

An Assessment-Informed Collaborative Initiative: Curriculum Mapping for PhD Program Improvement

Department of Urban and Regional Planning

About DURP

With 11 faculty and about 80 graduate students, the Department of Urban and Regional Planning (DURP) offers master's and doctoral degrees, and several certificates. In 2014 *Planetizen* magazine ranked DURP's fully accredited master's program 22nd in the entire nation. Each year its PhD program, which received UHM's 'established' status in 2011, admits 2 to 3 students. PhD graduates pursue academic careers at institutions of higher learning or assume research/administrative leadership roles in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

Program Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the PhD program in Urban and Regional Planning, students will be able to:

1. Evaluate, synthesize, and conduct independent research relevant to building knowledge in the field of urban and regional planning;
2. Demonstrate mastery of rigorous research design and application of research methods within the field of planning; and
3. Present, discuss, and defend research findings through effective oral and written communication.

Outcomes Assessed

1

Faculty reviewers evaluated presentations by doctoral candidates at a PhD forum. They provided oral and written feedback (strengths and weaknesses).

2

The assessment coordinator compiled written comments and organized them by SLO components.

3

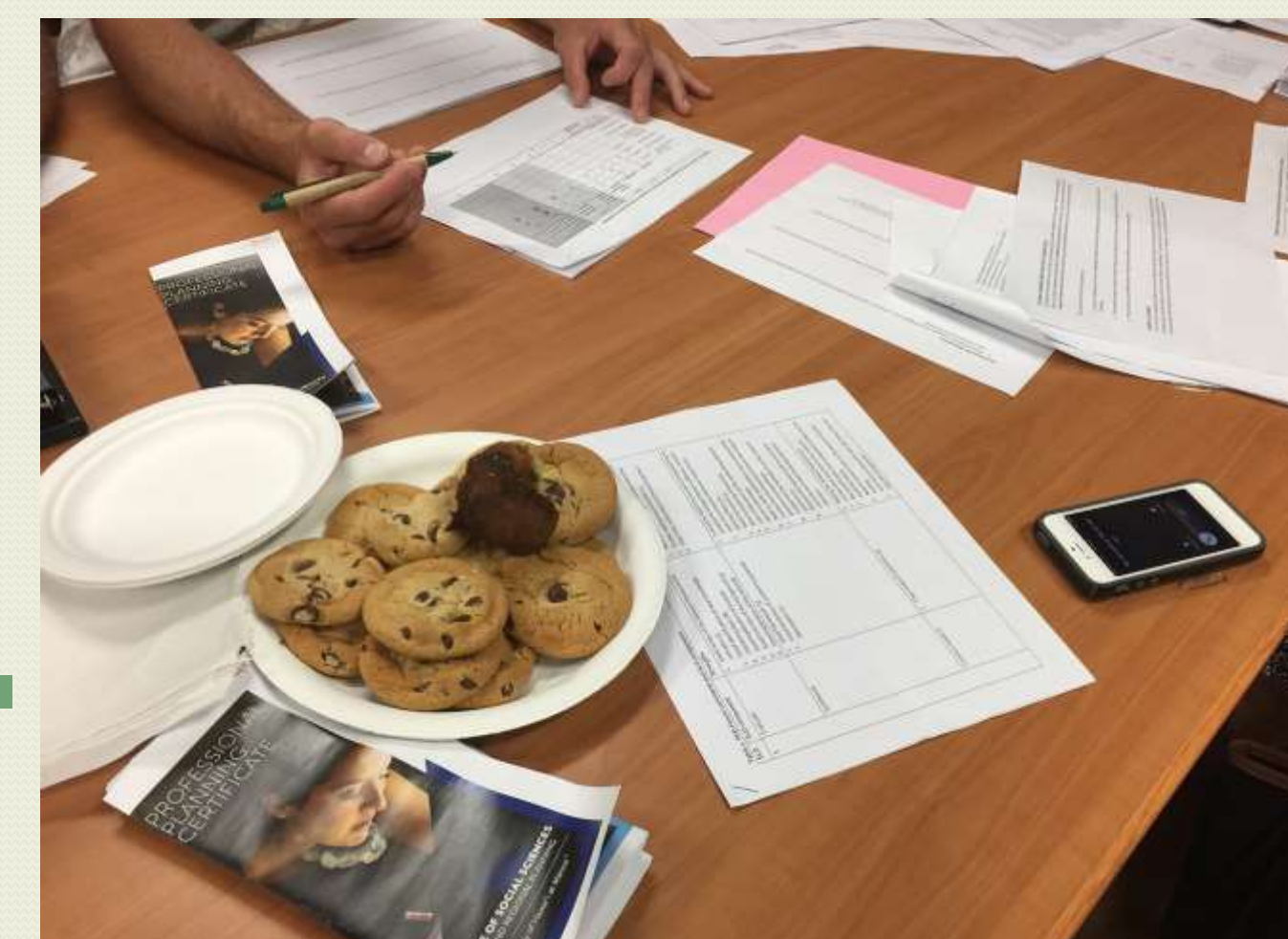
A qualitative analysis of the comments revealed the need to review the PhD curriculum.

