Instruction

Integrating Communication Skills and Planning Techniques

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Many planning departments often assign the responsibility of teaching courses related to skills-building and communication to junior faculty. But only a paucity of literature and support materials exist to help the faculty in this endeavor. This paper presents the lessons we have learned from a ten-year collaboration in teaching a skills-building, practical-methods course, "Urban Planning 505, Planning Techniques" (UP505), to entry-level graduate students in the Master's of Urban Planning Program at the University of Michigan.

UP505 is a four-credit required course taught in the second sixteen-week academic term in the first year of the Master's program. We attempt to integrate the development of good communication skills in professional planners with teaching some basic planning techniques.[1] The course helps prepare students for an integrative, six-credit workshop that is a required capstone course for students in the final (fourth) term of the program. In this workshop students prepare implementable plans for real clients in Detroit's inner-city neighborhoods.[2] Although assignments in UP505 require problem solving and development of an effective planning strategy, producing immediately implementable, detailed plans is not the primary objective. The goal is to teach problem definition, information gathering, and analytic techniques concurrently with effective communication skills. The problems investigated in UP505 involve long-range, directional-setting exercises aimed at providing the student with the "big picture" of planning practice. The objectives of UP505 echo many of those of the traditional workshop course in planning.[3] It has indeed been designed to help entry-level planning students begin to function as professional planners. But, it is also designed to encourage them to think explicitly not just about content but also about the form and style of information delivery so as to achieve good professional communication. The course structure is therefore a hybrid. It involves lectures with demonstrations of techniques and skills along with workshops where students "learn by doing" by gathering information in the field and analyzing and presenting it in the classroom. The course, which we have refined over the last ten years, is presented here in detail in its current configuration. Courses similar to UP505 appear to be making a comeback in Master's of Urban Planning programs (see Wetmore and Heumann 1984). This contribution along with other recent articles on parallel endeavors which have appeared in this journal may be useful to those faculty teaching similar courses.[4]

This paper describes the following aspects of the course:

1. the stimulus for developing the course, its evolution, specific tasks completed, and the methods stressed;
2. the actors involved in the course (students, academics, clients, public,

ABSTRACT

Practitioners have long stressed the need to teach professional communications skills to planning students. This paper describes ten years of experience in teaching a course in which communications skills and techniques of gathering and analyzing information are taught concurrently while investigating a problem of importance in the community. The course involves an ongoing collaboration, a "marriage of convenience," between an academic and a planner, casting city/county planning staff as clients for students. This has proven useful for pedagogy and has had some positive impact on the community.

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and vested interest groups) and the ways each
contributed to and benefitted from involvement
in the course;

3. the project, its selection, and the characteris-
tics that make it appropriate for classroom
assignment; and

4. what works and what does not in terms of
effective pedagogy.

■ THE STIMULUS

In 1980 the major stimulus for creating a course covering
planning techniques and communications skills in Univer-
sity of Michigan's urban planning program came from the
practitioner community. Surveys of planning practitioners
revealed that throughout the profession effective communi-
cation skills were deemed extremely important.[5] Few
planning programs were teaching communication skills,
perhaps because the basics of good communication were
thought to be taught in undergraduate programs. Or, since
the ability to communicate is needed to relate substantive/
professional understanding in planning, it might be assumed
that learning the techniques and methods of planning
included learning how to effectively communicate the
resultant findings. Not so, the practitioners were responding
almost unanimously.

While assimilating this feedback from the practitioners,
the University of Michigan's urban planning faculty
observed that the students, who come from diverse back-
grounds and training, needed some "common ground" to
begin to think of themselves as planners. The faculty
decided that they needed to teach professional planning
students communication skills not just planning techniques;
they needed to start the process early and introduce first-
year Master's students to the culture of this profession's
communication; and these skills needed to be taught by
identifying and simulating various communication points in
a real-world planning process.

