7 April 1998

TO: Members, University Senate

FROM: University Senate Council

RE: AGENDA ITEM: University Senate Meeting, Monday April 13,
                1998. Exemption to uniform grading system for Landscape
                Architecture and the College of Architecture

PROPOSAL:
The College of Architecture and the program in Landscape Architecture have requested
exemption from the uniform whole grade system to be implemented for undergraduate
students in Fall, 1998, for their 800 and 900 level courses so that they can continue with
their current grading system employing plus/minus grades in those courses (only). The
proposals were forward to the Senate Council by the Senate Admissions and Academic
Standards Committee. No Committee member present voted again the proposals. This
proposal comes from the Senate Council with no recommendation.

The Senate Council requests waiver of the ten-day circulation for consideration of this
proposal.

RATIONALE:
The rationale from the Landscape Architecture program follows. It directly parallels the
arguments made by the College of Architecture.

- The design studios, which are the central focus of the curriculum, represent a six
  credit hour course per semester. With such a large number of quality points
  available for one course each semester, the plus/minus system allows for more
  accurate evaluation and reward for the student. While this may be difficult to
  quantify, the students recognize the benefit of the grading system.

- Landscape Architecture students are not allowed to advance to the next studio
  level unless they earn a "C" or better in any given studio or site engineering
  course. In practice, each student falling below this level is given an opportunity
  to appeal his or her suspension. Students present their cases before the faculty
  along with reasons why the should be allowed to continue in the program. This
  policy causes students with a "C-" to reevaluate their motivation and
  commitment to their academic pursuits. Should a student decide that this is not
  the appropriate major, they can exit with a "C-" in a 6 credit hour course without
  a serious loss of quality points. This type of close monitoring provides timely
  counseling and contributes to the 80-85% retention rate for this five year
  program.

- A significant role of the plus/minus grade is to encourage each student's full participation throughout the semester. The studio semester is divided into a series of projects and exercises which may last from 2-6 weeks in duration. Students need the incentive to continually strive for excellence throughout a project even if a project is the last one of the semester and would not have sufficient value to elevate the grade standing by a full letter grade. The plus/minus grading system allows the flexibility to more accurately evaluate the student's performance. Tied to this is the fact that many projects involve team efforts and may involve "real world" clients. Without the plus/minus grade, a student may choose to redirect his or her energy to other courses toward the end of the semester because there is no hope of elevating the grade to the next full letter which then places fellow teammates or the reputation of the program at risk. The plus/minus grading system offers the potential to recognize excellence in student work with much greater detail than the whole letter system and is essential in a program such as this which relies so heavily on student output.

- The impact of the Landscape Architecture Program's reputation on a national level has to do with its graduates entering graduate school. Due to the diverse nature of the subject matter, virtually no student excels in all areas with straight "A"s. The better students generally attain a 3.25-3.75 GPA. As a result, students applying to graduate schools do so in the "B" average range. It is critical to the reputation of this program that a distinction is made between the student attaining an 80 average versus the student who earned an 89 average.

Note: If approved this exemption would take effect in the Fall, 1998 semester.

US Agenda Item: Plus/Minus in LA and Arch 4.13.98