospital Fire Code, theoretical and historical evolution of hospital spaces, design of hospital spaces, and various hospital renovations. In the Architectural Heritage Conservation track, students are tasked to study and analyze the cultural significance of heritage sites and structures before proposing possible solutions in protecting and preserving the areas being studied. Through these activities, students, academicians and design professionals become aware of the state and condition of the communities – hoping that they will be inspired to do their part in addressing the issues through their skills and capabilities.

In Landscape Architecture – through the Master of Tropical Landscape Architecture (MTLA) program – research goes alongside planning, design, community development, and environmental protection. In collaboration with the Environmental Design Studio Laboratory (EDSL), Landscape Architecture has been at the forefront in proposing solutions to environmental issues of the country. EDSL produces projects such as native tree planting in the University of the Philippines, student volunteer work in the design and maintenance of pocket parks and the organization of informative talks, workshops and seminars, among others. It also reaches out to communities and informs them of the diversified benefits of Landscape Architecture through its involvement and active participation in the undertaking to make positive change in the environment. Another major research undertaking by the program for the past few years was the Ecological Structure of Batad Rice Terraces' Cultural Landscapes and Community Adaptation. This study documented the indigenous practices of the local people, the different landscape units, and the environmental processes that sustain the terraces and surrounding areas.

The College has also been involved in several researches and extension projects. One of which is aptly titled “Daang Bakal”, which is a historical study on the stations and tracks of the Philippine North Railway line that runs from Tutuban to Pangasinan. Focusing on the physical and functional states of the worn-out stations, the goal is to establish cultural values of the stations by determining their social impact to current inhabitants through research. Another is the establishment of guidelines for providing thermally comfortable outdoor open spaces in various UP campuses around the country. The study was done in relation to the provisions included in the UP Master Development Plan. Two major research and extension projects of the College in collaboration with other government agencies are the UP-DOST-PCIEERD's Build Back Better (BBB) – Philippines Program and UP-Department of Foreign Affairs' Unified Consular Office Design Excellence Program. While BBB focuses on the science and technology of designing and planning disaster-resilient communities, sites and buildings, the DFA project addresses the need for guidelines in the design and construction of Philippine embassies in other countries.

One of the topics which graduate students shed light on through research studies in their classes is the historical significance of Rizal Park and the possible impacts it may create to neighboring cities. Site visits were also made to UP campuses to determine the significance of heritage trees. Several papers regarding the convergence of social classes, promotion of pedestrianization and creating alternative transport means through bicycle lanes have been incorporated in the discussions with the hopes of urban landscape renewal. Aside from these topics, the program also exposes the students to landscape issues from other parts of the world. Fieldwork in other countries such as Taipei and Indonesia were conducted for graduate students to experience and analyze the different urban and regional landscapes.

Research works of faculty and graduate students are also disseminated to the public through research posters during the Haraya Week festivities, which are held during the latter part of the second semester of each academic year. For the past decade, both graduate programs (MTLA and M Arch) have produced thesis works that encompass a wide range of issues of different urban and rural areas in the country. These works include the following topics: urban regeneration, spirit of place, bicycle landscape, hospital safety, low-cost housing, construction practices, gated communities, mall and commercial spaces, church cultural landscapes, historical districts, learning landscapes, waterfront development, community branding, and urban agriculture.

UPCA is committed to do its part in contributing to the research endeavors of the University. The next section features an example of a collaborative academic work that requires research of graduate students and faculty of the College. The study includes discussions on current issues and urban design proposals for the redevelopment of selected special precincts in Makati City.