As a new, junior faculty member presented with the task
of structuring this course, Dandekar became convinced that
teaching communication skills and planning techniques
needed to be related to real planning problems. She
consulted Clark. It became apparent to both that here was
an opportunity to structure the students' real-world exercises
so as to augment the city planning department's capacity to
do exploratory and long-range planning. Such inquiry is
often a luxury in planning departments, given the problems
and crisis-driven planning mode of most cities. We recog-
nized that the approximately forty students who needed
training in a real-world situation offered a resource to the
city, just as the availability of the experience would enrich
their training. We decided to collaborate in teaching the
course and identified the communications skills we thought
planning practitioners needed. These included mastery of

oral, written, and graphic communication; interpersonal
and group-dynamic capabilities; and the insight to pick the
right mix of media needed to get a message across to a
targeted audience. The aim was to provide the students with
a "preview" of the world in which they would soon be
functioning.

■ THE COURSE

We designed the course to emulate basic steps normally
involved in the evolution of a planning project. The goal
was to deliver to the city planner-client agreed-upon
products, simulating a typical contractual agreement.
Students would be taught communications skills while
researching and creating these deliverables. Over the ten
years of experimenting with this format some discrete steps
have been developed around defined tasks aimed at promot-
ing specific skills. Half of the course's assignments are done
by the students working alone and half by the students
working in groups acting as planning firms. Figure 1
illustrates the UP505 course structure, time lines, assign-
ments, communications points, skills, and products.

In the early years of teaching this course, Dandekar was
frustrated by the available support literature on techniques
and methods which was usually written for disciplines such
as sociology, psychology, architecture, or engineering.
Students required considerable help in interpreting these
materials to make them useful in urban and regional
planning. We needed to discuss methods related to the
practice of planning professionals and the problems they
encounter. The result was *The Planner's Use of Information*
(Dandekar [1982] 1988a), written in collaboration with
colleagues at the University of Michigan and used as a text
for this course. The chapters on techniques of collecting,
organizing, and communicating information have served to
make the students less anxious and uncertain about what is
expected of them. Graduates report that the book serves as a
good reference when they face a communications task in
practice. The following steps and their related tasks which
structure the course are illustrated in Figure 1.

Step 1: Getting the Job

The responsibilities and skills involved in getting the job
are presented in the first two tasks. Skills needed by both an
individual seeking employment as well as by a member of a
planning firm negotiating for a contract to do a project are
taught.

Task 1

Students prepare and make short, strictly timed, three-
minute introductions presenting the background and skills
that make them desirable members of a planning team.
(Throughout the term an ordinary kitchen timer is used to
monitor the length of students' oral presentations.) To

demonstrate this assignment Dandekar makes a timed presentation illustrating that exercising creativity in selecting the information to be presented and using graphic or other visual support material are useful in conforming to the assigned time. Dandekar analyzes student presentations, highlighting aspects that are particularly effective in oral delivery or in the selection of substantive information. She points out body-language cues. She discusses and demonstrates the explicit choices that need to be made between formal "behind the podium" delivery and informal "reaching-out" delivery styles. Such reflections on oral delivery techniques, analyses of supplemental graphic or written information used to reinforce the message, role playing, and instructor's demonstrations of the tasks assigned continue throughout most of the oral presentation assignments that follow.

Students complete one-page resumes which are made available for reference. The best are displayed in class and analyzed by Dandekar for format, content, and style. Students are asked to form planning teams of four or five individuals; members are selected on the basis of their presentations and a review of the resumes. They are

instructed to assure some diversity and mix in background and skills. The teams act as planning consultant firms to Clark who represents the city, a public sector client. Students also complete a cover letter and submit an outline and job search strategy along with the resume. These are used to evaluate writing skills and creativity in problem solving.

As indicated in Figure 1, three weeks are required for task 1. The techniques stressed and the skills obtained are speaking concisely before an audience, creating a positive first impression, learning to make quick judgments about individuals and assessing whether one can work with them on collaborative projects, finding collaborators with skills that complement and augment one's own, learning how to form and structure an effective team, and learning to write and compose formal communications such as resumes and informal ones such as problem-solving strategies. In addition, this first task enables students to get some sense of the composition of the class and to become familiar with their colleagues' capabilities. Background reading materials are assigned to prepare students for this task.[6]

