Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan

Periodic Program Review (PPR)

Urban Development (MPI)

Last Updated: February 11, 2020

In accordance with the University Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), this final assessment report provides a synthesis of the external evaluation and the internal response and assessments of the graduate program in Urban Development (MPI). This report identifies the peer review identified strengths of the program, together with opportunities for program improvement and enhancement, and it sets out and prioritizes the recommendations that have been selected for implementation.

The report also includes an Implementation Plan that identifies who will be responsible for approving the recommendations set out in the final assessment report; who will be responsible for providing any resources entailed by those recommendations; any changes in organization, policy or governance that will be necessary to meet the recommendations and who will be responsible for acting on those recommendations; and timelines for acting on and monitoring the implementation of those recommendations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The School of Urban and Regional Planning (SURP) offers a full-time professional graduate program in a one-year accelerated stream and a two-year stream, with a Master of Planning - Urban Development (M.Pl.) degree awarded on program completion. The graduate program centres on the advanced study of planning practice and design approaches for contemporary urban centres, which includes development, design, and policy for managing growth and urbanization.

The Master of Planning - Urban Development program (M.Pl.) was launched in 2008, and accredited by the Professional Standards Board for the Planning Profession in Canada (PSB) for the first class of graduates in 2010. This program was re-accredited with all other SURP programs in June 2015. The program has been preparing graduates for leadership in professional careers in urban planning across public, private, and non-profit sectors since its inaugural class in 2008. Enrolment in the program doubled between its first year and second year, and has held steady at an average of 35 students admitted annually for the past 5 years. The program has been steadily increasing in competitiveness (with fewer offers made to reach admissions targets) every year since 2009, and is now among the most competitive graduate programs for admission at Ryerson University, and one of most recognized planning programs in the country by reputation. Student satisfaction overall is very high.

The Master in Planning - Urban Development program has a number of core strengths and differentiating qualities as identified in the student, alumni, employer and comparator program surveys. Two dimensions unique to the M.Pl. Urban Development program include its focus on accommodating growth in urban core and urban periphery areas; and the integration of culture and nature into an inclusive, multi-cultural and ecological framework facilitating sustainable urban development.

Core requirements for both program streams are the successful completion of the Major Research Paper/Project (MRP) and two experiential learning studio courses, along with an internship for the 2-year program, which together differentiate the Urban Development program from other graduate programs in Planning in Canada. The studio courses are the heart of the teaching model at SURP and one of the most valued learning experiences noted by students and alumni. Maintaining and enhancing the studio experience remains a top priority.

In tandem with these strengths, the program identifies 3 core challenges going forward: increasing student choices and flexibility in learning, maintaining and enhancing experiential learning and curriculum evolution. These challenges may be met by providing more options for the capstone MRP, more flexible and supported internship delivery, and growth in electives.

The proposed development plan offers a starting point for program improvements and continued excellence in an enhanced program and quality learning experience for faculty and students. The Urban Development program is well positioned for continued success in the coming years as a desirable and competitive option for a graduate education in urban planning.

PERIODIC PROGRAM REVIEW AND PEER REVIEW TEAM

The graduate program in Urban Development (MPI), Faculty of Community Services (FCS), submitted a Self-Study Report to the Yeates School of Graduate Studies that outlined program descriptions and learning outcomes, an analytical assessment of the program, program data including data from student surveys and the standard data packages. Course outlines and CVs for full-time faculty members were also appended.

The appraisal committee spent two days at Ryerson. The visit included interviews with the University and Faculty Administration including the Provost and Vice-President Academic, Faculty Dean and Associate Dean, Vice-Provost and Dean Yeates School of Graduate Studies (YSGS); Associate Dean YSGS, Graduate Program Director of the Graduate Program, and meetings with Faculty, a group of current students, and support staff.

The Peer Review Team (PRT) for the Periodic Program Review (PPR) of the graduate program in Urban Development (MPI) consisted of Dr. Betsy Donald (Queen's), Dr. Richard Milgrom (Manitoba), and Dr. Fiona Yeudall (Ryerson).

