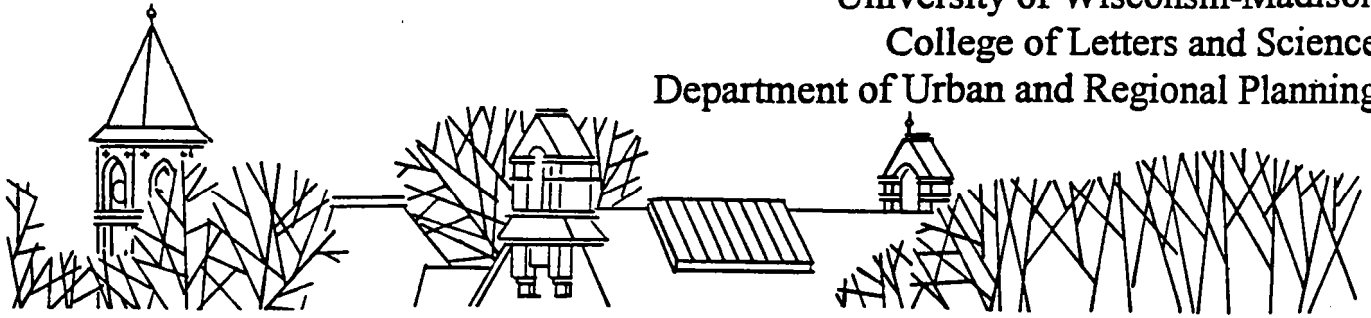


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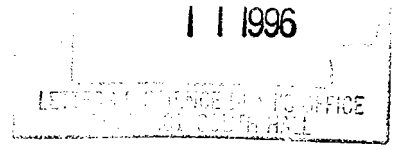
TO: Alex Nagel, Associate Dean *Alex*

FROM: Harvey Jacobs, Chair *Harvey*

DATE: December 10, 1996

RE: Assessment Plan

11 1996



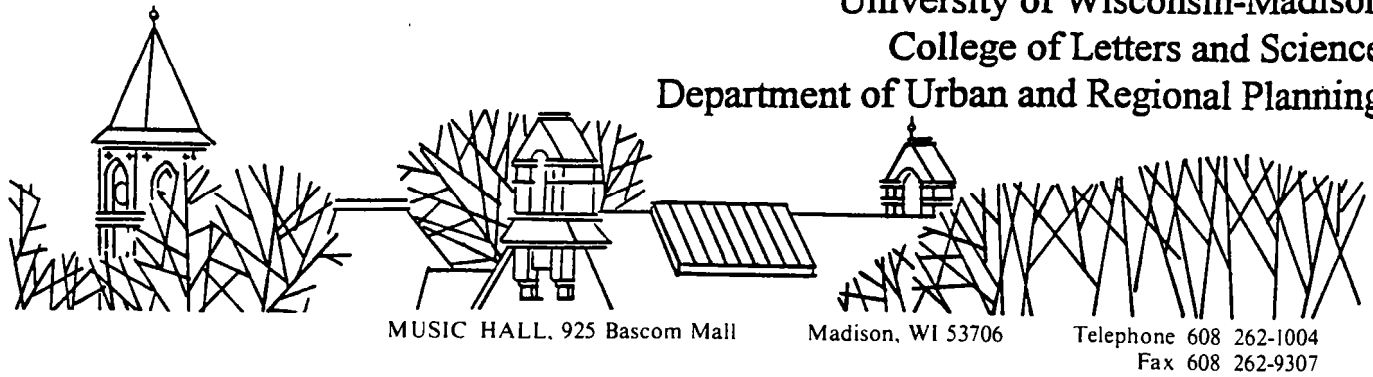
Attached is our proposed assessment plan for the M.S. degree in Urban and Regional Planning.

This was prepared over the course of this semester, and was officially reviewed and adopted at our faculty meeting of November 22nd.

I urged the faculty to keep in mind your admonition to keep the plan reasonable, doable, and "not be act of social science research." We believe we have constructed something which properly reflects what we can do with our present resources and which will, in fact, be helpful to us in the continuing management of the program.

We look forward to your review and comment of the plan.

cc: J. Craig



PLAN FOR ASSESSMENT
FOR THE
MASTER OF SCIENCE DEGREE

MISSION

As with most units in the College our mission is three part--campus-based education, research, and extension/outreach. However, there are unique aspects of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning (URPL) which give shape to these activities.

Campus-based Education. URPL is primarily a master's oriented professional program. We 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 and teachers 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 county-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 1992. 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.

Admission Standards. During the last 4-5 years, the quality of students (as measured by undergraduate GPA) has improved substantially. Of the students currently enrolled, 92 per cent meet or exceed the Graduate School minimum of 3.0 for admission, and 33 per cent have a 3.5 or better GPA.

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 study 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 relative 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 relatively 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. Under the current arrangement each graduating student meets with two faculty members for an exit interview. Exit 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).

For some time, the need to revise the purpose and scope of exit interviews has been recognized. To this end, attempts will be made to **make the "exit interview" process more rigorous through initiation of an "exit evaluation."** The exit evaluation will assess each student's synthesizing abilities as well as an in-depth understanding of her or his selected substantive issue areas.

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 shall set up a data base and prepare annual reports indicating 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 set up a data base similar to the one proposed for item (1) above and prepare annual reports with respect to the students admitted to the M.S. degree program.
3. The Department shall 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 shall set up a simple information system as to the extent of financial support/assistance (including part-time jobs) for each master's student.
5. The Department shall promote and facilitate contacts between students (through the 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 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 urge/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. Effective Spring 1997, URPL 781: Planning Thought and Practice (a required core course usually taken during the last semester) should be revised so as to emphasize the conceptual and synthetic approach to the purposes and nature of public sector planning. It would also provide the students an opportunity to reflect on their experiences in the workshop course and in their internships.

8. The Department shall **initiate a new system of "exit evaluations" for second year students**. Early in their last semester, students will be given a set of questions focusing on planning process and on substantive knowledge in the various concentrations. Each student will choose one question and will be examined orally on it by a committee made up of their adviser and one other faculty member appointed by the Administrative Committee. Exit evaluations will be on a **pass/fail** basis. If the student does not pass, she/he will have an opportunity to prepare further and will then be examined again. If a student writes a thesis, the thesis defense substitutes for the exit evaluation. Each student will also be required to prepare a written critique of his or her educational and other experiences in the Department. This will also be discussed at the exit evaluation interview.
9. The Department shall **establish a tracking system to gauge 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.
10. The master's program was first accredited by the Planning Accreditation Board in 1987 and again in 1992 (it occurs on a regular five year cycle). The review process for 1997 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.