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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 Program in Community and Regional Planning and the Master of Community and Regional Planning Program in the Department of Community and Regional Planning in the College of Design at Iowa State University.

Executive Summary: The Community and Regional Planning Programs (1) underwent a self-study that addressed the standards and criteria defined by the accrediting body; and (2) had an on-site visit by peer evaluators. The programs were accredited for a period of five years. However, there were two standards that were only partially met. The programs were required to submit a progress report by September 1, 2015. This report addresses the Board of Regents Strategic Plan priority to provide “educational excellence and impact” as well as Goal #8 – “Iowa’s public universities and special schools shall be increasingly efficient and productive.”

Background:

- ◇ **Description of Programs.** The *Bachelor of Science Program in Community and Regional Planning* (BSCRCP) combines classroom and studio-based instruction to provide students an understanding of the theory, methods and applications of planning practice. The program provides the foundation to become a certified professional planner through the American Institute of Certified Planners or for more specialized learning through graduate study. The *Master of Community and Regional Planning Program* (MCRP) provides students the education and practical skills to understand community problems and issues; apply appropriate planning processes; develop comprehensive plans for local governments, counties, or regions; and offer sound implementation strategies. The MCRP offers concentration areas 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 state and national standards for its development and evaluation. To employers, graduate schools, and licensure, certification, and registration boards, graduation from an accredited program signifies adequate preparation for entry into the profession. In fact, many of these groups require graduation from an accredited program as a minimum qualification. Accreditation is also intended to protect the interests of students, benefit the public, and improve the quality of teaching, learning, research, and professional practice.
- ◇ **Accrediting Agency.** The accrediting body is the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB).
- ◇ **Review Process.** The self-study prepared by the Community and Regional Planning Programs contained the responses to the standards 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 February 2012, the visiting team determined that the Community and Regional Planning Programs were in substantial compliance with the accrediting agency standards although several criteria were only partially met.
- ◇ Standards Partially Met Identified by the Visiting Team. (Institutional responses are included in italics.)
 - ⇒ *Academic Autonomy and Governance – Program Leadership (Administration)*. “The current chair is also chair of the Landscape Architecture Department. Each department is supposed to have an associate chair to handle undergraduate issues and a Director of Graduate Education (DOGE) to handle graduate recruitment and issues. The governance document limits the associate chair position to a tenured faculty member. CRP does not have an associate chair at this time. In addition, the chair serves as Interim Associate Dean of Research for the College. The chair’s involvement in three major responsibility administrative positions is a paramount concern of the CRP faculty. While they all acknowledge the excellent skills, qualities and dedication of the chair, they also emphasize that it is impossible for the chair to follow up on all tasks because the chair is exceedingly busy with these three responsibilities. In discussions with the chair and dean, it became clear that this situation would be resolved in the immediate future, as both individuals recognize the unsustainable nature of this arrangement.”

Faculty members have taken more direct responsibility for department administration in the face of college cuts to staff. One faculty member continues to direct the interdisciplinary graduate certificate in GIS; another was recently elected DOGE for the MCRP and joint degree programs; and a third faculty member is functioning as the faculty coordinator for the Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance major in Community Development. A fourth member has assumed the position of Interim Chair. The chair of the Department of Community and Regional Planning/Interim Chair of the Department of Landscape Architecture resigned from ISU. The College of Design administration is working to fill the leadership position.
 - ⇒ *Students – Recruitment and Composition (Undergraduate and Graduate)*. “A number of newly admitted undergraduates had originally indicated as their first preference the Architecture or Design programs but were not admitted into them. This creates an environment of disappointment among many students and has the potential to define the CRP Department as a ‘second choice.’ On the other hand, those students who enter CRP by choice, or are transferred from other programs, reject such connotations. So it appears that the way freshmen students are recruited into the CRP program through the First Year Core is not conducive to building good morale among the CRP undergraduates. This has now been recognized by the CRP Department and a major effort is being launched this year to introduce new and creative courses into the mandatory First Year Core curriculum. With the help of these courses, students in the Core will have the chance to learn systematically and extensively about the field of planning. In addition, the Department is organizing an effort to establish agreements with other academic institutions to attract a large number of transfer students.

