

The Missionaries of Chapel Hill

The University of North Carolina Spreads its Influence Far and Wide

Pat Verner

The text below is excerpted from the original article printed in Planning magazine in 1987, highlighting the commitment to outreach and community engagement held by UNC's Department of City and Regional Planning. As a result of this commitment and the missionary nature of its first 40 years of existence, DCRP was largely responsible for embedding modern planning practice in the State of North Carolina. In addition, the article quotes professors about the goals and vision of the department, providing a snapshot of the views held at that time. The article has been reprinted with the permission of Planning magazine.

When the city of Raleigh embarked on economic development planning a couple of years ago, planning director George Chapman wanted to be sure that his staff had a solid background in the subject. So he went to Emil Malizia at the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, who put together a short course on economic development for Chapman's staff. The short course was so well received in Raleigh that the North Carolina chapter of the American Planning Association took it to several other cities.

Helping North Carolina cities with their planning needs is nothing new for the university's planning department, which has been directly involved in statewide local planning since its establishment in 1946. On this task it works in concert with the university's Institute of Government, which presents short courses and workshops and provides consulting services in planning and other areas of government.

From the beginning, the new department fit well in a university whose hallmark is service to its state. "Out-

reach is a major role of a great public university," says William Friday, who, until his retirement last year [1986], was president of the 16-campus University of North Carolina system for 30 years. Friday himself was an active participant in a number of programs aimed at bettering the state.

Besides planning, the university has been a major player in promoting public health, quality government, culture, business entrepreneurship, economic growth, public schools, and even roads. The school has helped turn a once predominantly poor state into one of the nation's fastest growing. It is a tribute to the success of the university's planning department that there are so many planners—450 to 600, by most estimates—dispersed in so many towns, agencies, and firms. About half of them are University of North Carolina graduates. "There are UNC people everywhere," says long-time faculty member David Godschalk. "Every time you turn over a rock, a UNC graduate crawls out."

At the time of original publication, Pat Verner was a freelance writer and editor in Concord, North Carolina. Verner is a UNC graduate in journalism.

Nowhere has the department's influence been felt more than in its home state. About a quarter of its 1,200 graduates work in North Carolina, many in leadership roles in state government and local planning departments. Moreover, research and field work by both faculty and students often have far-reaching effects on local and statewide policies and decisions. "The university has made planning a very legitimate enterprise in North Carolina," says Raleigh planning director George Chapman, a former state APA chapter president and a 1963 graduate of the program. "Because the department was accepted and had a good reputation, planning was started on a good footing with a good image." From the beginning, the department—one of the first in the country not affiliated with an architecture school—focused on social questions such as the role of planners and the consequences of planning, in addition to teaching the technical skills needed for traditional land use planning. "Jack, Stu, and Jim instilled in all of us the importance of public service, that what we were doing essentially was trying to improve the life of a community," says Peter Larson, who graduated in 1951.

Building the Profession

Almost as big a part of the duties of Parker, Webb, and Chapin as establishing a planning department in the university was establishing planning in North Carolina at a time when the value of the field had yet to be proved.

Phillip Green, Jr., a faculty member at the Institute of Government who has taught planning law to hundreds of students and written much of the state's planning legislation, first heard about planning while he was a law

student at Harvard in the late 1940s. He did not think much of the idea. "I thought it was the silliest thing I had ever heard," he says.

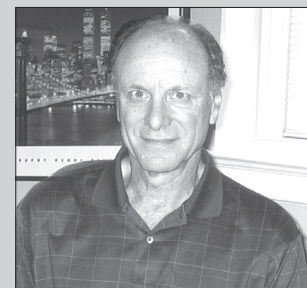
Parker, Webb, and Chapin did their best to win over the doubters with what Parker calls their "theme

Almost 20 Years Later: A Response from Current DCRP Faculty

Carolina Planning caught up with DCRP Chair Emil Malizia to get his thoughts on how planning at the University of North Carolina has changed since Pat Verner wrote his article in 1987.

CP: What kinds of research and practice-based projects are faculty members working on now?

Malizia: The department has numerous ongoing projects that are useful to practicing planners at the regional, state, and local levels. Coastal management has seen renewed attention of late. Led by DCRP professor David Brower, the university has become actively engaged in developing and implementing the North Carolina Coastal Resources Law, Planning, and Policy Center. Formed as a



partnership between the university and the state, this new entity is directed to use the resources of UNC to assist local governments and community organizations in developing and implementing sustainable-use programs for coastal and environmental management.

