TO: Professor Todd McNerney, Speaker of the Faculty

FROM: Heath Hoffmann, Member of Academic Planning Committee

CC: Agnes Southgate (Chair, Academic Planning Committee), Mary Ann Blitt, Paul Collins, Mutindi Ndunda, Robert Pitts, Kay Smith, Conseula Francis, Brian McGee

DATE: March 23, 2016

RE: New Graduate Program Proposal for Community Planning and Design

Over the past few weeks, the Academic Planning Committee (hereafter referred to as “the Committee”) has been reviewing and discussing the merits of the proposed graduate program in Community Planning and Design. On March 22, 2016, the Committee voted 6-1 in support of the proposal. While I was the only dissenting vote, our discussions of the proposal revealed a number of concerns about this proposal that I and other members of the Committee (all of whom are copied on this memo) felt it important to communicate to the Faculty Senate as the proposal undergoes subsequent reviews. This memo communicates those concerns which primarily reflects my own views of the proposal with a few exceptions of issues seconded by others on the committee.

Before spelling out these concerns, I want to emphasize that I believe the goal and substance of this program is good, important and consistent with the College’s strategic plan to invest in graduate programs that take advantage of “Charleston as place.” However, in light of the College’s current financial problems, combined with the College’s inability (in my view) to adequately resource existing interdisciplinary programs makes it unwise to found another interdisciplinary program—especially at the graduate level—that spreads our financial and human resources even thinner than is already the case.

Here are the specific concerns I have. When also expressed by others on the Committee, I have indicated such.

1. The Committee as a whole was concerned about the School of the Arts commitment to this program given there was no memo from Dean Valerie Morris expressing the School’s commitment to the program (other than her signature on the Faculty Curriculum Committee’s (FCC) new program proposal form) and—more importantly—how CPAD fits into the the strategic plan of the School of the Arts. Given the financial stakes involved with offering a new graduate program,
an explicit articulation of how the program fits within the envision future of the School of the Arts seems critically important.

2. It seemed that all members of the Committee were concerned about the financial costs of CPAD, a concern that we all agree was likely beyond the purview of the Committee’s charge. The Provost assured the Committee that, even if the CPAD program was approved by our Committee, the Budget Committee, the FCC and the Faculty Senate, that its financials would be closely scrutinized and not submitted for approval to the Board of Trustees unless the financials suggested the costs were reasonable relative to the foreseen benefits of the program.

3. I have often joked that the College of Charleston—has never seen an interdisciplinary program that it did not “like” and support. The faculty are responsible for this as we have accepted that undergraduate interdisciplinary programs have minimal costs. However, the cost of program director stipends, course releases for program directors that must be covered by an adjunct or an overload for a roster faculty member are real costs that have grown exponentially at the College during my 13 years here. This concern is tangential to the CPAD proposal given that the latter is a graduate program and calculates those costs in the proposal. However, a hidden cost to the CPAD proposal is how the School of the Arts will cover courses currently taught by those faculty (e.g., Professors Walker, Muldrow, and Stanton) who will be committed to teaching new courses in the CPAD program. Will we be paying adjunct faculty to cover the courses they will not be teaching so that they can teach courses as part of CPAD? This is a cost of all interdisciplinary programs and a cost that needs to be considered when reviewing all new program proposals.

4. CPAD is based on the premise that in year 4 of the program, it will have philanthropic support to hire a full-time, tenure track faculty member. I am not an advancement or financial guru but I am guessing we would need a significant endowment of $1,000,000+ in order to fully fund a faculty line (including benefits) in perpetuity. Without a large donor or set of donor contributions, the College would be forced to absorb that cost in order to meet the obligations to the 24 graduate students projected to be enrolled in the program by year 4.

5. I am concerned that CPAD will not be producing graduates employable in the field. The proposal notes several times that CPAD graduates can go on to get a MA in Architecture. While not an expert in the labor market in this area, my father-in-law is an architect and I am aware that the job market for architects is not great nationally and I would contend that the skill set of an architect is superior to that offered graduates of the CPAD program. So, if obtaining a degree in Architecture is a primary path to employment from CPAD, I am concerned we are setting students up to huge debts without much payoff when entering the labor market.

6. Several Committee members expressed concern that the cohort model proposed by CPAD would be impractical for the lives of potential graduate students. Life is riddled with uncertainty and if a student accepted into the program were unable to take the full slate (or any) of the classes scheduled for spring, she would have
to wait until the next spring to take those classes. We understand that the cohort model provides a level of ease in administering the program but this might not be consistent with the lives of students which again raises the issue of the financial sustainability of the program.