

**Florida Atlantic University
School of Urban and Regional Planning
Program Review
March 31, 2014**

Review Team:

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The Review Team of Dr. Sy Adler, Dr. Deborah Howe, and Dr. Russell Ivy reviewed FAU's School of Urban and Regional Planning (SURP) on March 28, 2014. The Review Team was provided with a December 2013 Self-Study prepared by five SURP faculty members.

The Review Team met with:

- Eric Dumbaugh, Associate Professor and SURP Director
- Yanmei Li, Assistant Professor and SURP Graduate Program Coordinator
- Jesse Saginor, Associate Professor and SURP Undergraduate Program Coordinator
- Members of the SURP faculty (one meeting)
- Roslyn Carter, Dean of College for Design and Social Inquiry (CDSI)
- Hugh Miller, Associate Dean of CDSI
- Graduate and undergraduate student representatives from each SURP program
- Michele Hawkins, Associate Provost
- Ed Pratt, Dean of Undergraduate Studies
- Debra Szabo, Assistant Director, Graduate College

A facilities tour was led by Asher Soldwedel, Coordinator of the Visual Planning Technology Lab.

The exit interview was conducted as one meeting with Dean Carter, Associate Dean Miller; SURP Director Dumbaugh and SURP Undergraduate Program Coordinator Saginor.

Overview

FAU's SURP has recently experienced many significant changes including satellite campus closures, a new university president and many high-level administrative positions held on an interim basis. While the university's strategic planning initiatives are in a state of flux, it is imperative that SURP engage in an inclusive strategic planning process of its own to address requirements of the Planning Accreditation Board and to ensure that SURP can take full advantage of both external and internal opportunities as they arise. SURP is in a position to be a strong program assuming the full engagement of faculty, transparent and inclusive decision making and university support to build on existing

strengths and opportunities.

Background

SURP offers three programs, a Bachelor of Urban and Regional Planning (BURP), a Bachelor of Urban Design (BUD) and a Master of Urban and Regional Planning (MURP). The MURP program is accredited by the Planning Accreditation Board. There is an expressed interest to develop a doctoral program, which is likely to be achieved by creating a planning track as part of an existing PhD program in Public Administration, and the review team agrees that this would be a good plan.

SURP has recently experienced significant changes. Historically positioned on the satellite Fort Lauderdale campus, the School relocated this past year to the Boca Raton campus upon the closure of its campus due to budget cuts. SURP has seized upon this situation as an opportunity enabling them to enhance connections to university resources for both students and faculty. College administration applauds this attitude and both students and faculty noted the benefits of this move.

The move led to new space within the CDSI building. The SURP office is nearing completion of renovations. SURP has a dedicated computer lab instruction room and a visualization lab. Overall space was reduced by approximately 20% as a result of the move.

In the past few years, two senior faculty members have left SURP for positions at other universities; interviewees noted that this stands as a significant loss. SURP has eight faculty lines held currently by one full, two associate and three assistant professors and one instructor. Candidates have been interviewed and negotiations are underway to fill a vacant position. The composition of the faculty has resulted in untenured faculty members assuming significant service responsibilities including an assistant professor serving as the graduate program coordinator.

SURP has experienced a series of budget cuts, the largest of which was 33% and resulted in the complete defunding of the Center for Urban and Environmental Solutions and the loss of all but one support position.

SURP enjoys strong support by the Dean of CDSI which has been historically important in preserving the accreditation status for the MURP program.

Challenges and Recommendations

University budget cuts contributed to a mandated increase in teaching loads from 2/2 to 3/2. With budget cuts and credentialing issues, the university has discouraged the massive hiring of adjuncts; SURP currently has four who teach predominately in the undergraduate programs. This teaching load including substantial undergraduate teaching requirements makes it difficult to focus on research, publication and securing external funding. The lack of involvement of adjuncts necessitates reliance on stacked undergraduate and graduate courses.

Recommendations: Clearly communicate to SURP faculty the criteria and opportunities for course releases associated with a productive research program.

Explore opportunities for hiring qualified adjuncts to remove some of the pressure from faculty. Qualified adjuncts can enhance the quality of the educational program.