In economic development, DCRP faculty members are working on projects to assess and improve the state's BioWorks workforce development strategy, and to develop interventions to assist the state's ailing furniture industry. The environmental field has emerged over the past ten years at Carolina as one of its strongest ar-

songs." First, they described how planning could help a community. Second, they stressed that planning was not a "one-time effort," but something that should become a regular and continuing part of government.

Students helped spread the message. “Almost immediately, we neophytes were taken out of the classroom and pushed into planning in North Carolina,” recalls Peter Larson. “We were immediately asked to practice what we were learning in class.” For many years, students were divided into groups of three or four, and each

Parker explains that the students first assessed the local situation, looking at such basics as population, local economy, and land use. Then they made recommendations about what the town should do. The data were compiled into a report, which the students presented to the town’s governing board. The reports were not plans,

says Parker, although they were the closest things to plans most of the towns had ever had.

The outcomes varied. “Some towns picked up the ball and really started moving,” says Parker. “The chamber of commerce, civic groups—lots of people were involved. Others did absolutely nothing. In still others, nothing happened for 10 years, then someone would find the report and get some ideas.”

Peter Larson remembers being assigned to three neighboring mill towns—Leaksville, Draper, and Spray. His team, in what Larson calls the “finest comprehensive plan ever developed,” recommended that the three towns merge. A few years later, they did so, incorporating as the town of Eden.

Some years, Parker says, the planning students worked together on a major project for one city. One of these, a growth study for the city of Charlotte and surrounding Mecklenburg County, became the basis for a metropolitan planning program.

Faculty members also affected planning through their own consulting work. For

example, Webb’s firm, City Planning and Architectural Associates (which he formed with two alumni, Donald Stewart and Robert Anderson), developed the site plan for the internationally respected Research

eas of teaching and practice-based research. The Carolina Environmental Program has gathered the people and momentum that may soon lead to a new school. This work will provide communities with useful research on environmental science, policy, and planning. DCRP provides much of the planning expertise with Phil Berke, Dave Moreau, and Dale Whittington.

The Carolina Transportation Program is continuing to produce research relevant to state and local transportation planners. In a 2005 report for NC Department of Transportation (NCDOT), program director Asad Khattak and Daniel Rodriguez provided a path-breaking analysis on the impact of neighborhood development styles on travel behavior. A follow-up study goes one step further, by measuring these impacts on public health. These studies

will help the NCDOT formulate transportation policies that local planners work with every day.

CP: A workshop course working for a real world client is still required for graduation. What are some of the workshops students have engaged in recently?

Malizia: In addition to applied research that continues to influence practice, the workshop courses have become powerful vehicles for “community engagement.” Each year, the faculty searches for workshop topics that are feasible, provide good learning opportunities for students, and would deliver a quality product to the client. Often, nonprofits, communities, or private citizens propose topics to the Department. Although some workshops are better than others, the process seems to be yielding the intended results. Faculty usually receive some financial com-

Article continued on following page

group was assigned to a town in North or South Carolina. The towns provided transportation and housing, although the latter could mean sleeping in the fire station; in exchange, the communities got free consulting.

Triangle Park, located between Chapel Hill, Durham, and Raleigh. Meanwhile, Phillip Green of the Institute of Government—by then a convert to the benefits of planning—wrote a book on zoning and planning aimed at local officials. He traveled around the state helping communities start planning boards and departments.

In many towns, interest in planning grew faster than budgets; often there was no money to hire professional planners. In 1949, Parker assembled a group of influential North Carolinians, who successfully persuaded the state government to begin assisting communities with planning. But large-scale local planning assistance did not come until the state received funds through the federal government's 701 program in the mid-1950s. When that happened, Green notes, there were suddenly more jobs than there were trained people available. Sometimes people were hired first and then trained with a short course developed by the Institute of Government in 1955.

As more and more North Carolina towns and counties hired professional planners, they were likely to be North Carolina graduates or were recommended by planning faculty members. By the early 1960s, planning was firmly established in the state.