The PRT site visit was conducted on April 9, 2019. The PRT report was communicated to the Associate Dean, YSGS on June 25, 2019, and the response to the report from the graduate program and Faculty was communicated on December 17, 2019.

PROGRAM STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Peer Review Team identified program strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for program improvement and enhancement, outlined below.

Strengths

The Program did an excellent job of highlighting its strengths and weaknesses in its self-study report. The Program Review Team was impressed with how often and how well the comments it heard from faculty members, support staff, students and other University stakeholders had already been were clearly articulated on the report. The program review team feels that it is important to highlight the following strengths:

Competitive Program: Within the range of Canadian graduate professional planning programs, the Ryerson Urban Development program is very competitive. Perhaps more importantly, it is maintaining a strong applicant pool in a very competitive provincial market, with graduate planning programs offered at University of Toronto and York University within the Toronto Region, and University of Waterloo and Queens University within southern Ontario. This is evident from size of the applicant pool and conversion rate. Peak application levels

were in 2012-13 (276). The reduction in application number corresponds to a period in which a number of new planning programs were initiated in Canada (University of Alberta BA/BSc 2012; MSc 2018; Vancouver Island University MCP 2018) or regained accreditation (University of Calgary MPlan, 2011) in western Canada. Following a short decline in applications, though, number have grown again. Total applications have hovered around 200 per year in the last few years, and about 25% have been offered positions. Of those, 35-40 students have typically accepted places in the program (2018-19 applicants 214; offers to 55; accepted offers 35).

Experiential learning: The studio base of the program is unusual. Although it is not unique in Canada, it is the only studio-based program in Ontario, and is attractive to students who want to develop "job-ready" skills. The small group projects, and their client focus, that studio classes are structured around were praised by students, and many felt that they would like opportunities for more studios. The low faculty to student ratio that the program maintains ensures that all students feel engaged.

A required internship, the other aspect of experiential learning, was also cited by many students as one of the reasons they chose the Ryerson program. Historically, it has helped students find good positions to gain some experience in planning practice, and both students and faculty felt strongly that the internship should continue. Some current challenges with the internship are discussed below.

Excellent national reputation for job ready candidates: The program maintains an excellent reputation for graduating students who are "job ready." This reputation is based on the hands-on experience provided, particularly in the studio courses and internships. The programs survey of students and alumni found high levels of satisfaction with this approach to experiential learning that provides practical

preparation for a professional career. The survey findings also noted that experiential learning, in particular the studios, had a positive influence on the perceptions of employers that have taken on graduates of the program. In meeting with the current students of the program, it was clear that the experiential elements of the program were also a major factor in their decisions to apply to the program, and to accept offers. The combination of the undergraduate accredited planning degree and the Master of Development program make the School of Urban and Regional Planning a flagship

program for Ryerson University, and its location in the city and connection with communities provide opportunities for an even higher profile and greater public benefit.

Contributions of recent hires: Several long-term faculty members have retired in recent years or are approaching retirement. As a result, the program is experiencing some renewal opportunities and has successfully hired a number of new, young, research-active colleagues to its faculty complement. Those hired to these positions

have been "research-active" and have helped the Department increase its funded research activities significantly.

Connection between research and teaching: The program curriculum is well- structured around themes of culture and nature, and this provides a clear identity for the program. The general match between faculty research and these themes, contributes to keeping the course material current. The emergence of centres within the School also provides the potential for classroom and studio activities to play a role in research, and opportunities for students to gain experience as research assistants.

Student and alumni organizations: The RPGSA provides a strong voice representing students interests to the School, as well as with the Ontario Professional Planning Institute. The Ryerson Planning Alumni Association provides excellent connections for the School and its students to practitioners, hosting events and co-sponsoring a lecture series. Alumni also participate in teaching activities, contributing guest lectures and feedback on student work during studio reviews.

