Urban Studies and Planning
Program Review – 2011-2012

Memorandum of Understanding

Commendations:

- The Department leads the students to a broad, well-integrated knowledge of urban studies and urban planning.
- The Department is commended for making two recent tenure track hires. While the Department has suffered from turnover and has been thinly staffed in the recent past, it now appears to have stabilized and to be well positioned for the future.
- The Department’s choice for chair has helped stabilize the program and has started the process to grow this program.
- The faculty does an exceptionally good job of making themselves available for advising of students. The chair and faculty work hard to make students aware of internship and job opportunities.
- The faculty and Department focus on quantitative methods and urban design courses do a good job of introducing students to computerized statistical packages and Computer Assisted Design software. These are marketable skills and assist students in career preparation.
- The Department has successfully introduced some online courses and is meeting the needs/demands of students.
• The College and Department are noted for their efforts in securing the James Ring Chair Endowed Professorship and Scholarship.

• The Chair and faculty do outreach to the alumni and community for program recognition, information and fund-raising.

• The faculty is commended for the creation and support of the CSUN-Brazil FIPSE grant. This led to valuable external support for this exciting program and creates a highly visible Department effort to internationalize the program.

• The faculty is actively involved in academic urban planning and urban studies organizations. The extent and quality of their research and publications support this professional involvement.

• The College is commended for re-configuring classroom space to make larger lecture rooms available.

Recommendations

• The Department should work to support its new hires in order to develop a more balanced faculty in terms of time at CSUN and rank. This retention effort and associated mentoring of new faculty would allow the program to better govern itself in the future and provides the basis for an orderly succession of chairs. The College should provide reassigned time for research by the new hires and support newer faculty to attend professional meetings.

Understanding: The College has provided reassigned time for new hires for first two years. One course reassigned time per semester.

• The College and Department should think about alternative ways to create “stackable” urban planning and GIS certificate programs that might be combined into a new graduate urban planning program with an emphasis on spatial information technology. The Department should
evaluate the first few years of the graduate certificate programs in urban planning and GIS for student interest and participation. This assessment effort may allow for data-driven decisions on the potential for a master’s level program in the future.

Understanding: The department has sponsored two graduate certificate programs – a) Urban Planning (first inaugurated in Fall 2010 and a second cohort in Fall 2011); b) Secured approval with Tseng College and CSBS for a certificate in Community Sustainability in Fall 2011.

- The College should strive to add additional large lecture rooms so that the department can offer fewer and larger sections of GE courses.
  Understanding: The CSBS has created large lecture rooms in Sierra Hall and beginning Fall 2011 Urban Studies and Planning has used these for several GE courses. This will continue in the future. Courses are offered in a two-year rotation.

- The Department should create a GIS course for urban planning majors.
  Understanding: The department plans to work with the Geography Department to create a URBS course – “GIS for Urban Planners” or “GIS for Planning Applications”. The department faculty feels this course should be added as a requirement in the curriculum.

- The Department should consider making URBS 150 an elective for the major and limit the availability of URBS 310 to majors.
  Understanding: The faculty does feel it would be appropriate to remove URBS 150 (Urban Scene) as a requirement for the major (it could be replaced by the GIS methods course as a requirement for majors). Previous assessment efforts show that a stronger distinction needs to be made between URBS 150 and URBS 310 and that their catalog descriptions should be changed.
to reflect this change. The faculty believes both courses should remain as part of the GE curriculum offerings.

- The Department should consider reducing and simplifying its specializations. For example:
  - The Community, Economic and Housing Development specialization should be considered for elimination or revised to include a smaller set of courses.
  - The Custom specialization should be eliminated or the number of permitted courses greatly reduced.
  - The Department should consider if the number of courses in the other specializations could be reduced.

Understanding: The department faculty does see the need to revisit the degree specializations.

- The Department should incorporate action-oriented assessment and link these findings to strategic planning.

- The University, College and Department should encourage additional faculty grant and contract research endeavors.

- The College and Department should continue to build financial support for the program.

Understanding: The department is building financial support for the program. The graduate certificate programs, its participation in the MPA program, and its current development of a self-support MUP (Master of Urban Planning) degree for planned inauguration in Fall 2013 or 2014.

The department also continues to reach out to and cultivate its alumni for financial and other support.

- The Department should create an action agenda of tasks to be done as a result of the Self-Study, the outside reviewer report and the MOU.
Understanding: The department faculty has outlined an initial action agenda as a result of the program review process.