In North Carolina Today [1987]

The department and the urban studies center have continued to influence and aid planning in the state, although their role today probably is not as integral as it once was. "Certainly there is extensive involvement here," says David Godschalk, a 1964 master's and 1971 doctoral graduate who chaired

the department from 1978 to 1983. "The faculty plays an important role in advising various state agencies, especially the Department of Natural Resources and Community Development. If a major planning issue in the state comes up, we're probably involved."

pensation to cover student expenses associated with the project, and in exchange, clients value the work that they have paid for.

My own workshop this semester focuses on real estate developments within center cities in larger North Carolina cities. It was a very complex, large-scale, mixed-use project intended to revitalize the downtown, and there was a complicated public-private partnership to consider. Students conducted a systematic series of feasibility studies—considering economics, politics, financial market studies, finances, and the public role.

We also had a transportation workshop in which students developed and tested instruments to assess the safety and accessibility for pedestrians in a variety of walking environments such as near schools and bus stops. These instruments will aid practitioners in proactively deter-

mining unsafe areas for pedestrians to be addressed in comprehensive transportation plans.

Other workshops seek to integrate disparate planning areas in a comprehensive project. In an example from this year, we are providing a sustainable development workshop, in which our students are putting together a feasibility study and impact analysis for a developer who wants to build a first-of-its-kind sustainable community in South Carolina. This workshop brings together green building strategies, water quality and environmental management, transportation planning, and equity and affordable housing issues. The workshop topics provide a range of study areas and required different skill sets to complete, but they all offer a unique opportunity for students to engage in problem-solving with a client and apply fundamental planning knowledge and methods.

One area in which university planners have been particularly involved is coastal management. In 1974, the Coastal Area Management Act was enacted by the state legislature, making North Carolina one of the first states

to set up a coastal program. “It probably wouldn’t have happened without the center and the work of people like David Brower,” says Jonathan Howes, director of the Center for Urban and Regional Studies and a 1961 department graduate.

with another alum, William McElyea, did extensive research on the effects of hurricanes. Their book, *Before the Storm: Managing Development to Reduce Hurricane Damage*, was published by the coastal management office and formed the basis for the state’s hurricane mitigation requirements.

CP: How has the Department dealt with the tension noted by Stegman between research/theory and practice?

Malizia: The tension between theory and professional practice remains another characteristic of most top-tier planning programs. In addition to the community engagement efforts I mentioned earlier, the practice-oriented nature of the planning field contributes to resolving this tension and helping strike a balance between theory and practice. Teaching, research, and service—this is the three legged stool of academia. However, in Planning, all three legs are rooted in service because the discipline itself is so rooted in practice. Ideally, therefore, even planning theory and academic research can benefit practicing planners. As a result, the faculty are often able to engage in service by producing reports re-

quested by federal, state, and local government agencies; faculty then often turn these practice-oriented reports into the peer-reviewed, academic articles so necessary in the academic world. Occasionally, government agencies will also find these academic articles helpful in buttressing their own analysis. Additionally, the required Master’s Projects and workshops are very client-oriented, so community engagement is built into the Planning degree curriculum.

I am the first to admit, however, that more can be done to exploit this creative tension. One strategy could be to initiate a mid-career program for city planners who are rising stars. Having thoughtful professionals on campus for an academic year would raise the theory-practice tension to a new level and provide benefits to students, faculty, and professionals alike. Another might involve creating a chair for

Article continued on following page

A problem-solving course, which all students in the planning department are required to take, brings real-life planning issues into the classroom and takes students out into surrounding communities. Their efforts often influence planning decisions:

- Carrying capacity studies of Currituck Banks and Hatteras Island, on the Atlantic coast, tried to determine the potential of and limitations on future growth in each area. The studies looked at infrastructure, water supply, and evacuation schemes. The state coastal commission may soon require coastal communities to consider carrying capacity in their land-use plans. Both studies won state APA awards.
- A study commissioned by the Sierra Club in North Carolina’s rapidly growing Research Triangle examined the impacts of population growth on natural resources in that area.
- A redevelopment plan for a Durham neighborhood looked at the pros and cons of developing the area as a business park.

The coastal- management program, which is directed by department alumnus David Owens, has several components that can be tied directly to research done at the university. For example, Brower and Godschalk, along

- The Warren County Economic Development Commission commissioned a study on potential solutions to the problem of increasing jobs in the county, ranging from an equity retirement center to cultural arts development to main street revitalization. The following year, another group of students worked on the specifics of implementing proposals made in the original study.

