

The Undergraduate Survey Course as an Introduction to Planning

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There has been a rising interest in undergraduate planning education in recent years. A basic indicator of this trend is the growing number of undergraduate programs. Successive editions of the *Guide to Undergraduate Education in Urban and Regional Planning* document this. The second edition of the *Guide* (Hankins et al. 1988) lists thirty-four programs that award undergraduate degrees in planning and an additional eighteen non-degree programs. Three years later, the third edition (Hankins et al. 1991) lists thirty-seven undergraduate degree-granting planning programs, fourteen "planning-related" undergraduate degree-granting programs, and twenty-two non-degree programs.

Probably a more engaging indicator for most academics is the recent flowering of dialogue on the nature, purpose, and feasibility of undergraduate planning education. The Report of the Commission on Undergraduate Education of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP) (Niebanck et al., 1990), also called the Niebanck Report, has stimulated much discussion at ACSP's annual meetings, and there have been several recent pieces in the *Journal of Planning Education and Research* (Goldsmith 1991, Hotchkiss 1992, Goldsmith 1992, Niebanck 1992, Dalton and Hankins 1993).

One part of the dialogue revolves around how undergraduate planning education is to be con-

ceptualized. The issue can be roughly stated in the following two questions:

1. Is professional planning education possible and appropriate at the undergraduate level?
2. Are there goals for undergraduate planning education other than preparation for professional practice?

The Niebanck Report supports the model of professional practice, but also urges that schools develop additional models of undergraduate planning education—for example, teaching planning as an academic discipline or as preparation for citizenship (Niebanck et al. 1990, ch. 4). In his comments on the Niebanck Report, Goldsmith (1991) raises important questions about professional training as an appropriate goal for undergraduate education in planning or other fields. Hotchkiss's (1992) spirited defense of professional undergraduate planning programs, along with Goldsmith's (1992) response, further illuminate the two questions above. And Niebanck (1992: p. 229) offers his thoughts on the possibilities of planning as "an academic field of its own."

Aside from the twelve Planning Accreditation Board and four Canadian Institute of Planners accredited programs, which are by definition professionally oriented, we know very little about how planning is being presented to undergraduate students. So, on the assumption that it would give us some idea of how planning is being conceptualized, we have used the limited view available through the window of the undergraduate survey course to broadly examine undergraduate planning education.

Survey courses are planning courses offered for the general undergraduate student population. To try

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to understand the various ways the undergraduate survey course is taught, we surveyed all North American graduate planning programs and degree-granting undergraduate planning and planning-related programs.

The Survey

A total of 119 schools were sent questionnaires. In addition to answering a few questions about their courses, we asked respondents to send us a copy of their most recent syllabus. Eighty-four usable questionnaires were returned, for a response rate of 71%.

Findings

Planning survey courses seem to be very popular. Seventy schools (59% of those queried) reported offering a survey course. Survey courses are generally well-subscribed, with a wide range of enrollments among the responding schools. Twenty-one report annual enrollments of one hundred or more, and only fifteen report enrollments of twenty or less.

Undergraduate survey courses are targeted at different audiences by different types of programs. Most master's programs are fairly explicitly trying to recruit students into the field, with courses generally directed at juniors and seniors. None of the stand-alone undergraduate programs mentioned recruitment as a purpose of its survey.

There seem to be interesting differences in character between the courses offered by stand-alone undergraduate programs and those in departments with PhD programs. Roughly, the undergraduate survey courses being taught in stand-alone undergraduate programs emphasize doing planning, while those being taught in doctoral-granting programs are more oriented toward understanding planning—studying about cities and regions and the logic of the planning process. Courses offered in programs which offer only master's degrees and master's/undergraduate programs are arrayed between these poles.

Instructors in seventeen of the twenty responding stand-alone undergraduate programs characterized the purpose of their undergraduate survey course as introducing the practice and/or profession of planning. A review of syllabi shows that the most frequently mentioned themes of these courses are to provide an overview

of the field and to introduce students to land use planning.

At first blush, these seem similar to the undergraduate survey courses being taught in doctoral-granting programs. Although seventeen of the nineteen instructors from doctoral programs also characterized the purpose of their courses as providing an overview of the field, the themes identified in their syllabi are quite different. In syllabi from the doctoral-granting programs, the most frequently mentioned themes are urban policy-making, the history of planning, and planning as a tool for social change.

The topics covered and course assignments found in survey course syllabi tell us even more. Taking the syllabi collectively reveals planning as incredibly diverse. Some syllabi define the field as urban design, some as policy analysis, and some as community organizing. It is variously applied to environmental management, economic development, social policy, and land use. It is employed at every level from the local neighborhood to the nation-state. There is no dominant way of understanding what planning is. Instead there is a wide diversity of foci—or perhaps a lack of focus—in the field.

