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COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING PROGRAMS
ACCREDITATION REPORT AT IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Action Requested: Receive the accreditation report for the Bachelor of Science in Community and Regional Planning and the Master of Community and Regional Planning in the College of Design at Iowa State University.

Executive Summary: Both programs (1) underwent a self-study that addressed the criteria defined by the accrediting body; and (2) had an on-site visit by peer evaluators. The programs were accredited for a three-year period through December 2012; the maximum period possible is seven years. A Progress Report must be submitted by September 1, 2011. Subject to satisfactory review of the progress report, the accreditation period may be extended by an additional two years. This accreditation report addresses the Board of Regents Strategic Plan objective (1.1) to “offer high-quality programs through ongoing program improvement for undergraduate, graduate, professional, and non-degree students and special school students.”

Background:

- ◇ **Bachelor of Science in Community and Regional Planning.** This program is one of only 12 accredited undergraduate planning programs in the United States. The program is designed to communicate knowledge of the structure and functions of urban settlements, history of planning, and aspects of planning and policy making. Graduates are expected to assess the impact of values in terms of equity and social justice, economic welfare and efficiency, environmental sustainability, and cultural heritage in the context of citizen involvement in decision making.
- ◇ **Master of Community and Regional Planning.** This program includes areas of concentration in land use and transportation, community design and development, and rural and environmental planning.
- ◇ **Purpose of Accreditation.** An accredited educational program is recognized by its peers as having met national standards for its development and evaluation.
- ◇ **Accrediting Agency.** The accrediting body is the Planning Accreditation Board.
- ◇ **Review Process.** The self-studies prepared by the Community and Regional Planning Programs contained the responses to the appropriate criteria required by the accrediting body – mission, goals, and objectives; institutional relations; academic autonomy and governance; curriculum; faculty resources and composition; teaching, advising, and student services; research and scholarly activities; public and professional service; students; institutional resources; and administrative and fair practices.
- ◇ **On-Site Team Report.** In November 2008, the visiting team determined that the Community and Regional Planning Programs met the requirements for accredited status, although there were four criteria that were only partially met. One criterion applied to both programs; one applied to the undergraduate program; and two criteria applied to the graduate program.

◇ Sample Strengths Identified by the Visiting Team.

- ☑ “The Geographic Information Systems (GIS) facilities and rooms (including the visualization studio), the labs with up-to-date computer equipment (MAC and PC) and peripherals (large digitizer tablet and color printer that can handle large maps and posters) are commendable. The graduate students have a very nice room for their office space.”
- ☑ “The Community and Regional Planning (CRP) program is well linked to the broader community through Cooperative Extension Service programs like PLaCE, Town*Craft, and ISU Design West in Sioux City. These links provide excellent opportunities for students to work throughout the state of Iowa on urban revitalization, rural community economic development, and other community issues.”
- ☑ “The CRP faculty are diverse in their nationalities and interests. This provides a broader worldview for the students and a rich mix of research interests, Cooperative Extension Service opportunities, and classroom experiences.”
- ☑ “The presence of three Cooperative Extension Service-based faculty in the CRP program provides strong links to funding and research/service opportunities.”
- ☑ “The undergraduate first year in a college-wide common design core class experience provides an important and strong base for the next three years of study. The sense of design is incorporated in the excellent student projects and is displayed in the poster-style presentation of material as well as in formal reports. The enrollment management program for admission to the program will only strengthen the undergraduate program.”
- ☑ “The quality of the student work displayed and the intern experiences reported to the team are very noteworthy.”
- ☑ “The department chair is exercising strong, even-handed leadership and providing important mentoring and counseling to junior faculty.”

◇ Recommendations for Improvement.

- ☑ Opportunities within the institution (2.1). “The team recommends that the faculty make an effort to attend seminars and presentations by faculty and guests in the various research centers and institutes. In this way, they can begin to develop a network that can lead to collaborative research projects. By associating with a research center and institute, faculty members can avail themselves of information about outside funding opportunities and gain assistance in grant writing and budgeting.”

All but two faculty members have collaborations with ISU faculty outside the department, including African Studies international development and sustainable agriculture; economics; Center for Transportation Research and Education; and Latino Studies. The department is working to increase its visibility through participation in joint research proposals as well as studying the creation of a collaborative environment for planning research to draw faculty from other departments. This will take 1-2 years to initiate.