	Step 1. Getting The Job				Step 2. Collecting Information							Step 3. Organizing Information				Step 4. Communicating Information		
Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
Tasks	1→			2→		1→		2→		3→						1→	2	
Tasks	Introductions	Resumes	Teams	Proposals	Client Interviews	Interviews	Presentation of Interviews	Physical Analysis	Graphic Presentation	Secondary Sources Analysis	Secondary Sources Presentation	Writing Reports	Group Dynamics	Policy Formulation		Group Work, Report & Presentation	Editing Report	
Communication Points Student - Student	●	●	●	●			●		●		●	●	●			●		
Student - Client				●												●		
Student - Community					●											●		
Skills Analysis			▦				▦		▦			▦	▦	▦				
Group process			♯	♯	♯							♯	♯	♯	♯	♯		
Communication	✿	✿	✿	✿	✿		✿					✿	✿	✿	✿			
Written		➷		➷	➷		➷				➷	➷				➷		
Verbal	◉		◉		◉		◉		◉		◉					◉		
Graphic			ⵚ	ⵚ				ⵚ		ⵚ		ⵚ				ⵚ	ⵚ	
Deliverables	Resumes		R.F.P.		Interviews			Graphic Presentations		Secondary Source Analysis						Final Presentation & Report		

Figure 1. Schematic of UP505 course on planning techniques.

Task 2

Student planning-teams prepare written proposals in response to a Request for Proposal (RFP) from the client. The RFP is composed collaboratively by Clark and Dandekar. It is designed to provide a useful product to the client while setting out a scope of work that is manageable by the students but requires the development of a diversity of skills. Students are briefed on the RFP by the client, and they have an opportunity to question the client about the various parameters of the problem. Dandekar helps them in this task by inviting people with expertise on aspects of the topic to the classroom, accumulating and making available background literature and data on the topic, and demonstrating techniques such as brain storming which might be useful in approaching the problem. Dummies of proposals are critiqued in class.[7]

On the basis of their proposals, which are submitted by a stipulated deadline, student teams are interviewed by Clark and Dandekar role playing a client-team. Each team's suggested scope of work is renegotiated to focus effort on the interests expressed in the team's proposal. We also try to eliminate overlap between teams to assure a breadth of coverage on the topic rather than potentially counterproductive competition. Even though this represents a departure from what can happen in a real-world context we have found that it helps promote learning and eliminates duplication and some competition. It also allows sharing of resource materials. In some cases we have contracted for two opposing approaches to deal with a particular problem, for example eliminating a local airport and suggesting alternative development options for the released land as opposed to planning for optimal facilities and development of the existing airport.

The students learn to examine an RFP; to get clarification of the tasks and definition of the problem from the client; to listen carefully to the client; to negotiate the scope of work; to plan a project and develop a time and work schedule; and to produce a written, graphically illustrated statement of interest and proposal and to defend it. Thus oral, written, graphic, and group-dynamic communication skills are developed. Students often resist making oral presentations and have trouble with the instructor's strict adherence to time limits. But tailoring presentations to the time allocated is established early in the course and proves very useful to the students, not just throughout the course but in the years to come. It is at this stage, too, that students are encouraged to shift their writing and oral presentation from the hesitant "I am a student and I don't know much" to take, with some confidence, a position on a professional topic.

Often at this point the dynamics of the group become a factor. Cultivating good group communications and enabling the team to produce work for a given deadline is the objective. Teams that learn to address group issues early in the term are often the most successful. But many students from disciplines that require a "lone scholar" approach to knowledge find it difficult to learn to function effectively within the group. Some teams never work together very well. Various ways to structure work teams, the evolution of work teams, and problem solving in dysfunctional teams are discussed generally in class and more specifically with individual teams as needed. Films illustrating aspects of group processes are shown in class and related reading is assigned.[8]

Step 2: Collecting Information

As individual assignments, students do three skills-building tasks involving interviews, secondary source materials, and graphic analysis. Student teams are encouraged to coordinate these individual assignments so that they contribute to the overall group effort. The extent to which this occurs is a good measure of group cohesion and growth between the two major group assignments: writing the proposal, and writing the final report and presenting findings and recommendations.