In spite of this diversity, an important unifying thread is reading lists. Of the sixty-six syllabi submitted, twenty use John Levy's *Contemporary Urban Planning*. A handful of other books in wide use are Gallion and Eisner, *The Urban Pattern*; Catanese and Snyder, *Introduction to Urban Planning*; and Hodge, *Planning Canadian Communities*. These and most of the other commonly used texts take planning to be a form of professional practice.

The dominant conceptualization of planning, then, is professional. There are a few exceptions, however, one of which should be specially noted. Ball State is conducting an important curricular experiment by running two undergraduate programs side by side. One is a five year program designed to prepare students for professional planning practice, while the other is a four year degree program designed to educate students broadly and to prepare them for graduate work.

Conclusions

To the extent that a brief survey and course syllabi provide insight, we can say that, with a few exceptions, planning survey courses for undergraduates present planning as a field of professional practice.

Figure 1. North American colleges and universities offering degrees in planning.
(Key: U=undergraduate program; M=masters program; D=doctoral program)

Alabama A&M	U M	Plymouth State Coll.	U	U. of North Carolina,	
Appalachian State	U	Pratt Institute	M	Chapel Hill	M D
Arizona State	U M	Princeton	M D	U. of North Carolina,	
Ball State	U M	Portland State	M D	Greensboro	U
Brigham Young	U	Rhode Island	M	U. of Oklahoma	M
California Polytechnic, Pomona	U M	Rutgers	M D	U. of Oregon	U M
California Polytechnic, San Luis Obispo	U M	Rutgers (Dept Env Res)	U	U. of Pennsylvania	M D
California State, Fresno	M	Ryerson Polytechnical	U	U. of Puerto Rico	M
Cincinnati	U M D	San Francisco State	U	U. of Saskatchewan	U
Clemson	M	San Jose State	M	U. of Southern California	U M D
Cleveland State	M D	Shaw	U	U. of Tennessee	U M
Columbia	M D	Southern Mississippi	U	U. of Texas, Arlington	M
Cornell	U M D	Southwest Missouri	U M	U. of Texas, Austin	M
East Carolina	U	Southwestern Louisiana	U	U. of District of Columbia	U M
Eastern Oregon State Coll.	U	St. Cloud State	U	U. of Toledo	M
Eastern Washington	U M	SUNY Albany	M	U. of Toronto	M
Florida State	M D	SUNY Buffalo	U M	U. of Utah	U
Frostburg State	U	Technical U. of Nova Scotia	M	U. of Virginia	U M
George Washington	M	Temple	U	U. of Washington	U M D
Georgia State	U	Texas A&M	M D	U. of Windsor	U
Georgia Tech	M	U. of Akron	M D	U. of Wisconsin, Madison	M D
Harvard, Kennedy Sch of Government	M D	U. of Alabama	U	U. of Wisconsin, Milwaukee	M
Hunter Coll.	U M	U. of Arizona	M	Universite de Montreal	U M
Indiana U. of Pennsylvania	U M	U. of British Columbia	M D	Virginia Commonwealth	U M
Iowa State	U M	U. of Calgary	M	Virginia Polytechnic	M D
Kansas State	M	UC Berkeley	M D	Washington State	M
Louisville	M D	UC Los Angeles	M D	Waterloo	U M D
Mankato State	U M	UC Santa Cruz	U	Wayne State	M
Mass. Inst. of Technology	U M D	U. of Colorado, Boulder	U	West Chester	U
McGill	M	U. of Colorado, Denver	M	Western Carolina	U
Memphis State	M	U. of Florida	M	Western Washington	U
Miami U. (Ohio)	U	U. of Guelph	M	York	M
Michigan State	U M D	U. of Hawaii	M		
Morgan State	M	U. of Illinois, Chicago	M D		
New Mexico State	U	U. of Illinois, Urbana	U M D		
New Sch. for Social Research	M	U. of Iowa	M		
New York	M	U. of Kansas	M		
Northern Arizona	U	U. of Maryland	M		
Northern Michigan	U	U. of Massachusetts, Amherst	M		
Nova Scotia Coll. of Art and Design	U	U. of Massachusetts, Boston	U		
Ohio State	M D	U. of Miami (Fla)	U		
Pittsburgh	M	U. of Michigan	M D		
		U. of Minnesota	M		
		U. of Nebraska	M		
		U. of New Mexico	M		
		U. of New Orleans	M		

In some cases, students are introduced to doing planning, and in other cases, students are taught to understand planning. Beyond this difference, a wide range of approaches, issues, and contexts are found.

Professional planning education is clearly possible at the undergraduate level and is the dominant conceptualization. Whether this is appropriate is a normative question worthy of debate. Specifically, we should question the nature of the relationship between professional undergraduate programs and master's programs in planning. There can be, and there are, goals for undergraduate planning education other than preparation for professional practice. The most common is preparation for graduate work in planning. However, we can be even more innovative in our thinking. Other programs should follow the lead of Ball State University and try out a wide variety of conceptualizations of undergraduate planning education. **CP**

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