The Review Team was not in a position to determine whether the stacked undergraduate and graduate course is an issue for faculty and students. If the percentage of admitted MURPs who were BURPs increases in the years ahead, stacked courses may very well become a problem that needs to be addressed

The move to the Boca Raton campus resulted in a loss of space dedicated to SURP classes. Faculty members expressed a need for a dedicated studio classroom that would allow for easy configuration of tables and chairs to support group efforts.

Recommendation: Dedicate a classroom for studio uses; such a room could be used by more than one course thus improving efficient use of limited space.

There has been some loss in matriculated students attributed to the move to Boca Raton. Attempting to grow the undergraduate and graduate degree programs at the same time could put a strain on faculty and staff resources.

Recommendations: It's possible that the new location will result in long term increases in students. Cost effective recruitment efforts should be explored such as expanding the attention on the website to the range of place-based initiatives that SURP is pursuing, especially those that creatively engage students in the community. Consideration might be given to sponsoring a planning intervention such as a modular parklet on the Main campus to draw attention to SURP's programs.

University recruitment services should also be explored.

The SURP programs are noteworthy for the level of diversity in the student body. The existence of diversity, however, does not mean that differences will automatically be bridged.

Recommendation: Student diversity could be the basis for scholarly research on how to cultivate reflective appreciation of different world views. The diversity could be the foundation of project work with the communities in the region from which those students are drawn. The University of New Mexico's Indigenous Planning Institute and La Raza Center could serve as models.

Students expressed concern that most of their courses are offered in the evenings.

Recommendation: As the programs grow, consider offering more courses during the daytime. Online courses are another alternative to consider.

The Bachelor of Urban Design program has been developed by combining existing planning and architecture courses. The Review Team is concerned that this may not

be an effective way of enabling graduates of the program to develop the skills they would need to work in the urban design field.

Recommendation: Consideration should be given to developing urban design studios. This may be an appropriate opportunity to engage adjuncts in such courses. Offering UG UD studios, unless they are taught by adjuncts, however, would necessitate allocating more scarce tenure line faculty resources to UG teaching, making it more difficult to increase research/publication/external funding.

Concern was expressed that undergraduates are taking courses out of sequence, compromising their overall education.

Recommendation: Clearly indicate course sequence requirements in advising materials. Consider mandating advising before course registration, at least at one point during matriculation.

The MURP offers four specializations. Students raised concerns about the availability of courses in support of specializations.

Recommendation: SURP should reevaluate the specializations especially in light of faculty turnover and the relatively small size of the faculty. Four specializations is a lot for a faculty of eight. It may also be feasible to develop certificates that could serve in place of specializations.

The Self-Study notes the emphasis in the MURP program on research. Consideration should be given as to whether this should be required for those who will be pursuing professional planning work. Attention should also be given to the extent to which this is an effective use of faculty resources.

Recommendation: Portland State University's Planning Workshop offers a model of student initiated group projects that facilitate close student/client relationships and replicates the nature of planning practice. Workshop projects have tended to focus on cutting edge planning issues resulting in substantial projects that have had both regional and national relevance. SURP could do the same for South Florida thereby elevating the profile of the MURP program. These projects can also become the basis for scholarly publications.

It appears that there has been a more formal mentoring program in the past for junior faculty that disappeared with the loss of key senior faculty members. There is no mentoring program for mid-career faculty who may be interested in further promotion or career opportunities in administration.

Recommendation: Mentoring programs can be developed at the School, College or University levels. Emphasis should be placed on balancing research, teaching and service obligations as well as life and career. New faculty should also be advised on how to establish external mentoring relationships that could help them secure external reviews when they are up for promotion and tenure.

Junior faculty should be made fully aware of university resources in support of research, teaching and personal development.

The university should consider giving new faculty start-up funds, which have become the norm in the planning academy. This would provide junior faculty with guaranteed resources that could be used for travel, technology, student hires, etc.

Junior faculty should be advised against excessive service demands that compromise their ability to pursue research and publication.

Mid-career faculty should be mentored to ensure that they continue to make progress in promotion to full professor. Those who are interested in administration might benefit from a mentoring program that focuses on the skill sets needed for such a career move.

None of the SURP full time faculty have the AICP (American Institute of Certified Planners) credential.

Recommendation: The Review Team supports the existing SURP policy to offer faculty financial support for taking the AICP exam.