Weaknesses

As with the strengths, the authors of the self-study report provide a good summary of issues that should be addressed. In most cases, these are not so much weaknesses and issues that the program would like to improve. The Program Review Team would like to highlight the following:

Space and physical plant: The spaces available for classes and studios are well below the quality found in most planning programs in Canada. Most instructional spaces lacked natural light, and some that could be subdivided with movable partitions, were far from ideal acoustic environments. Studio spaces are largely shared; while "hot desks" are not unusual when space is limited, they did not provide opportunities for the storage of supplies and equipment (e.g. lockable totes) between studio meeting

times). Most spaces and much of the studio furnishing also provide accessibility challenges, and universal design should be addressed in any improvements. Given the high profile of the program in the city and in planning circles, and the potential for community interaction, the program's location is more or less invisible. It would benefit from more visibility.

Computing infrastructure: Given the importance of computer programs in planning processes (e.g., GIS, 3-D visualization), the program relies on the Faculty of Community Services to manage computers and tier software. Students and faculty have both identified a lag in the speed of computers, and updating of software that planning students require. The program has relied heavily on resources from the Libraries to provide support, particularly for GIS applications and tutorials. While the PRT heard praise for the library's facilities and services, a

better integration of computer resources and instruction would benefit the program and research activities within the School.

Internship: Although the required internship was praised as an important element to attract application, and as part of the experiential learning process, students and faculty both recognized some challenges. Some positions are unpaid, and this was a deterrent to some students who need an income to support themselves while in the program. Some students felt that more support could be given to students seeking positions for themselves, rather than applying for positions offered by the roster provided by the program. And some students noted that the short duration of internships (a minimum duration of only 6 week), meant that they never really experienced a sense of fully participating in the life of their workplace.

Opportunities

In terms of opportunities, the program is very fortunate to be located in the heart of one of Canada's most dynamic cities and in proximity to many urban challenges and success stories. The program, in alignment with the University's mission on city building, could do even more to profile this fantastic position. The building itself, could be better connected to the urban streetscape and more inviting to "let the city" in to the exciting work happening in the program.

As stated in the Self-Study report, the program could be offering more student choices and flexibility in the MRP program and the program outlines their ideas on page 75 of their document. The PRT support this plan, specifically by the additional of an optional thesis stream and second, by the addition of a course-based option.

PRT RECOMMENDATIONS

The PRT made a total of 3 Administrative and Financial Recommendations.

Administrative and Financial Recommendations

1. Given the central nature of the internship to the program, consider full time staffing to develop and co-ordinate internship opportunities and engage with university level experiential learning initiatives.

2. The University alumni office could work with the program to find ways to encourage SURP alumni working in private planning offices to find paid internships for SURP students as this is a key component of their graduate student experience.

3. The University should work with the program to find ways to plan for further space and computer infrastructure needs given the growth of the program and the changing nature of practice in planning.

Summary of PRT Recommendations with Graduate Program, Faculty Dean, and YSGS Responses + Implementation Plan

ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation	MPI Response	Action Item, Timeline, and Lead	Faculty Response	YSGS Response
1. Given the central nature of the internship to the program, consider full time staffing to develop and co-ordinate internship opportunities and engage with university level experiential learning initiatives.	The program agrees with the PRT's recommendation that the protection and enhancement of the mandatory internship is essential. The internship course is appropriately taught by a sessional instructor currently. However, it is under-resourced as it also needs a staff person to develop and coordinate internship opportunities. As such, the internship course requires both continued support and resourcing; it is a critical differentiating element of the program, and yet is under threat. The MPI program is committed to improving and enhancing the internship course. It is important to note that the Undergraduate program PPR also identifies the need to support undergraduate student placement and experiential learning opportunities. The School sees the opportunity to harness these needs together in the form of requesting support from the FCS Dean's office for a new Student Affairs position that would take leadership on	Submit a budget request to FCS Dean for a student affairs position.

GPD to submit the budget request by March 2020 | The Dean's Office supports the program response.

