

# The Undergraduate Planning Degree in North Carolina: East Carolina University and Appalachian State University

Wes Hankins and Garry Cooper

Within the past ten years, undergraduate planning education has received greater attention.<sup>1</sup> While a significant body of literature exists on undergraduate planning education at the national level, little attention has been focused on the two undergraduate degree programs located in North Carolina: East Carolina University (ECU) and Appalachian State University (ASU). This paper will provide a brief history and assess the impact of these two programs.

## East Carolina University

East Carolina University has offered an undergraduate planning minor since 1963 and a Bachelor of Science in Urban and Regional Planning since the Spring of 1974. Historically, the ECU program has maintained approximately 60 undergraduate majors/minors with approximately 25-30 graduates per year. In 1982, the faculty made a commitment to strive for recognition of the undergraduate planning degree by the American Planning Association (now accreditation by the Planning Accreditation Board). The latter initiative was in keeping with the North Carolina Chapter of the American Institute of Planners 1973 statement on planning education: "NCAIP should provide strong support to develop at least one bachelor's program in planning at a university in the state that fully meets AIP accreditation standards."

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*Wes Hankins is a professor in the Urban and Regional Planning Program in the School of Industrial Technology at East Carolina University. Garry Cooper, AICP, serves as Associate Professor of Community and Regional Planning and is the Planning Program Coordinator for the undergraduate planning degree program at Appalachian State University.*

Since the mid-1980s the planning program at ECU has undergone a number of changes. First, it has acquired an international element in both teaching and research. During this time ECU hosted approximately 50 students from Malaysia. Upon graduating with the undergraduate degree, almost all of these students completed graduate planning degrees at universities within the United States. In addition, the planning faculty has been involved in significant research/service activities abroad. Dr. Mulatu Wubneh has made a number of trips to Africa as an economic development consultant for the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program. Dr. Richard Stephenson was involved in a Middle East archeological research project in Jordan during the summer of 1995 and will return to Jordan in the summer of 1996 to continue this research project. Professor Shen Guoqiang, who joined the planning faculty in 1994, has conducted housing and land economics research in Beijing, People's Republic of China.

A second important change was the separation of planning from the Department of Geography and Planning in 1993. The planning program was reestablished as a Department within the School of Industry and Technology. While retaining its traditional ties to the Social Sciences, the Department of Planning is establishing new relationships at the undergraduate and graduate levels with the professional curricula located in the School of Industry and Technology and other professional schools. With the establishment of the Planning Department, the planning program acquired a fourth full-time faculty position. The addition of Professor Shen Guoqiang added important teaching and research expertise in geographic information systems and computer aided design (GIS/CAD), quantitative methods, urban design, and transportation. The four full-time faculty

members are periodically augmented with visiting lecturers in planning. These visiting planning faculty hold a graduate degree in planning and usually teach one course per semester.

Third, the planning faculty has been active in a variety of capacities within the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP). Professors Hankins, Wubneh, and Stephenson served as co-editors of *UPDATE*, the ACSP newsletter. Hankins was a member of the ACSP Commission on Undergraduate Education and served two terms as a regional representative on the ACSP Board. He is completing his second term as Secretary-Treasurer of the Association.

Finally, during 1995 the planning faculty at ECU completely revised the undergraduate curriculum in planning to address recent trends in planning education and practice. This revision reflected suggestions contained in a consultant's report prepared shortly after the establishment of the Department.

The new degree requirements include the following major elements: 15 semester hours (s.h.) of required planning courses, 12 s.h. of required skill courses (computer applications, technical writing, public speaking, and quantitative methods), 9 s.h. in one of three planning tracks, 9 s.h. of planning electives, plus one or two minor concentrations for a minimum of 24 semester hours. The planning tracks are Urban Planning and Design, Regional Planning and International Development, and Environmental Resources Planning and Management. The revised curriculum places considerable emphasis on introducing the latest computer technology. To support this initiative the Department of Planning has acquired computer equipment to support GIS/CAD instruction in the Planning Studio and a lab in the School of Industry and Technology.

To date, approximately 800 students have graduated from ECU with either an undergraduate major or minor, or the graduate level planning concentration. In 1989, on the 25th anniversary of the ECU planning program, the faculty developed a survey to assess alumni opinion regarding undergraduate planning education at ECU. Of approximately 600 alumni identified in 1989, a questionnaire was mailed to 340

for whom current addresses were available; 164 questionnaires were returned.

Of the alumni returning the survey, 71 percent graduated with a planning major and 29 percent with a planning minor. When they enrolled at ECU, 82 percent were from North Carolina, 12 percent from Virginia, and 6 percent from other states or countries. Following graduation, 58 percent secured their first job in planning. Of this 58 percent, 61 percent obtained their first planning job in the public sector. Approximately 60 percent were currently employed in planning and 50 percent were enrolled in or had completed a graduate degree program. The most popular discipline at the graduate level was Public

Administration, with Planning and Geography close behind. The majority (82 percent) of the ECU undergraduate planning alumni felt that they were well prepared for an entry level planning position, and 86 percent believed that their undergraduate planning education prepared them well for graduate school. Of those that had not been employed as a planner since graduating from

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ECU, 98 percent felt that their planning education had been useful to them as a citizen in their community and 78 percent found their planning education useful in their professional work. Finally, when asked if they would still pursue a planning major or minor at ECU if they had the chance to do it over again, approximately 70 percent of the ECU alumni responded affirmatively.