Task 1

As a way to rapidly get a "feel" for the problem and to get their feet wet through primary, field-data collection, students are assigned to conduct two in-depth interviews. Dandekar covers the basics of good interviewing and field-recording techniques in class and joins students in role playing various interview situations to demonstrate effective techniques. Video tapes on interview techniques are also used and background readings are assigned.[9] The techniques taught include developing questions and probes, planning a documentation and recording strategy, exploring ways to make initial contacts, establishing rapport with respondents, and identifying key people to interview. Students conduct one interview with a lay person who has experiential knowledge of the problem under study and another with a person who has a professional overview and understanding of the problem. Insisting on this mix underscores the fact that there are many vantage points from which to learn about a problem. Students get some sense of the kinds of issues that can better be understood from questioning the affected public and those illuminated by expert insight. Each student orally presents to the class the findings from the two interviews. A written report is also prepared describing the method used for documentation and recording, and including an analysis of and commentary on the significant issues raised by the interviewee. The five-minute oral presentations are commented on and critiqued in class by Dandekar for both style and content. The written reports are also critiqued. One copy is returned to the student and another is placed into the class file of background resources.

The techniques stressed and the skills obtained from this exercise are abilities to communicate findings from the field quickly and succinctly; to recognize and understand another person's point of view on a topic, even if it does not correspond to one's own; to build a collective, class-wide understanding of the issues and problems; to identify the individuals and groups who are key players in an issue; and to develop interpersonal skills in establishing rapport with and obtaining useful information from lay persons and experts. As illustrated in Figure 1 the interview assignment consumes about two weeks.

Task 2

Students are asked to make a graphic analysis and thematic presentation of an issue germane to the problem addressed. For two-thirds of an incoming planning class (those not from fields related to physical planning such as architecture, landscape architecture, or geography) this is the most difficult of the tasks assigned. Some computer graphic skills are introduced as are uses of photography, slides, maps, G.I.S.-generated base maps, and charts. Students make a five-minute presentation of their graphic analysis to the class, selecting appropriate media to display the work and reinforce the oral narrative. They submit a report documenting their findings which must include their graphics translated into a report format.

The students learn to use graphics as a way of augmenting oral and written communication, types of graphics useful in the context of oral presentations and reports, effective use of audio-visual equipment, coping with technical failures during a graphic presentation, and graphic design and analysis as a problem-solving technique.

The use of computer graphics, "canned" slide sets, and video tapes are demonstrated in class to illustrate options available when choosing a technique to fit a subject matter. Some of the graphic, analytic sections of William H. Whyte's films have been shown to help students in this endeavor.[10] When students' presentations are critiqued, Dandekar considers the style and effectiveness of the oral presentation as well as the substantive content. This cumulation and linking of skills learned and their integration in addressing the next assignment continues from task to task throughout the course, as illustrated in Figure 1 the graphic assignment consumes about two weeks.

Task 3

Students are required to analyze at least two different secondary sources of information to obtain insight into the problem. As preparation they are introduced to the range of census material available and its limitations, and to various other sources of relevant documentation. The librarian from the university's documents center gives the students a guided tour of the holdings and walks them through some tailor-made exercises in locating needed data from the

documents. The archival holdings of the public library and the historical library are suggested as other resources.

The skills developed include the abilities to quickly explore some parameters of a problem, manipulate precollected data and to begin to understand the limitations and potential uses of this information, and to interpret data and communicate findings in plain English. Students present their findings in a brief written report systematizing the data into a readable document. Clear writing is the explicit objective. Use of graphic techniques learned in the previous assignment is encouraged. Students make a five-minute oral presentation of their findings using graphic aids to augment their delivery. Again, the critiques address both the content of the analysis and the quality of the communication itself, as indicated in Figure 1 this assignment consumes about two weeks.

Step 3: Organizing Information

In the process of presenting information individually acquired on various aspects of the problem, the class collectively develops a considerable amount of information on aspects of the topic. The next segment of the course helps the teams develop a collective vision of their problems and reach some agreement on recommendations for action.

Task 1

Students are introduced to various techniques such as brainstorming, scenario building, snow carding, and other gaming and simulation exercises which facilitate synthesizing and consensus-building skills. A team needs these skills to analyze the problem and to develop policy recommendations. In this phase students are expected to analyse the problem using what they are learning in parallel courses in quantitative and technical methods.

The skills developed include facilitating good group dynamics, developing the ability to organize factors affecting a complex problem set, defining clusters of related components, and developing an understanding of the overall system's dynamics. Student teams develop a dummy of their final report and assign components of the two group tasks (writing the final report and making a formal presentation) to appropriate team members. This refinement of the research and identification of alternatives is usually completed within the group during the last couple of weeks of the course (in consultation with instructors as needed).