Faculty members also serve on all sorts of local boards and commissions. Not surprisingly, their presence is felt most in Chapel Hill, where Jonathan Howes and David Godschalk have been elected to the town council, and several faculty members are or have been on the planning board; a student, Meg Parker, currently serves on the planning board, and Edward Bergman is a member of the Orange County economic development commission.

Michael Stegman has chaired the Chapel Hill housing authority; David Moreau has headed the local water and sewer authority; and Raymond Burby has been on the recreation commission. Stegman, who with former colleague Thomas Snyder devised an impact fee structure for Raleigh, also is the only nonresident on that city's affordable housing task force. Moreau directs the state Water Resources Research Institute. And Burby has been on the Governor's solar law task force. In addition, local and state officials use the faculty members as experts. For example, Mary Joan Pugh, as assistant secretary of the Department of Natural Resources and Community Development, North Carolina's most highly placed planner, says she often calls Burby or Moreau for advice when dealing with watershed protection.

Division of Labor

Local planners in North Carolina have even more day-to-day contact with the Institute of Government, notes William McNeill, High Point planning director and the

well-respected senior professional planners. This chaired professor of practice could join the faculty for two to three years and enrich the entire DCRP community.

CP: Is DCRP still committed to serving the public interest? Does this still take the form of working in the public sector?

Malizia: As Ed Kaiser pointed out in the [Verner] article, "...There has always been a bias toward the public sector as being a higher calling." This is still true today. Our department continues to emphasize that working in the public interest remains a "higher calling" far superior to "speed and greed." Recent MRP graduates are as likely to pursue the public interest in the private and nonprofit sectors as in the public sector.

CP: What do you think of the criticism that DCRP graduates sometimes do not have the technical

skills to step into an entry-level planning job?

Malizia: We have a mantra around here that says: "The Master's program prepares you for a career, not just your first job." Students want professional education that works in practice; faculty want to promote concepts and methods that push the envelope in practice. In doing so, the trick is not just to stimulate innovation, but the kinds of innovations that can actually be executed.

Some have opted simply to train technicians to do "relevant and practical" planning but have sacrificed the hard thinking required to move beyond good practice or even best practice methods to more innovative and effective planning practice. Encouraged to pursue flexibility and creativity in their planning work, our students are well equipped to bridge

current president of the state APA chapter. The institute is set up to help the local practicing planner," says McNeill, "while the planning department is set up to train new planners and to do research."

McNeill says he wishes the department itself were more involved. Although some individual professors do a good job of disseminating their research in the state, he says, too often local planners have to wait until books are published to find out about research done in Chapel

Department chair [in 1987] Stegman also says he would like to see more of the department's research put to immediate use by local planners and hopes the problem will be resolved through the department's upcoming merger with the Center for Urban and Regional Studies, which will be completed by June 1988. The merger "may help us redefine our service role," Stegman says.

National Stature

As much as it has influenced planning in North Carolina, the department's impact extends beyond its home state. "In many ways, our national stature is easier to document," says Stegman, who was deputy assistant secretary for research in the US Department of Housing and Urban Development from 1979 to 1981. Emil Malizia has been a special assistant in the US Department of Labor's Office of National Programs and William Rohe a visiting scholar at HUD. Gorman Gilbert currently is on leave working as New York City's taxi commissioner.

North Carolina planners hold a variety of nationally visible positions. Howes is president of the National League of Municipalities. Kaiser is vice-president of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, and he, Stegman, and Weiss are on the organization's accreditation committee. Godschalk, Chapin, and Brower have served on the national APA board in recent years. Burby and Kaiser are the current editors of the *Journal of the American Planning Association*, and

Hill. He would like to see a system through which local planners could learn about research earlier.

its predecessor, the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, was edited twice at UNC. Moreau is associate editor of Water Resources Research. Weiss is a fellow of the Urban Land Institute.

this gap, not the least because the program has always valued professional experience among MRP applicants and has peppered each class with students with planning experience.

CP: Programs across the country are offering dual degrees in order to provide students greater flexibility and diversity of professional-level training and experience. What do you think is the reason for the recent explosion in the dual degree programs?

