

Unit Plan for Assessing and Improving Student Learning in Degree Programs

Unit: Department of Urban and Regional Planning

Unit Head approval:

Date:5/9/08

This plan, the planning process, and the implementation of ongoing assessment serve several purposes:

1. An updated plan has been requested by the Provost because of past successes in making program improvements as well as the campus' upcoming HLC re-accreditation in 2009. Assessment will also be part of the upcoming UIUC Academic Program Review Process.
2. Continuous assessment assists the Department in revising curricula, hiring faculty, communicating with students and alumni, and providing appropriate academic and career services to students.
3. Continuous assessment and data collection will facilitate periodic accreditation reviews of our two professionally accredited programs.

SECTION 1: PAST ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Since 2000, the Department has used continuous assessment and strategic planning to:

- Revise the MUP Capstone requirement (2000 and 2008)
- Revise the MUP core courses (2004 and 2008)
- Institute an undergraduate Minor in Urban and Regional Planning (2006)
- Hire new faculty and develop new elective courses

SECTION 2: REVISED ASSESSMENT PLAN

(a) PROCESS.

The task of preparing the Assessment Plan was assigned to the BAUP Coordinator. The coordinator attended three of the training sessions, downloaded training materials, and reviewed appropriate data sources.

General content and a draft plan were discussed at the departmental faculty meeting on March 27, 2008. A committee was appointed, consisting of the coordinators of the three degree programs, and this committee performed a detailed review and revision of the draft plan on 8 April.

(b) STUDENT OUTCOMES:

Mission:

The Department of Urban and Regional Planning nurtures—creates, articulates, teaches, and shares—skills and knowledge that enable planning professionals to 1) bring a comprehensive view to specific planning situations and 2) help citizens to achieve fulfilling and just human settlements that are ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable. The objective of each departmental program is derived from this mission.

The primary focus of the MUP is to prepare students to become practitioners in the planning profession. We are strongly committed to a model of strong intellectual grounding in knowledge areas as well as preparation in specific skills. We intend to educate leaders of the profession. The strong intellectual content is also consistent with the continuation of some of our students to the PhD in planning and to academic or advanced research positions.

The primary focus of the BAUP is to prepare students for careers in planning. A career in planning involves knowledge of planning philosophy, writing and critical thinking skills, analytical methods, problem formulation and resolution, law and government, and the cultural, social, economic, ecologic, and physical characteristics of human settlements. More broadly, the objective is to prepare entry level professional planners who have the intellectual grounding to pursue graduate study and to grow into leaders of the profession

The primary focus of the Ph.D. program in Regional Planning is to prepare students to be leading researchers and educators in the fields of urban and regional planning. Graduates should be well-grounded in the intellectual foundations of the field, have a well-developed area of research specialization, be prepared to formulate significant research questions to advance the field, be able to apply appropriate research methods to address these questions, and be able to clearly communicate the research results to a variety of audiences.

Desired Outcomes:

1. BAUP and MUP graduates will be prepared for careers as professional planners in the public, nonprofit and private sectors.
2. Ph.D students will be prepared for careers as teachers and researchers in specialized aspects of urban and regional planning.
3. All students will be prepared to develop, analyze and discuss, in both verbal and written formats appropriate to their level, qualitative and quantitative information on solutions to social, economic and environmental issues.

4. All students will develop an understanding of the distinction between individual interests and the public interest to assist them as professionals and as citizens of a global society.

(c) MEASURES AND METHODS USED TO MEASURE OUTCOMES:

There are several ways to measure how well we educate our students to meet the learning objectives. Generally, we can assess (1) course content and teaching, (2) objective measures of incoming students, (3) student learning outcomes, and (4) job placement, alumni professional success, and alumni evaluation of their UIUC education. Based on effectiveness of measures and feasibility of data collection, we propose to use the following measures and methods of assessment:

1. Teaching Evaluation

This year our Department instituted a systematic peer teaching evaluation program, in which all faculty (including junior faculty) will review all other faculty (including senior faculty) teaching on a regular basis. The purpose is to go beyond ICES data in order to evaluate course content, syllabi, and classroom performance. By using peer review committees, we expect to collectively share best teaching practices, increase awareness of each others' courses, offer constructive criticism, and thereby improve and maintain the overall quality of departmental teaching.

2. Annual Review of Key Indicators from Campus Profile

The Campus Profile provides the means to measure key departmental variables regarding quality of incoming students and their progress toward their degrees. We propose to annually review the following, and compare them to previous years:

- Number of Freshmen, Sophomores, Juniors, Seniors, MUP students, and Doctoral students. Two- or three-year running averages might be used to decrease emphasis on anomalous years.
- ACT and class rank of incoming freshmen, GRE scores of incoming graduate students
- GPA by class year.
- Class sizes in required BAUP courses, required MUP courses, electives.
- Number of BAUP, MUP, and Ph.D. degrees awarded.
- Mean semesters to complete BAUP, MUP, and Ph.D. degrees.

- Senior survey. We would like to explore obtaining the results of the annual UIUC senior survey for our Department alone.

3. Student Performance Evaluations

Employer Evaluation of Interns:

- Employers will complete a confidential evaluation form on the performance of each Intern as a condition of awarding credit for the course.

Capstone Evaluation:

- MUP students will be required to present their capstone projects in public presentations to students and faculty.

Doctoral student outcomes evaluation

- The program coordinator will develop a list of Ph.D. alumni and their current professional position.
- Each year, the coordinator will update data on years to completion and completion rates of doctoral students for the preceding five years.
- Each doctoral student will be asked to provide a one-page annual report of activities, including any fellowships, external grants, publications, presentations, or awards. The coordinator will compile these into an annual report of the program.

Tracking of MUP Student Achievements

- The MUP program coordinator will each year compile a list of student achievements, such as publications, presentations, and awards.
- At the beginning of each school year, the program coordinator will verify progress of all 2nd year MUP students with respect to each of the following: core courses completed, area of concentration, capstone project, completion of optional internship.

4. Alumni Survey

A survey of alumni will be conducted every three years. The survey, to be coordinated with the Development Officer, will include specific and open-ended questions to elicit opinions on the quality and relevance of course work and the ability of alumni to perform professional work. It will also seek to objectively describe alumni career tracks, in terms of sector, location, job function, and years since degree. In addition, items will be included to determine the respondents' ability to compete with other planners and other professionals in achieving the expected outcomes. The first survey will be conducted, via e-mail, in late Spring 2008.

Every Fall, the MUP program coordinator will contact recent graduates from 15 months previously, in order to identify their employment status and salaries.

SECTION 3 : PLANS FOR USING RESULTS

(a) PLANS FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT: .

1. Annual Review:

The Associate Head will prepare a summary of assessment data as a report to the faculty at the end of the Spring semester each year. The data will be reviewed at the annual faculty retreat, where we will consider appropriate improvements.

2. Curriculum Revisions:

The Curriculum Committee and the Program Coordinators of department programs will consider and recommend improvements in their areas of responsibility based on the assessment data.

3. Alumni Advisory Committee:

Department faculty will continue to discuss the most appropriate way to structure an alumni advisory committee, which has been dormant in recent years.

(b) TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION:

1. Upon adoption of this plan by the DURP faculty, implementation is anticipated to commence in Fall 2008.

2. Development of survey instruments will begin in Spring 2008 with their application by early Summer.

3. The first assessment review by the faculty will be completed Spring 2009.

4. Data generated in the interim will be presented to the faculty and students for discussion of possible revisions.

The assessment plan will be reviewed at the first faculty meetings of the academic year. Recommendations for revision may be made at those times by any faculty, staff or student in DURP.