Step 4: Communicating Information

Task 1

Student teams develop a formal, half-hour presentation of findings and recommendations. The use of graphics and communication of key findings is emphasized. Their audience consists of a panel of jurors including Clark and

Dandekar, other academics, invited members of the community, invited public officials such as city council members, representatives of interest groups in the community, interviewed residents, and the other student teams in their class. Observing other teams and their various styles of presentation is considered part of the learning process. In some years students have been asked to evaluate the performance of their classmates to help them learn to listen carefully and reinforce their own understanding of the criteria that are operative in the reception of a presentation. Teams make dry-run presentations for Dandekar prior to the formal, final presentation. They are critiqued and receive help in honing the timing, content, and style of their presentations. During the final presentation each team is expected to respond to a question and answer period. Following this they receive an oral critique from their jurors. We provide to each team a written summary of the comments made on both the report and the oral presentation.

The skills developed include delivering formal presentations as professional planners before a relatively large audience; making the presentation in a timely manner, drawing on appropriate graphics and other visual aids to augment the message; providing support to one's group and learning to perform well as a team; responding professionally as a team to questions from the audience, which can involve confrontation as well as clarification; and representing the team's position as plausibly as possible.

Task 2

A professional-quality written report of the team's findings and recommendations is compiled. The report must incorporate graphic and written analyses and respond to the verbal critiques received during the final presentation. The physical format of the report and its graphics are to be designed to facilitate economic reproduction without compromising quality. One copy of the report is delivered to the City Planning Department and another remains in the college as reference material for future students of UP505.

The skills developed include bringing a project with a tangible product to conclusion through team effort within a specified time frame, group leadership and facilitation, scheduling to meet production deadlines, and communication and editing skills for effective organization of human and material resources. The completion of this task requires skills in graphic organization and design choice regarding format, layout, and selection of materials, all of which shape the physical quality of the final report.

Over the last ten years we have found that the quality of the final reports has continuously improved, partly because the previous years' work (which is on reserve), raises the standards for subsequent final submissions. The students appear to have developed a greater acuity about the small decisions that affect the overall graphic quality of a report

(e.g., the consistency and repetition of integrating motifs such as logos; the location of annotated maps and charts within the text; and the framing, layout, and format of the writing so that it is accessible and attractive to more than an academic audience). These elements are all discussed and demonstrated in the instructional component of the class. The development of computer software that allows choice of type style, provides publishable printout, allows graphic delineation, etc., has improved the sophistication of the end product.

■ THE ACTORS

The major actors involved in this course, their contribution to the course, and the benefits they derive that cause them to remain involved are presented below.

The Professor

The professor is responsible for the overall progression of the course and is involved in all stages of developing materials and evaluating products. A course like this one, structured around a real-world problem and involving major presentations to client and community, requires extra organizational effort above and beyond the normal lecture format. The payoffs, however, are many. There is the satisfaction of observing students transform themselves into competent professionals able to deliver good products. There is the gaining of a deepened understanding of the physical and social reality of the local community. Interaction with the city planner on class assignments brings an understanding of the criteria important for someone with practical applications in mind. The increased awareness of the differing mandates of professional and academic life helps in current assessments and in future elaborations of student assignments. The blending of the planner's practical considerations with the academic and learning objectives of the professor allows the course to be a real-world experience within the control of the classroom. This is a necessity when students are in their first year and not yet prepared to deal with the nitty-gritty aspects of problem solving and implementation they will be asked to confront in the capstone workshop that they complete in their final term.

In addition, the work developed by students in the course has at times complemented Dandekar's ongoing research. For example, in 1987 the students' exploration of family farming and its relation to urbanization in the county helped broaden Dandekar's ongoing work on farmscape and farm architecture preservation. Having to explain to students why the mix of qualitative and quantitative methods taught and applied in this course is necessary has resulted in several articles on the topic of qualitative methods in planning.[11] In short, although UP505 was designed as an introductory, basic, core course for teaching introductory material to entry-year planning students with

careful formulation of the tasks assigned, the students' work has stimulated and augmented the professor's research and publications.

The Planner

The planner-client contributes a major effort during the early preparation of the course by identifying a problem of long-term interest to the city. The planner's vision of the future and the ability to identify problems which will be facing the city are consequently very important. From the city's perspective, writing the RFP so that the products generated will be useful to the city and briefing the students so that they get good initial directions to the problem are important steps in the success of the collaboration. The next opportunity to shape the contracts so that useful and diverse products will be generated is when team proposals are evaluated and reshaped by the planner/professor client-team.

