MEMORANDUM

To: Board of Regents

From: Board Office

Subject: Accreditation Report for the Graduate Program in Urban and Regional Planning, University of Iowa

Date: March 12, 2001

Recommended Action:

Receive the report on accreditation for the Graduate Program in Urban and Regional Planning , University of Iowa.

Executive Summary:

On April 20, 2000, the Planning Accreditation Board granted accreditation to the University of Iowa program leading to the Master of Arts or Master of Science in Urban and Regional Planning degree. The accreditation is effective January 1, 2001, through December 31, 2005.

A condition of the accreditation is that the program submit a progress report on or before September 1, 2002, addressing the following criterion area: (1.9) Educational Outcomes: Reports of measurable educational objectives, including information about the program's graduates. This is consistent with the Board of Regents' policy requiring outcomes assessment of all undergraduate programs.

Accreditation reviews are consistent with the Board of Regents' strategic plan, KRA 1.0.0.0, Quality. The accreditation process relates to Objective 1.1.0.0, "to improve the quality of existing and newly created educational programs."

The Graduate Program in Urban and Regional Planning is a two-year master's degree program oriented primarily toward the education of professional planners. Based on the social sciences, the Program focuses onhow planners can influence decisions, policies, and actions that affect the quality of life in cities and regions.

The Planning Accreditation Board has 11 criteria and 53 guidelines. The Program met all standards. Three of the guidelines were judged "partially met" by the Site Visit Team. The response of the University reduced that to one.

Background:

The Graduate Program in Urban and Regional Planning was organized as a separate academic unit in 1964. In 1995-96, the Program was substantially restructured, which included modifying areas of concentrations and adding several new elective courses. The Program first applied for accreditation in 1984 and was the first school visited by a Planning Accrediting Board (PAB)-sanctioned team. For its self-study for this accreditation, the Program prepared a three-volume report. The first addresses the criteria of the PAB, the second provides supplements, such as course syllabi, and the third contains additional supplemental materials, i.e., strategic plans, faculty handbook, student manuals, and recruitment brochures.

The mission of the Program has five elements:

- Maximizing the long-run career potential of graduates who will seek professional positions primarily in the United States, providing them with entry-level skills as well as the depth and flexibility needed to progress in the field over a career lifetime.
- Providing graduates with basic competence in an area of emphasis within the field of planning so that they are prepared for the increasingly specialized jobs in the planning field.
- Challenging students to think about the roles they will play as planners, their ethical and moral responsibilities, and their commitment to improving the quality of life in our nation's cities and regions.
- Disseminating knowledge in the planning field through both graduate and undergraduate teaching, as well as through the professional and public service activities of the faculty; the latter include active participation in applied research supporting the development and improvement of public policies at the local, state, and national levels.
- Advancing the state of knowledge in the planning field, through research on the nature of urban and regional economic, political, social, and environmental systems and on the effects of alternative public policies.

The Program aspires to become one of the ten best schools in the United States for master's level education in the areas of (1) transportation and infrastructure planning, (2) environmental and energy planning, and (3) housing and economic development planning. A previous accreditation site visit team judged the Iowa Planning Program overall to be one of the 15 best programs and very possibly the best master's only program in the nation.

The Program offers two degrees: the Master of Arts and the Master of Science in Urban and Regional Planning. There are no differences in the requirements for the two degrees. The Program offers joint-degree programs with the following units on campus:

- M.A. in Urban and Regional Planning and a J.D. in Law
- M.A. in Urban and Regional Planning and an M.A. in Hospital and health Administration
- M.A. in Urban and Regional Planning and an M.S. in Preventive Medicine and Environmental Health
- M.A. in Urban and Regional Planning and an M.A. in Economics
- M.A. in Urban and Regional Planning and an M.S.W. in Social Work.

In each case, students in these programs complete the entire Planning core, a minimum of 35 hours total in Planning courses, and an area of concentration. In addition, the Program works with the Transportation Studies Program in offering a Certificate of Transportation Studies.