The Site Team stressed that in order for recruitment of strong students to be successful, the Department will need to define one or more niches which will make its programs unique for its Midwest location and will identify it as an academic unit where students will learn certain aspects of planning which are hard to find in other universities (such as the small town planning focus, sustainable agriculture focus, and rural development and planning focus). These, plus an improved presence in the College web site (currently very inaccessible, not informative, and unattractive) would make the Department much better known and understood to entering and interested students. The composition of the undergraduate student body reflects the demographic distribution of the people of Iowa. The student body has some minority representation, some international students, and a good percentage of female students.

The graduate program is having a problem recruiting a sufficient number of students for the last two years. Part of the problem appears to be the transitional period of the reorganization of the College, which has reduced the effort and resources devoted to graduate student recruitment available in the past. The size of the program is not sustainable in the long run with such numbers, so it is imperative that resources and energy be devoted to graduate student recruitment and retention. A recruitment specialist, added to the centralized staff of the college, is making CRP Graduate Recruitment a top priority.”

The Department received a recruitment grant from the Graduate College; it is being used to obtain mailing lists for direct ‘mail’ communication to potential graduate students. Faculty members have visited targeted colleges in Iowa to recruit at ‘grad college fairs.’ There have been visits to a number of community colleges to recruit transfer students to the BSCRIP program. Several articulation agreements have been drafted and are being reviewed for faculty approval.

Although the first College of Design recruiting staff person resigned after six months, a replacement has been hired and is providing support for department recruiting. The College held a Grad Student visit day in Spring 2013. A new program brochure was completed; department web site was launched, and Facebook and LinkedIn links were developed. However, this stretches department resources to maintain.

◇ Strengths Identified by the Site Team.

- ⇒ “The quality of education provided by the Department is excellent at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. New curricula at both levels aim to offer more flexible study plans, allow more choice of electives, and create opportunities for CRP students to take courses outside the Department and the College. The new curricula make the CRP programs more flexible, more open to other fields, and more interdisciplinary.
- ⇒ The Department has an excellent faculty. Its members are diverse in their nationalities, backgrounds, education, and interests. All of them are enthusiastic, full of energy, innovative, productive, and dedicated to teaching. Their students like them, respect them, and use them as role models. As a result, the students are provided with a broader worldview, a rich mix of research interests. Cooperative Extension Service opportunities, and classroom experiences.
- ⇒ The Department Chair is exercising strong, even-handed leadership and providing important mentoring and counseling to junior faculty.

- ⇒ The presence of three Cooperative Extension Service based faculty in the CRP program provide strong links to funding and research/service opportunities.
 - ⇒ The 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 program's alumni and employers in the region are extremely fond of, and enthusiastic about the CRP programs, and are eager to assist and support the Department and its students in many and diverse ways. There is a real sense of volunteerism among them, and the Department is poised to capitalize on this good will and rich expertise and experience of this constituency.
 - ⇒ The GIS facilities and rooms (including the visualization studio), the labs with up-to-date computer equipment and peripherals (large digitizer tablet and color printer that can handle large maps and posters) are commendable.
 - ⇒ The presence of the agricultural campus and disciplines, and the asset of the University as a land grant institution offer unique opportunities to CRP to develop niches that will establish it as a unique place to study planning subjects such as small town planning and rural development.”
- ◆ Accreditation Status. In November 2012, the Planning Accreditation Board awarded continued accreditation to the Community and Regional Planning Programs in the College of Design at Iowa State University for a period of five years. A condition of accreditation is that the program submit a Progress Report on September 1, 2015 with updated information on the standards partially met. Subject to sufficient evidence in the report of progress toward compliance, the accreditation period may be extended by an additional two years. The maximum term granted by PAB is seven years.
- On January 1, 2013, PAB implemented new accreditation standards. All programs are expected to be in compliance with the new requirement that outcomes-related information will be available on program websites:
- ⇒ Public Information. The program shall routinely provide reliable information to the public on its performance. Such information shall appear in easily accessible locations including the program website. Information shall include, but not be limited to:
 - (1) student achievement as determined by the program;
 - (2) the cost (tuition and fees) for a full-time student for one academic year;
 - (3) student retention and graduation rates, including the number of degrees produced each year, the percentage of master's students graduating within four years, and/or the percentage of bachelor's student graduating within six years; and
 - (4) percentage of master's graduates who pass the AICP exam within three years after graduation and/or the percentage of bachelor's graduates who pass the AICP exam with five years of graduation; and (employment rate of full-time graduates in a professional planning or planning-related job within one year of graduation).