The students' submissions, both written and graphic, prepared as individual assignments (e.g., interviews, secondary source data analysis, and graphic analysis) are made available to the planner as resources. The planner-client is theoretically available throughout the course but it is the academic's responsibility to control the extent of claims made on the client's time. After renegotiations of the team proposals responding to the RFP, Clark's next major face-to-face involvement with students occurs during the jury of the final presentations and evaluation of the final reports at the end of the term.

Clark's involvement in the course is an opportunity for the city to set problems that promise to be important in planning deliberations in the future and to obtain a broad scan of the issues involved. This is useful in narrowing the scope of the problem into "doable" tasks that may subsequently be contracted to private consultants or dealt with in-house. It augments the planner's ability to do some long-range thinking and to test ideas without a major commitment of city resources. The 60 to 80 field interviews completed by students are often particularly useful; they provide information from the community that might not have been given to a government official. This alone may make the investment of staff time in the course cost-effective. The students' work provides the planner with some base-line information from which to glean key points and trends for his superiors and possibly for consideration by the city council. Although anonymity is assured to the interviewee by the students, sometimes it is waived by a respondent who wants to be heard by the city. This can help the city planner identify individuals in the community who must be brought "on board" if the problem is to be effectively addressed by the city. In short the students' work augments the city planner's eyes and ears. When the problem selected was regional our collaboration was often strengthened by the participation of a county planner as an additional client.[12]

The Students

In addition to the skill acquisition described above (which is often not recognized by students until they begin their first jobs as professional planners) the class format is of interest to the students because they find that their work has meaning and relevance in the real world. As they research a topic they discover the local community; get a sense that their efforts might translate into some action in the public domain; and learn about the structure and politics of the city, county, and planning administration. For foreign students this is a quick and effective immersion into current planning problems in the U.S. They are exposed to lay people as well as specialized publics and get to know their team members in the hothouse atmosphere of a product-oriented group. This has led to bonds and friendships that might not occur in lecture courses.

The accumulation of student work (both the excellent and the average) from past years is made available to each new group of students entering the course. This provides a sense of continuity to the work. There is an opportunity to capitalize and build on past students' work. Past products serve to tangibly illustrate the level, quality, and content of the work expected. In 1988 the UP505 class won the Michigan Chapter of American Planning Association's prize for the best student project. This recognition of the exemplary quality of first-year student work, which was judged in competition with projects by advanced students, has served to reinforce the students' commitment during the more onerous and time-consuming stages of this course. In UP505, first-year students gain insight into the planning profession, which helps them in their summer internships that follow. Students have found that the products generated in this course, particularly the final reports, have been useful in their job searches.

The Lay and Professional Members of the Community

People directly approached by students seeking information during the interview stage, or who attend the final presentation because of their interest in the problem being addressed, become directly or indirectly involved in this course. The benefits to them vary and depend on the nature of the problem being addressed. Exposure to the students as they investigate aspects of the problem or to their findings during the final public presentation allows these individuals to broaden their own conception of the problem. It may also introduce them to new ideas and possible solutions. Groups and individuals with a special interest in the problem addressed often attend the students' presentations, sometimes uninvited. They obtain a creative farther-reaching rendition of the problem, learn about other groups and individuals interested in the same problem from a different perspective, and are introduced to a range of approaches to the problem. Networking within the community is thus enhanced.

■CHOOSING THE PROJECT

Topics assigned to students in the past ten years have ranged from micro-scale projects within the city to county-wide preservation/planning strategies. Some of the problems which have been addressed are described below.

Micro-scale problems ranged from analysis of the relationship between a centrally-located vibrant farmers' market area and surrounding transitional neighborhood, and main-street commercial activity; to alternative uses of a downtown parking lot adjacent to the public library with the potential to be a focal-point city square; to alternative sites for a hotel/conference center.

Medium-scale projects covered the study of transitional neighborhoods around the central business district; analysis of suburban shopping center malls, their relationship to each other, and their impact on downtown main street development; and alternative approaches to the improvement of the Ann Arbor Municipal Airport.

