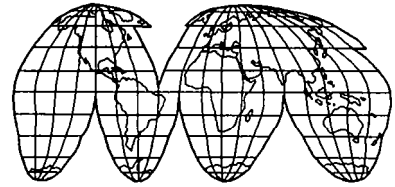


Department of Urban and Regional Planning

University of Wisconsin-Madison



INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

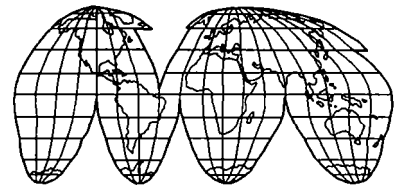
TO: ASSOC. DEANS ~~HERBERT KING~~ AND RICHARD BARROWS
FROM: STEPHEN M. BORN, CHAIR
SUBJECT: PLAN FOR ASSESSMENT FOR THE MASTER OF SCIENCE DEGREE
DATE: JUNE 4, 2001
CC:

Enclosed is a copy of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning's Plan for Assessment for the Master of Science Degree. We may have sent this to you recently, but we have made minor editing revisions and would like you to have our most up-to-date version for your files. Please replace any earlier copies with the one enclosed.

JUN - 5 2001

Department of Urban and Regional Planning

University of Wisconsin-Madison



**PLAN FOR ASSESSMENT
FOR THE
MASTER OF SCIENCE DEGREE**

**MAY 2001
(revision of plan adopted 11/22/96)**

MISSION

As with most units at the University, our mission is three part -- campus-based education, research, and extension/outreach. However, there are unique aspects of URPL which give shape to these activities.

Campus-based Education. URPL is primarily a master's oriented professional program. We traditionally have a total master's enrollment of 50+ students in a two-year accredited program. The program's primary mission is to equip students with the necessary theoretical and technical training to, upon graduation, begin professional careers as junior-level planners, and to then be able to grow in their careers to positions of more responsibility and authority. In general, the orientation of URPL education has been toward local and state level public sector, and related private sector, activity.

In addition, URPL has a doctoral program. The program was initiated and designed to be quite selective and small. It is aimed at preparing scholars, teachers, and advanced researchers who will contribute to the development of planning thought and practice.

URPL has traditionally offered a limited number of "service" courses at the 400 level and above for students throughout the campus. These courses expose students to the complex issues of managing growth and change in democratic societies, and also provide them with exposure to the profession of urban and regional planning.

Research. Our goal is to undertake theoretical, methodological, and field-reflective research which will improve the professional practice of urban and regional planning. The goal of urban and regional planning research, here at UW-Madison in particular and in the field in general, is to enhance the professional practice of urban and regional planning. Our clientele are the tens of thousands of planners, who include professionals with planning degrees, activist citizens and political and agency decision-makers, seeking to more effectively manage growth and change.

As a Department, we seek to be recognized as distinguished in a selected set of research areas, including planning theory (which encompasses ethics and process), land use and environmental planning, and socioeconomic planning.

Extension/Outreach. The Department's extension/outreach function is extensive, reflecting, in part, the professional nature of our educational mission, and, in part, the unique and productive relationship we have with the UWEX. Our goals are: (a) to lend our professional expertise to governmental, professional, and citizen organizations; (b) to provide for continuing education of professionals and citizens throughout the state and beyond on critical planning topics; (c) to provide applied research and consultative services to the network of country-based planning related extension agents and professional planners in the state of Wisconsin; and (d) to provide similar services to agencies of state and local governments in Wisconsin.

FOCUS AND SCOPE OF THE PLAN

The focus of the Assessment Plan is the professional Master of Science degree in Urban and Regional Planning. It is this degree that is accredited by the Planning Accreditation Board, on a five year cycle. Our most recent accreditation was undertaken in 1997. The next cycle of accreditation is currently underway.

The M.S. degree program requires 45 credits; a thesis is optional. In addition, all students are required to complete a professional internship that is equivalent to full-time summer employment (normally undertaken between the first and second years of graduate study).

All students take a core of common courses comprising 18 credits. Each student selects from one of four concentrations (land use planning, natural resources/environmental planning, economic planning, and community development planning), each of which requires 15 credits. These two components are supplemented with 12 credits of electives selected jointly by the student and her/his advisor.

EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Our primary goal is to achieve overall improvements in educational experience and outcomes for the master's degree students at different stages of their study programs, from their admission to completion of degree requirements. Specific objectives are as follows.

The specific objective is to **maintain and if possible enhance the standards of admission** (quantitative and qualitative) by raising the minimum and mean GPA, GRE, and TOEFL scores; and by more carefully reviewing students' statement of purpose(s) for graduate studies in urban and regional planning, and their recommendation letters.

