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**Subject:** Assessment Report

College of Letters and Science  
Assessment Report

Department or Program Name: Urban and Regional Planning

**Abstract:** The Department of Urban and Regional Planning adopted a "Plan for

Assessment for the Master of Science Degree," on November 22, 1996. The

M.S. degree is a two year, professional degree with an enrollment of approximately 50 FTE students. The degree requires completion of 45 course credits (thesis optional), and completion of a professional internship.

The overall goal of the Plan is to improve the educational experience and outcome of the professional master's students. Specifically, we established objectives that included: 1) maintaining and enhancing the quality of students admitted, 2) increasing financial support for students, 3) assuring state-of-the art competence in the curriculum, 4) increasing contacts between students and alumni, 5) revising the exit experience towards an exit examination, in order to more thoroughly assess student knowledge and preparation, and 6) developing a tracking system for recently graduated students. To implement this goal and these objectives, a set of ten instruments and methods were specified.

During 1997-1998 we concentrated our activities on two of these instruments: re-accreditation of the master's program under the guidelines established by the Planning Accreditation Board, and establishment and implementation of an exit examination process. The report prepared on behalf of the accreditation body noted that the Department enjoys "a rich legacy of excellence in instruction, dominance in pioneering research . . . and superiority in extending service to the people of the state." At the end of 1997 we received notice that we were fully re-accredited for the ensuing five year period by the Planning Accreditation Board. A new exit examination procedure requires all graduating students to undertake a one hour oral examination on a question developed by the faculty. This has proved very useful in focusing students to synthesize their educational experience, and in providing faculty with insights into the strengths and weaknesses of aspects of the curriculum.

Assessment Tools Used:

Direct Indicators

Undergraduate	Graduate
Major	Program

National Exams \_\_\_\_\_

Local Exams \_\_\_\_\_

Capstone Course(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Spring Semester

Embedded Testing \_\_\_\_\_

Student Portfolios \_\_\_\_\_

Review theses & dissertations \_\_\_\_\_

Performance Evaluations \_\_\_\_\_ End of each semester; initiated  
Spring '97

Pre and Post Testing \_\_\_\_\_

Indirect Indicators

	Undergraduate Major	Graduate Program
Student Surveys _____	_____	_____
Exit Interviews _____ Spring '97	_____	_____
Alumni Surveys _____	_____	_____
Employer Surveys _____	_____	_____
External Reviews _____	_____	1997

Narrative:

The Department of Urban and Regional Planning adopted a "Plan for Assessment for the Master of Science Degree," on November 22, 1996.

The M.S. degree is a two year, professional degree with an enrollment of approximately 50 FTE students. The degree requires completion of 45 course credits (thesis optional), and in addition the completion of a professional internship that is equivalent to full-time summer employment. The program requires that 18 credits be taken in core courses by all students, 15 credits in a designated concentration, and 12 credits in electives selected jointly by the student and her/his advisor.

The overall goal of the Plan is to improve the educational experience and outcome of the professional master's students. Specifically, we established objectives that included: 1) maintaining and enhancing the quality of students admitted, 2) increasing financial support for students, 3) assuring state-of-the art

competence in the curriculum, 4) increasing contacts between students and alumni for the purposes of feedback on education, selection of internships and employment opportunities, 5) revising the exit experience towards an exit examination, in order to more thoroughly assess student knowledge and preparation, and 6) developing a tracking system for recently graduated students relative to professional employment.

To implement this goal and these objectives, a set of ten instruments and methods were specified. These include: 1) establishing a data base and preparing annual reports on applicants for admission, 2) establishing a similar data base on those admitted, 3) ascertaining reasons students chose not to come once admitted, 4) establishing a data base on financial assistance, 5) establishing a multi-prong strategy for alumni/student contacts, 6) requiring student internship supervisors to provide formal written evaluations, 7) revising the content of URPL 781, 8) initiating a new system of exit evaluations, 9) establishing a tracking system for graduates, and 10) maintaining eligibility for professional accreditation through the Planning Accreditation Board.

Since adoption of the Plan, we have been quite active in its implementation. In particular, we have (more or less) fully implemented instruments 1, 2, 6, 8, and 10, concentrating our efforts on elements 8 and 10 in this last year, and partially implemented instruments 3 and 5. A fuller discussion of elements 10, 8 and 6 follow.

Under the guidelines of the Planning Accreditation Board, the master's program must be re-assessed for professional accreditation on a five year cycle. As part of the accreditation process, an extensive self-study document is prepared and submitted for review by the Board (according to its guidelines) and after review by campus authorities. After a self-study document is accepted, a site visit is scheduled by a team composed of two academics and a master practitioner. Their report is submitted to the Department and the Board. The Department then appears before the Board for a discussion on the self-study and the site visit, and a decision on accreditation is rendered. This process provides for a regular opportunity for thorough examination of a programs goals, objectives, courses and requirements, in the context of the field's expectations. We completed our self-study early in the 1996-1997 academic year. In winter 1997 the site visit occurred. The report of the site visit team was delivered in the spring. In part, it noted that the Department enjoys "a rich legacy of excellence in instruction, dominance in pioneering research . . . and superiority in extending service to the people of the state." They also included suggestions for further improvement in the program. At the end of 1997 we received notice that we were fully re-accredited for the ensuing five year period by the Planning Accreditation Board.

As a program that does not require a thesis on the part of master's students, we have long been concerned about whether students were successfully synthesizing their educations. In part because of our own concerns, and in part prodded by requirements of the Planning

## Accreditation

Board for a synthesis experience, during the 1996-1997 academic year we developed and implemented an exit examination procedure. This procedure requires that each graduating student complete a one hour oral examination with two faculty, which is graded on a pass/fail basis. Early in semester two of the academic year faculty committees draft examination questions reflective of the program's four concentrations plus the core (for a total of five questions). These questions are circulated to all graduating students, and posted. Students then formally select the question they wish to be examined upon, notifying the office staff of their selection. A faculty committee consisting of a student's advisor and one other member selected by the Department's Administrative Committee conduct the examination. We have now gone through two rounds of this process (Spring '97 and Winter '97), and are about to undertake round three (Spring '98).

On the whole we are very pleased. The examination process is clearly prompting students to work at synthesizing their educational experience, and causing them to think more synoptically about their studies. In addition, it is providing faculty with data on the strengths and weaknesses of how we go about teaching within our concentrations and the programs as a whole. This has led directly to discussions about faculty hiring priorities and possibilities for curriculum revision (though no revision has yet occurred).

The internship is a vital part of the educational program for the master's degree. Students have their first full-time exposure to planning practice, and if they undertake the internship between their first and second years (as they are urged), many return to their studies with a renewed sense of focus and direction. The requirement for a formal written evaluation of the internship by the intern's supervisor is helping both the students and the program. Supervisors seem, for the most part, eager to share their impressions of the students, and to provide them with thoughts on professional development. In addition, supervisors seem to welcome the chance to share with the program their thoughts on professional education. Students arrange for the letters from their supervisor to be sent to their academic advisor. They are then required to meet with their advisor for a formal assessment of their internship experience, including their supervisor's input. When the cycle of assessment is complete, the faculty discuss the results of this feedback from supervisors at a faculty meeting. So far we have only done this once (in Spring '97) and will do it again in this spring. For the most part, supervisors are complimentary of student's training, and have put forth some useful suggestions which may have impact on curriculum, once we see comments over a couple of year period.

The Plan has been useful for the Department during a period when we are undergoing a great deal of personnel and organizational change. We anticipate that we will continue with the implementation of those elements initiated, and extend implementation to other

elements of the Plan during the upcoming years.