- ☑ Student faculty ratio; undergraduate program guideline is 15:1 students/faculty (5.7). “The undergraduate CRP program, using current courses and faculty, has a ratio of 23.2:1. This does not meet the criterion. The team thinks the program should have this as only a partially met because of the current fiscal situation most universities find themselves in today. While the 15:1 ratio is an ideal, the team thinks that programs should not be penalized for having larger classes. The team recommends that the Planning Accreditation Board ratio should be applied only to studio-type courses where the one-on-one interaction is important to the learning process. However, the students also learn from their peers in studio classes. The team recommends that the program strive to maintain a 15:1 ratio in the studio classes.”

The department has 5.65 FTE assigned to undergraduate teaching and 4.0 FTE assigned to graduate teaching. In the past two years, there has been a net loss of two tenure-track FTE and two tenure-track FTE currently on terminal contracts. To meet the standard, the department has considered reallocating approximately 1.0 FTE from graduate to undergraduate teaching but this could negatively affect graduate enrollment. The department projects that without restoration of recent faculty line losses, it would be necessary to reduce undergraduate enrollment from 130 to 80 students. The concurrent loss of 50 students and their tuition revenue would have substantial impact on the program.

- ☑ Size and Recruitment and Composition (9.3/9.4). “The team recommends that the CRP program concentrate on increasing the size of the graduate class so that there is a critical mass that allows for more electives to be taught as well as for more viewpoints to be present in studio classes. This is going to require a more active recruiting effort – getting out into the state and talking to people. The ideal size is probably around 45-50 graduate students with an incoming class of around 20 students. However, the team recognizes that growing to 45 graduate students with the current faculty FTE (45/3.28) will result in a student to faculty ratio of 13.7:1. The team recommends that the current approach to recruitment be intensified.” The team identified a list of potential opportunities to increase recruitment.

The accrediting agency has indicated that the graduate program is below critical mass. To begin to address the decline in enrollment, the department assigned a new director of graduate education and developed a marketing plan with new marketing materials, and a recruiting plan targeting Iowa undergraduate programs in geography, sociology, political science, and related disciplines as well as College of Design undergraduate students. Financial support for new graduate students remains a limitation on retaining admitted students.

- ☑ Other areas of enhancement.

“The team recommends that the CRP faculty think creatively about how to handle some of the administrative tasks assigned to the associate chair since none of the eligible faculty are willing to take on the position. Perhaps some of the tasks could be picked up by the current administrative personnel, and some of the more routine tasks they do be handled by student workers. However the faculty decides, some administrative relief needs to be arranged for the current chair.

The team suggests that the chair might want to develop a rolling two-year teaching schedule that is shared with faculty and professional advising staff. With such a schedule, students could plan their class schedules so that they could get the courses they need to graduate within the eight semesters. This would also allow faculty to more efficiently schedule their time. Granted, things may change due to resignations, sabbaticals and other unforeseen events, but the majority of courses would follow the scheme.

Individual faculty members, in consultation with the chair, should be careful not to teach more than the 12 hours expected, because taking on additional teaching can be a creative method of procrastination from the other duties of a faculty member, like research. Junior faculty should look to undertake research that will lead to the publication record needed for promotion and tenure. Without adequate publications, a faculty member will lose the opportunity to continue as a faculty member with the responsibility and the luxury of time to spend expanding knowledge in his or her field of interest.”

The accrediting agency suggested that one issue continues to be high faculty turnover in the program. The program has a poor history of faculty retention which has an impact on recruiting students and faculty. The department is addressing this issue with a number of initiatives, including active mentoring of junior faculty by the new program chair; and aggressive start-up packages for the two new faculty, which is yielding considerable fruit in faculty productivity. Greater focus on research and scholarship within the department and college should begin to address issues of faculty advancement. The department expects that it will take years to assess any change.

- ◆ Accreditation Status. In May 2009, the Planning Accreditation Board awarded accreditation to the Community and Regional Planning Programs at ISU for a three-year period through December 2012. A condition of the accreditation is that the program submit a Progress Report on September 1, 2011, with updated information on the following areas of accreditation – opportunities within the institution; student/faculty ratio; size; and recruitment and composition. Subject to satisfactory review of the report, the accreditation period may be extended by an additional two years.