Financial support. URPL draws the majority of its master's students from the upper Midwest, especially Wisconsin and Minnesota. This is a function of relatively low in-state tuition available to these students (Minnesota students can obtain reciprocal tuition) and the lack of student support funds (both hard dollars and grant) to offer students from other states. An improvement in student support funds would enable the Department to attract better quality students from Wisconsin and Minnesota as well.

Currently, a small number of master's students receive financial support, primarily through project/research assistantships. In recent years, we have been able to support a somewhat higher number of our students. Concerted efforts in the past and in the future are aimed at **increasing financial support to a larger number of our master's degree students.**

Teaching quality. Teaching is one of the strengths of URPL. The Department has a reputation throughout the University for the quality of its instruction and instructors. Students from other units on the campus regularly take classes in the department.

Efforts will continue to maintain, and where necessary improve, the quality of teaching in the program. It is critical to **assure that graduates receive a state-of-the-art understanding of, and competence in, the curriculum.**

Alumni contacts. The Department should **maintain regular contacts with its alumni, and should assess the market for planners in alumni service areas.** Along with gauging alumni placement trends, and utilizing the results of such information in program development, **the Department will strive to increase contacts between master's students and alumni, and to mobilize efforts for timely internship placements.**

Feedback from graduating students. A thesis is optional for the M.S. degree. Following from the 1996 Assessment Plan, an "exit examination" was initiated (following a long-standing practice of an exit interview). Based on a set of questions distributed mid-semester, the exit examination assesses each student's synthesizing abilities as well as an in-depth understanding of his or her selected substantive issue areas.

Under the current arrangement, each graduating student meets with two faculty members for an exit examination and interview. In addition to the component focusing on the examination, these interviews attempt to ascertain from the graduating students their overall experience in the program, the extent to which their expectations were met or not, and their suggestions for improvements. Each student completes a short course evaluation form for each course taken outside the Department (students complete a course evaluation for each URPL course at the end of the respective semester).

Based on the student and faculty experience of this entire process (exit examination and exit interview), it requires revision. The revision should primarily focus on the examination, addressing shortcomings of timing, length of the exam, and its adequacy to serve as a synthesis experience for the students.

Employment outcomes. To gauge the employment outcomes, measured in terms of the first job after graduation, **a tracking system will be set to monitor the graduating students' efforts to find suitable employment (timing, type of job, type of agency, location, and salary).**

INSTRUMENTS AND METHODS FOR ASSESSMENT

1. The Department should further **refine its data base annual reports on the characteristics of the applicants for admission**, e.g., GPA, GRE, TOEFL (required for foreign students), state (country) of residence, undergraduate degree university, sex, ethnicity, stated area(s) of concentration(s), and other qualitative measures.
2. The Department shall **refine its data base with respect to the students admitted** to the M.S. degree program.
3. The Department should continue to **ascertain, to the extent feasible, the reason(s)** from the **students** who were admitted to the program but **decided not to join the department**.
4. The Department should continue to **explore the best system to share financial support/assistance** (including part-time jobs) **with each master's student**.

5. The Department should continue to **promote and facilitate contacts between students** (through student association in URPL) **and planning professionals, in general**, and URPL alumni in particular, by inviting them to make presentations at brown-bag seminars and by ascertaining, in advance, from them about internship opportunities in their agencies. (It may be pointed out that the Planning Accreditation Board requires a formal meeting with alumni during the Board's site visit).
6. The Department shall continue to **require the agency head/supervisor to provide the Department with an in-depth review and evaluation of the performance of each URPL intern** placed in their agency as well as suggestions to improve the educational experience of master's students during the first year of their studies.
7. The Department shall **continue to track the experience of URPL graduates in their efforts to find employment**. Each graduating student would be urged to report to the Department as soon as she/he has found her/his first job and relevant particulars.
8. The master's program was first accredited by the Planning Accreditation Board in 1987 and again in 1992 and 1997 (it occurs on a regular five year cycle). The review process for 2001/02 accreditation is underway. The Planning Accreditation Board reports provide important information for assessing the overall performance of the Department's mission as well as details for many of the specific activities relevant to measuring and monitoring different aspects of educational experiences of master's students. The PAB reports provide important benchmarks and a framework to review and revise the proposed assessment measures. **The master's program shall remain eligible for accreditation, and shall continue to participate in the PAB accreditation process.**

OVERSIGHT RESPONSIBILITIES

The Department's Administrative Committee shall have the overall responsibility to oversee the implementation of Assessment Plan. The Committee will set up a timetable for the next steps; design, collect, and analyze the appropriate information; and prepare and disseminate the necessary reports. The Departmental Chair and/or the Administrative Committee may delegate some of the tasks to other faculty members and/or other Committees.