Review Analysis Questions

The Review Team was asked to address the following questions:

- *What can SURP do to become a Top-15 planning program? Please discuss both activities that can be addressed within SURP and FAU, as well as activities that may be targeted to take advantage of outside opportunities.*
- *What are the major barriers to realizing this goal? Please again refer to internal and external barriers.*
- *What actions should be taken to overcome these barriers.*

The School should consider adopting a more nuanced approach to elevating its profile nationally; the stated objective of becoming a Top-15 planning program may not be appropriate. As SURP faculty members are aware, the validity of the Planetizen rankings has been and continues to be seriously critiqued by planning academics around the country. The Self-Study suggests that SURP reflected on the feasibility of the Top-15 goal and recognizes that it may not be realistic given the size of the School and the lack of a doctoral program. It is noted that this goal may be more reasonable in the context of SURP's unique niche considering its location or in comparison with other program which also do not have doctoral programs. The Review Team concurs with this assessment.

That said, we think the national profile of the SURP would be elevated by capitalizing on its unique location in South Florida, outstanding regional outreach efforts and innovative applied planning initiatives that create rich learning experiences for students, professionals and residents.

To realize these opportunities, SURP is strongly encouraged to conduct an inclusive strategic planning process in such a manner that faculty find as much common ground as possible and develop sufficient trust to move forward collectively and

intentionally to achieve a limited number of objectives. Since a strategic plan needs to be developed as part of the Self-Study for re-accreditation of the MURP degree program, it will be an especially important vehicle to accomplish the objective of elevating the profile of the program in the context of all of the School's activities. Given that the accreditation site visit will take place within a year, it is imperative that this planning be undertaken immediately and not delayed due to uncertainty in the university's more comprehensive planning initiatives.

Specific attention needs to be given to the mission statement which is currently generic, long and complex. The Self-Study response blurs any distinction between the mission and purpose. There is no reference to the School's location in South Florida nor its desire to claim this region as its area of focus for research and teaching.

The regional mission is important because the convergence of environmental, political and cultural systems results in a place that has international and ecological importance. This region is a living laboratory that should be a draw for students, researchers, educators and practitioners from around the world.

A regional mission for FAU should be embraced through:

- Political advocacy to restore targeted state funding for regional initiatives
- Developing the DeGrove Institute as a critical bridge between the School faculty and the region drawing on lessons learned from similar institutes such as the Institute of Portland Metropolitan Studies
- Collaborating with colleagues in CDSI and other university units on a major grant that aligns with a regional research focus
- Emphasizing the research and publication opportunities created by existing initiatives such as Livable South Florida and the Living Laboratory Program
- Expanding training programs that take advantage of region-serving facilities like the Visual Planning Technology Lab
- Hosting conferences that showcase SURP research and activities in South Florida and/or further research objectives
- Encouraging SURP faculty to organize sessions at Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning and other academic conferences that promote their South Florida work
- Ensuring that SURP stories are well presented online so as to enhance student recruitment efforts
- Pursuing development of a planning track within the existing Public Administration PhD program with the goal of ultimately creating a stand-alone planning doctorate
- Pursuing a strategically focused senior hire to support a PhD planning track with a specific focus on FAU's place specific stewardship initiatives
- Support SURP faculty in pursuing journal editing opportunities which can begin on a small scale by offering to edit book reviews

The strategic planning process should give attention to alternative indicators of success. One measure of rising prominence would be an increase in applications from out of region students. Another would be the recognition by researchers interested in South Florida that they would need to consult and/or collaborate with SURP faculty on a range of research projects.

Feedback on Program Review Process

The Review Team appreciated the hospitality extended by FAU, including university administrators, SURP faculty, staff and students. We learned a lot in the process and hope that we have been able to offer useful recommendations. That said, we feel that our ability to do so was constrained by the way the review was structured. We understand that this review was conducted a bit differently than other recently completed FAU program reviews in other colleges.

- The one-day format did not provide enough time for necessary meetings, especially time between initial and exit interviews, and for processing the range of input received.
- Faculty meetings should have been arranged so that the Review Team met separately with junior and senior faculty, or at least the schedule should have permitted faculty an opportunity to speak privately with the review team if desired. Individual meetings with faculty, given that SURP is a relatively small unit, would have been preferable. Program administrators (graduate and undergraduate program directors) should not have been present in the general faculty meeting.
- Curriculum vitas were not provided.
- Separate exit interviews should have been conducted with the Dean and Program administrators.