There are the obvious financial benefits to choosing the Master of Architecture degree program at NDSU—a degree in five years, lower tuition. The more amazing part is that the quality of education you receive here easily rivals the quality of education at much more expensive, schools with six year programs. Comparing the work of NDSU architecture students to that of other schools at conferences, or hearing about other schools second hand in interviews, I have never felt that our work was of a lower quality. Usually, I feel like the work is stronger.

Personally, I credit this to the intellectual openness of the way studios are taught here. The school as a whole has no single “design identity”, but rather encourages you to develop your own sense of design through the emphasis on process. The resulting projects as a body of work tend to address all aspects of design, rather than exhibit strength in one area. One studio may emphasize structure, one theory, one sustainable design, but at the end of your education here you can feel that you have explored most of the major topics in architecture through your designs in the studio courses. The instruction you receive from various professors even occasionally conflicts, but you are given the opportunity to decide for yourself the correct solutions through design exploration. Our projects truly reflect who we are and how we think as individual designers, and not anyone else’s design ideal.

Beyond the curriculum there are many opportunities to expand your knowledge of the design field, make friends, and in general have fun. Both Architecture and Landscape Architecture have student organizations (AIAS and ASLA, respectively) that really seek to engage you socially and intellectually, as well as provide opportunities for you to network with other students and design professionals. The field trips that we take to major cities such as Minneapolis, Chicago, and San Francisco give you a truer sense of the scale and scope of the design projects assigned while you learn about the importance of different aspects of the interactions between people, plants, transit, sun, wind, water, and the built environment in cities.

The curriculum and schedule are intense—to fit the program into 5 years you need to take a credit overload almost every semester, but the intensity of the program helps you quickly learn to be effective with your time. You must be curious and eager to learn independently to find success, as many of the faculty here use what I call “the breadcrumb method”. They become a cross between Socrates and a Research Librarian—asking you guiding questions while giving you hints of projects, readings, artists, designers, philosophers, and engineers to research to help you arrive at your design solution. We learn how to use advanced design software, and about cutting edge design innovations, ancient design philosophies and artistic hand rendering simultaneously. This is a program where you will learn to push yourself creatively and intellectually, while discovering your own strengths as a designer and honing your individual design process.

Best of luck with your future studies here, and I hope you will enjoy your time here as much as I have.

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