Sample SLO components and comments

SLO COMPONENT	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Synthesize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good framework [3] Good extraction of content for potential theorization [2] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It would be helpful to provide a conceptual map to visualize the linkage between different concepts Lack of a connection between research and planning theory [4] Weak framework [4] Lack of discussion on the relationship between planners and media Need to clarify stakeholders' input in partnership Unclear how the framework links to the research questions and hypotheses Unclear how the methods tie to the research questions [2]
Rigorous research design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong model CDA is a useful tool for planning research Good comparison Clear research questions [3] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Missing a discussion on how to evaluate the potential bias in the data source [2] Present the rationale for interview questionnaire design and target selection [3] How could the research design help to justify causal relationships between progressive cities and planning factors? How did you ensure you were not drawing spurious relationships to your findings?



FORM SMALL GROUPS
Faculty and students formed small groups for discussion.



REVIEW CURRICULUM
The groups reviewed the curriculum, syllabi, and tabulated comments from the PhD forum.



IDENTIFY GAPS
The groups discussed and identified gaps in the existing curriculum.



FILL WORKSHEET
The groups filled out a curriculum worksheet.



COLLATE & DISCUSS
Curriculum worksheets were collated and discussed. Revisions were proposed and agreed upon.

Use of Results and Action Plan

How can we strengthen the PhD curriculum? Should we revise existing courses or assignments? Should we add new courses?

Research design and methods requirements are weak. We recommend additional methods courses. Research design should be taught separately from research methods. Core courses need to be more consistent across instructors.

Do you think our SLOs are adequate? Should we revise any SLOs for better alignment with proposed changes (if any)?

Current SLOs are adequate. We should enforce the timely attainment of milestones.

Curriculum Map

	Theory	Methods	Research Design	Major Field	MOU	Comp Exam	Proposal Defense	Dissertation Defense
Credits	3	3	3	6				
SLO 1								
Evaluate	I	I-R	I	I-R	I	R	M	M
Synthesize	I	I-R	I	I-R	I	R	M	M
Conduct independent research		I					R	M
SLO 2								
Mastery of rigorous research design		I	R				R	M
Application of research methods		I					R	M
SLO 3								
Present, discuss, and defend research findings		I		I	I	R	R	M
Effective oral and written communication	I	I	I	R	R	R	R	M

I=Introduce R=Reinforce M=Master

Participants in the curriculum review included 10 faculty members, 6 current students, and 1 recent graduate.

Next Steps

1. Increase course requirements (15 to 21 credits)
The PhD program chair will prepare a memo (to increase 3 credits each for methods and major field) for DURP to submit to the VCAA.
2. Develop rubrics for program milestones
The Curriculum Committee will develop rubrics and discuss their application toward program improvement.
3. Increase teaching opportunities for PhD candidates
DURP is offering six summer courses through Outreach College to be taught by doctoral candidates.
4. Offer annual PhD colloquium
Faculty and students will organize a colloquium which will be mandatory for first year PhD students to attend.