Large-scale or regional problems encompassed a county-wide strategy to establish urban-rural linkages to support the local farm economy; a county-wide agrarian and recreational green-belt strategy; regional waste disposal and recycling planning; and strategies for implementing travel demand management in the urban part of the county.

Work on problems requiring a county-wide assessment has been particularly successful in raising the community's awareness of the possibility of and constraints on a regional approach. We have found that macro-level issues, although initially overwhelming for the students, yielded more useful products and better stimulated planning insights. The amount of secondary source data, the pool of interview respondents, and the variety of approaches to the planning problem are greater.

Micro-scale projects often resulted in the dominance of the physical planners in the student teams. Students tended to develop the more traditional urban-design, physical-plan solutions. Although the macro problems are less manageable (physically commuting to the countryside to interview a farmer, for instance, can be a major hurdle for a student with no car) they are more important in yielding conceptual insights, at least for Clark and Dandekar. In addition macro-problems cause less encroachment of the students' onto private consultants' turf. RFPs that test the feasibility of turning a project into a doable planning problem can later be issued in a more focused way for the attention of private consultants. The city planner is thus able to test whether an approach has the potential to be translated into professional action. Macro-level problems also allow for a greater range of mutually viable solutions. This in turn allows a diversity of approaches so that each student team can evolve a unique product.

We have found that problems related to issues in the public realm are more accessible and controllable than those related to the private sector. The planner client has to keep an eye on the horizon and choose, in a timely fashion, topics that are about to become problems. The students' work can then establish the basis for long-term planning for which the city often lacks resources. Often a topic can be selected which the planner feels is about to become of concern to the community but has not yet, or may not, reach the problem stage.

We have had some success in identifying topics that a year or two later were put on the city planning department's priority list. In the early 1980s students examined the potential uses of a centrally located surface parking lot in downtown Ann Arbor. Ideas generated by the class are now being discussed by the city as development of the parking lot has become a current concern. Two years ago students investigated options for solid waste disposal in the greater Ann Arbor area. The problem of landfill capacity has now brought the issue to the forefront. Last year's topic was the city's general aviation municipal airport that needs improvement but faces strong citizen opposition. An airport planning consultant has now examined noise issues and produced an airport layout plan to meet Federal Aviation Administration requirements. The airport's future is now being hotly debated. The students' work provided valuable research on the history, legislative background, and land-use dynamics of the airport and its surroundings. Anticipating future traffic congestion in the rapidly urbanizing part of the county, students have investigated options for implementing travel demand management that could significantly reduce automobile trips. Many of the class projects would have been described as exploration of "potential problems" when they were underway. A year or two later they have become the major planning issues of the day. Typically, problems that students investigated were in areas where a consultant's fee would not make good economic sense. The topics were not explored in detail, and the planning agency did not want to commit a significant amount of staff time to them. The students' work can sometimes be thought of as preventive planning. In truth, not all student projects later turn out to be of burning interest to the city. One such problem investigated by the class included an assessment of public sector investments to revitalize an older commercial area of the city. The private sector has been found to be reinvesting with little need for public intervention. Another project evaluated alternative sites for a downtown conference center which, after six years, has still not materialized.

■SOME REFLECTIONS

This course has concentrated on teaching some of the simple but most used techniques and methods in planning. Comments received over the years from graduates of the program indicate that we have succeeded in teaching the neophyte planner to professionally write and present ideas

and supporting materials, and to introduce students from varied backgrounds to the way of doing business as planners. The course has served to socialize an incoming class and to teach students that good group products, resulting from good group work (so ubiquitous in the planning field), are collective efforts that require attention to process and do not result from a mere aggregation of individual efforts.

In addition to being a core required course, UP505 is labor intensive and time consuming for instructor as well as students. Consequently instructor-student and student-student relationships can become stressful. We have learned to recognize and accept this fact. One important ingredient of the course has been the ongoing, formalized involvement of Clark and Dandekar over the last ten years. This continuity of effort has made it easier for us to learn from past mistakes. The joint memory of past experiences has enabled us to respond flexibly to students' complaints while knowing that we cannot respond to them all without jeopardizing the purpose of the course.