In 1999-2000, when the self-study was written, there were 10 faculty members in the Program, 6 full-time and four part-time, or 7.41 FTE. The Program is enhanced by the services of a number of adjunct faculty and lecturers. At the time of the self-study, the Program had experienced several faculty resignations, and was in the midst of hiring new faculty. The Program was also experiencing the transition to a new chair.

The Program reported 46 graduate students currently enrolled in 1998-99. Fourteen students graduated in 1997-98. Since 1984, the Program has enrolled 253 students. A student profile for entering classes from 1994-98 found that of 117 students, 71 were Iowa residents; 58 were male and 59 female. Other evidence provided in the self study revealed that enrollments from 1994-95 to 1997-98 had declined from 57 to 47.

Analysis:

The Site Visit Team concluded that the Graduate Program in Urban and Regional Planning was a policy-oriented program, with some movement toward land use and urban design. The Team reported noted that the narrowly constructed program had a depth that was extraordinary, stating "by grouping their faculty so that there are two or three with similar interests, the program is able to provide as many as five classes for sectors or specializations in economic development, transportation, housing and environment."

The Site Visit Team identified the following **strengths** of the Program:

- Faculty respect for diverse viewpoints, collegial resourcefulness, and flexibility
- Incorporation of computer technology into classrooms
- Creative and enterprising recruitment of students from across the nation and internationally
- Support of the Graduate Dean
- Graduates who have strong analytical skills.

The following three PAB criteria were judged by the Site Visit Team to have **met only partially**. The institution's responses are in italics:

Structure and Functions of Urban Settlements

Based on an evaluation of the core course syllabi and discussions with the faculty, the site visit team concluded the structure and functions of urban settlements was not covered in any systematic manner in the core courses.

Response: The Program concurred that the core curriculum was deficient in its coverage of the structure and function of urban settlements. The Program proposes to redesign a course, 102:205 Economics for Policy Analysis I, to address the concern.

Conservation of Natural Resources and Social and Cultural Heritages

Based on an evaluation of the core course syllabi, the site visit team thought that the importance of conserving natural resources and our social and cultural heritage was not covered in the core courses. Some material is covered in the electives.

Response: The Program will address this issue when one of its professors returns from leave. The course, 102:203 History and Theories of Planning, will cover the topics mentioned.

Outcomes Assessment

The Program has just begun to make a concerted effort to keep track of their alumni and has not done a recent alumni survey to assess the outcome of the master's degree program as viewed from the perspective of a graduate. The department has undertaken a written and oral exit survey of their graduating classes, but has not used that data to assess the outcomes of the educational experience.

Response: The Program acknowledged that it had been more than ten years since it sought formal evaluations of the curriculum from alumni. In light of the efforts of the Program's admissions and placement director to develop an alumni web site and database, the survey will definitely be undertaken later this year.

The Board Office adds that Outcomes Assessment, as is required by Board policy, consists of much more than surveys of students. As part of the Academic Review process, units typically use a variety of assessment instruments to determine student outcomes.

The Site Team also made several recommendations. First, it encouraged the Program to respond to the University's initiative to provide interdisciplinary research opportunities for undergraduates. The Program stated, in its response, that it would welcome this opportunity, and will explore doing more after the new faculty hires have been completed. Second, after the Site Visit Team acknowledged the recruiting efforts of minority students (12% of the student body enrolled in the program are minority), it encouraged the Program to continue its efforts of active and persistent recruiting.

A variety of sources, including the self-study, Site Team report, and follow up correspondence from the Program, noted that the Program was in transition at the time of the accreditation visit. The PAB has stated that one condition of the accreditation renewal is a progress report due in September 2002. The Board Office believes that this report is of major importance, to provide evidence of the promised implementations. In addition to faculty changes, the report show include data on student enrollments and alumni feedback.

A copy of the Self-Study report, Site Visiting Team report, and correspondence between the accrediting organization and the University is located in the Board Office.

Charles R. Kniker

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Approved: Frank J. Stork

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