### Appalachian State University

The Department of Geography and Planning at Appalachian State University (ASU) offers a bachelor of science degree in Community and Regional Planning. The ASU planning program began in 1975 and the first degrees were bestowed in 1977. Over 100 students have earned this planning degree since the program's inception. The ASU planning program is small by design. It typically has a total enrollment of 16-20 majors and approximately 15 minors, with 4-5 majors graduating each school year.

Job prospects for Appalachian State graduates are steady. Presently, students with GIS skills are the most marketable. Appalachian students have an excellent



reputation for their applied skills. Most planning students are able to find jobs in their disciplines.

There are two bills presently before the North Carolina legislature that propose expanded, mandated land use planning in the state. One bill would mandate planning in the mountain regions, and the other would mandate planning state-wide. Presently, the only mandated state planning is for the coastal area. The passage of either proposed legislative act would significantly increase the need for entry-level planners, particularly in western North Carolina.

The Appalachian State planning program specifically targets public sector societal needs in North Carolina. Most graduates from this program at least initially seek employment in small towns and rural counties in the Piedmont and mountain areas of the state. The employment analysis for program graduates from May 1977 through December 1994 indicates that 47 percent are in planning or planning-related jobs, 13 percent are in non-planning-related jobs, while the employment for 40 percent is unknown. In addition, 75 percent of graduates in planning or planning-related jobs work for the public sector in some capacity, and 72 percent of these graduates work in North Carolina.

The Department of Geography and Planning has only one full-time planning faculty member who spends greater than 50 percent of his time in support of the program. This person frequently involves students in planning outreach projects within the region. The department additionally has eight full-time geography faculty, one half-time geography faculty, one GIS Laboratory Supervisor (who also teaches a limited course load), and 2-4 adjunct planning faculty who teach on a temporary and part-time basis. Adjunct faculty generally teach additional sections of the introductory course in planning. These faculty members are practicing planners with either a master's degree or certification from the American Institute of Certified Planners. Although they bring to the classroom significant professional experience and are an important contribution to program quality, the pool of available planners qualified to be adjunct planning faculty is small due to Appalachian's rural location.

A student working toward a Bachelor of Science in Community and Regional Planning must complete

several program component requirements prior to graduation: the University core curriculum, environmental literacy (two designated 3 s.h. courses in physical geography and cultural geography), the technical core (40 s.h. of designated planning, geography, and statistics courses), interdisciplinary bridges (21 s.h. of designated courses within several colleges), and electives. Additionally, most students develop two or more planning specialties from among thirteen different 9 s.h. specialty tracks.

### **The ECU and ASU Undergraduate Planning Degree Programs Compared**

Although the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill offers the master's degree and doctorate in planning and several other institutions in North Carolina offer undergraduate planning minors or concentrations, only ASU and ECU offer an undergraduate planning degree. Both of these undergraduate degrees were authorized to fill the need for entry-level planners within North Carolina. Both programs lack a

graduate degree in planning and Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) accreditation. However, both programs have numerous alumni who have pursued graduate degrees in planning or related fields. ASU and ECU both stress interdisciplinary relationships with other academic units, computer skills, and experiential learning opportunities within a small class setting.

Both ECU and ASU have been active within the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning. ECU Professors Hankins and Wubneh and retired ASU faculty member Robert Reiman coedited the first three editions of the *American Collegiate Schools of Planning's Guide to Undergraduate Education in Urban and Regional Planning and Related Fields*. Reiman and Garry Cooper of ASU edited the fourth edition of the *Guide*. In addition, the planning faculty of both undergraduate degree programs have historically supported the activities of the North Carolina Chapter of the American Planning Association (NCAPA). Examples of these contributions include serving as chapter president and other offices, editing the chapter newsletters and directory, and serving as the repository for the archives of NCAPA and

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its predecessor, the North Carolina Chapter of the American Institute of Planners.

Some differences exist between the two programs. A principal difference is the recent creation of a separate Department of Planning at East Carolina University with a related increase to four full-time planning faculty. These changes reflect a continuing commitment on the part of the ECU planning faculty to ultimately seek PAB accreditation for the undergraduate planning degree. Another difference is the larger number of planning majors and graduates historically associated with the ECU program, including a substantial number of international students. The ECU program also has a significant international research focus involving countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. The Appalachian State program is distinct in having a strong linkage with the Town and County Management Program in the Department of Political Science and Criminal Justice, by which most of the students obtain a minor in planning. **CP**

## Endnotes

1. Examples include the report of the American Collegiate Schools of Planning Commission on Undergraduate Education, "Creating the Future for Undergraduate Education," *JPER*, Fall, 1990, Vol. 10, No. 1; "Educating Undergraduates in Planning: Characteristics and Prospects," *JPER*, Spring, 1993, Vol. 12, No. 3; and the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th editions of the *Guide to Undergraduate Education in Urban and Regional Planning and Related Fields*.