We have learned many lessons, some the hard way, directly from students' complaints and indirectly as we waded through products that lacked "spark." We continually revised the course, and it undergoes constant modification. Tasks have been eliminated and methods changed along the way. For example, an exercise experimenting with unobtrusive measures was jettisoned as it proved to be too challenging and research oriented for students who were struggling to master the basics. The graded assignment to attend one city council meeting and report on the dynamics has become optional, with a strong recommendation that students attend one meeting for their personal edification. For the winter term in 1992 we are planning to video tape some student presentations to allow us to make a more personalized analysis of the performances. We have found it useful to listen to the students' comments regarding such matters. If students are going to learn, then the products we ask for must "make sense" to them. Over the years the number of products we require has been reduced and the products defined in more precise terms.

The instructor's demonstrations of effective techniques, displaying and analyzing exemplary products, and simulating and role playing situations students will face in their field work have been very useful in preparing them for completing technical assignments. Films discussing group process issues, trouble shooting group-issues during team meetings and at dry runs of presentations, and providing comments on group image and posture as it is revealed in their written and oral assignments have been effective in making teams aware of group process issues. This latter instruction can be more difficult than the former and requires careful deliberation. We have learned that it is important to become aware of dysfunctional teams and attempt to trouble shoot before it is too late to resolve problems. We learned to help students break the research

and refinement process down into the steps that must be taken to generate a final recommendation. We do this generically so that the task becomes manageable in the context of the course but can be replicated by the students when they are faced with similar needs in practice.

Unlike the products of students' final year integrative studio, those of entry-level students will normally not be of professional quality suitable for dissemination to a community, nor will they usually provide implementable suggestions. We have learned to serve as a "screen" to filter out the less useful and extract the more applicable material from the student productions and thus monitor community access to these materials. At the end of the term we often wish that we could hire one or two of the best students in the class to wrap up and package the more readily usable of the students' work. This might be an investment the planning departments of some cities would be very willing to make.

We have cut down the exposure of the planner-client to students, reduced the number of contact points in the classroom, and restricted the availability of the planner. Our success in limiting these encounters reflects the reality that access to clients in practice is similarly restricted. From a more pragmatic perspective, it has served to "keep the practitioner in the game" over a considerable period of time to the benefit of students and the course. As a team we have been able to be more aware of changes in the community which have brought new problems to the fore and we have been able to pose them as problems for the class. For us, the payoffs of teaching this course have remained commensurate with the energies we have invested. We have presented our experiences here in hopes that this will be of some assistance to those faculty who teach similar courses in other institutions.

■ **NOTES**

1. We used Webster's definitions to distinguish between skill (the ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance, of doing something competently) and technique (a body of technical methods, of accomplishing a desired aim).
2. An evaluation of earlier experimentation with this capstone workshop course is provided in Vakil et al. (1990). The workshop has evolved over the years that followed and was cotaught by Dandekar in the winter term of 1991. This enabled us better to understand the skills base needed to complete the assignments in the workshop. Further refinements of UP505 to emphasize the linkages between the two courses are envisioned.
3. For a listing of these see Heumann and Wetmore (1984).
4. For descriptions of another course on communication skills see Lusk and Kantrowitz (1990). Shalinshi and Norris (1986) ask for explicit attention to the teaching of small-group process. See also Lang (1983).
5. This position was reiterated by University of Michigan's urban planning alumni in a survey conducted in 1978.
6. Readings assigned for Task 1 have included Dandekar ([1982] 1988a, 1-12), Storey ([1982] 1988, 157-169), resume guidelines for planners in manuscript form, and sets of exemplary resumes.

7. To assist students in writing, particularly in the proposal and final report stages, Schmerl ([1982] 1988, 170-187) is assigned as background reading.
8. Readings assigned to help with group dynamics issues have included Ash ([1982] 1988, 105-124).
9. Background materials suggested as reading for interviews include Dandekar ([1982] 1988a, 15-31) and Nishikawa ([1982] 1988, 33-55).
10. See for example William H. Whyte (1980), Social Life of Small Urban Spaces distributed by the Municipal Art Society of New York. Graphic assignments from previous student classes, reports from professional planning firms, and Dandekar's ([1982] 1988a, 188-214) chapter on graphic techniques are assigned to help students complete this assignment.
11. See, for example, Dandekar (1988b, 75-92) and Dandekar (1986).
12. We are grateful to Ms. Denisse Flynn, Program Supervisor, Washtenaw County Planning Department, for her participation as client in two projects in this course and her sustained contribution in participating in year-end juries.

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