Malizia: There is probably no greater interest in dual degrees among planning students today than 20 years ago, but the department has increased the number of dual degree options in order to adjust to an era of budget cut-backs. They are essentially providing more options on existing resources, instead of asking for more resources.

The dual degrees offered by DCRP first started with the Law School in the 1970s. Then it partnered with the Business School, the School of Public Administration, and then Landscape Architecture (landscape architecture in cities is urban design). More recently we have offered dual degrees with the School of Public Health and has revived an engineering school partnership with NC State.

We also see these programs as introducing diversity to our program and curriculum. Intellectual diversity is good for the department and is good preparation for students' careers. The dual degree programs create stimulating learning environments, offering different perspectives, backgrounds, and professional experiences that enable students to gain more diverse views.

CP: Do you have any concluding remarks about the changes that

Article continued on following page

Philosophy

Throughout the years, the university's planning program has had three consistent characteristics: an emphasis on public service, an emphasis on analytical thinking, and a willingness to change as the planning field and society change. "The commitment to public interest stands out," says Kaiser, who in 1966 received one of the first doctorates awarded by the department. "Until very recently, work in the public sector was an unwritten expectation. That's moving away a bit, but there has always been a bias toward the public sector as being a higher calling."

The curriculum, which includes basic courses required of everyone and specific courses in five areas of concentration, has been criticized at times for focusing too much on methodology [and theory]. The harshest critics say that North Carolina graduates sometimes do not have the technical skills to step into an entry-level planning job.

Mary Joan Pugh, whose duties at the state's natural resources department include responsibility for programs as diverse as community planning assistance, the state zoo, and jobs training, defends the university's approach. She says it bothers her that some planners and students expect easy answers—the three steps to writing a zoning ordinance, for instance. "Planning is a thought process—it's not fill-in-the-blanks," Pugh says. "You have to tailor-make what you're doing, to bring people into the process, because if it's not implemented, it's absolutely no good. Technical skills are important, but when you go for a graduate degree, you want something more than technical expertise."

Joining Forces

With the law school, [DCRP] also offers a joint planning and law degree. More curriculum changes and additions will come, says chairman Stegman. A joint

DCRP has made in the last 60 years and where it is heading?

Malizia: The Department of City and Regional Planning has never lost connection to the land. It is still concerned with the urban process, physical development, and land management, with particular concern for low-income communities. Other articles in this issue of *Carolina Planning* provide a sense of the sweeping history of the department in relation to overall changes in the planning field in North Carolina.

In the period from 1980 to 1995, DCRP had the option of heading in several different directions. Chairman Mike Stegman thought that the future of planning (and the DCRP curriculum) was in finance and pub-

lic policy. Thus, he helped start the real estate partnership with the Business School and focused less on NCAPA interests, APA interests, and land use concerns. Others in the department, such as Dave Godschalk, maintained a more traditional perspective that the roots of planning should stay in land use planning and management. As a result, the department pursued both tracks.

In the last ten years, there has been a return to the basics of planning: transportation, land-use, environmental management, as well as economic and community development. The department has tried to reconnect with a broader view of planning and articulate a comprehensive model of land use

planning and business program has been approved and will soon have its first students. Stegman believes much of the department's future expansion will be in two areas: public policy and international planning. The department has been in charge of the interdisciplinary undergraduate program in public policy since 1985. Next on the agenda is a doctoral program in public policy. A joint public administration/planning degree probably is in the future, Stegman says.

Conclusion

It has been more than 40 years since Jack Parker began his quest to show North Carolinians the benefits of planning.

In some ways that job is not yet complete. Stegman would

planning consistent with modern design practices and economic realities. As a result, the current curriculum offered by the department provides a bridge to many planning areas, like economic development, community development, historic preservation, and real estate. We see this particularly in our efforts in small-area planning, which brings together land management, economic, community, and design-related elements. It becomes a three dimensional world, not just a two-dimensional world of what goes where. We firmly believe that this kind of integrated planning approach engages communities and prepares our students for planning in the multi-dimensional built environment.

like to see the department, through its teaching, service, research, and consulting, improve the image of the planner. Too often, he notes, the planner is seen either as a regulator who gets in the way of development or as a “visionary whose hopes for the future are never linked to workable means of getting there.” A better image, in Stegman’s view, would be of the planner as a “regulator in the public interest and a visionary who can help define society’s goals and provide the tools needed to meet them.”