The Dean's Office understands the School's needs regarding additional staffing to develop and co-ordinate internships. We would like to work with the School's Director and Graduate Program Director to discuss the potential provision of additional staff resources to support students. The Dean's Office acknowledges the need to secure internships and maintain strong sustained relationships with community/industry partners. As such, the Dean's Office provides support for experiential learning opportunities and suggests that the School contact Nadia Bello, Manager, Experiential Learning Strategy to support the School's efforts. | YSGS supports the Program and Faculty responses.

YSGS notes that it is currently developing an online hub for experiential learning for graduate studies. This should be released in the Winter 2020 term. |

Recommendation	MPI Response	Action Item, Timeline, and Lead	Faculty Response	YSGS Response
	placements, internships and other experiential learning for both graduate and undergraduate programs. We will also begin to build new and strengthen relationships with the newly hired Director of Experiential Learning and the University's Career and Co-op Centre to explore experiential learning support and resources.			
2. The University alumni office could work with the program to find ways to encourage SURP alumni working in private planning offices to find paid internships for SURP students as this is a key component of their graduate student experience.	The program agrees with the PRT's recommendation. Alumni and students respond favourably to the internship experience and emphatically would not want it eliminated or replaced with an elective. They also appreciate both the option for self arranged placements as well as the range and diversity of SURP-arranged placements. However, there is widespread dissatisfaction with those placements that are unpaid. Furthermore, it is likely that there will soon be legislative changes that will prohibit unpaid internships and this will significantly affect SURP's ability to arrange placements. The MPl program has continued to communicate with and directly engage the	Consult with both the University alumni office and the Ryerson Planning Alumni Association to lay out an action plan; continue to lobby to the OPPI.

GPD to implement the action items by May 2020. School Director will lobby OPPI. | The Dean's Office supports the program response.

The PRT recommended that the School engage the University alumni office and SURP alumni to help find paid internships. The School, in its response, indicated that the Graduate Program Director will consult with both the University alumni office and the Ryerson Planning Alumni Association by May 2020 to lay out an action plan. Furthermore, the School Director will lobby the OPPI. The Dean's Office reminds the School that we now also have staff support in the Dean's office (Claudia Hughes) to increase alumni engagement. We encourage the School to | YSGS supports the Program and Faculty responses. |

Recommendation	MPI Response	Action Item, Timeline, and Lead	Faculty Response	YSGS Response
	University alumni office, the SURP alumni network and our professional organization, OPPI, in developing more paid internship opportunities.		follow up with Claudia as well.	
3. The University should work with the program to find ways to plan for further space and computer infrastructure needs given the growth of the program and the changing nature of practice in planning.	The program agrees with the PRT's recommendation. Both the PRT and the MPl program have identified the shortage of physical space (for studios and research labs) and the long-term lack of investment in physical and computing infrastructure as the major weaknesses, which are "well below the quality found in most planning programs in Canada" and "failing to meet program needs." The PRT has addressed these issues in their meeting with Provost and VP Academic Benarroch. Following the discussion, the program is prioritizing a funding request to the FCS Dean for a building renovation focusing on studio and computer lab spaces. The program is currently exploring options to share spaces throughout the university. There exists strong collaborative potential and cross-platform sharing for hands-on "making and	Submit a budget request to FCS Dean for studio and computer renovation; Explore shared lab spaces across campus. GPD to submit the budget request by Fall 2020 after consultations with SURP community.	The Dean's Office supports the program response. The PRT raised the issue of the need for space and computer infrastructure improvement. The Dean's Office understands this need as it is applicable to multiple FCS Schools. We propose a meeting with the School's leadership to discuss this further to see what we can do in the short and in the long term.	YSGS supports the Program and Faculty response. Although space allocation is not within its purview, YSGS supports and will continue to advocate for additional space for graduate programs.

Recommendation	MPI Response	Action Item, Timeline, and Lead	Faculty Response	YSGS Response
	building" opportunities across campus; these may be realized more effectively and efficiently through infrastructure integration and program collaboration, e.g., if SURP could move and/or share space with Architecture or FCAD (e.g. Fabrication Lab in FCAD, modelling lab in architecture, Digital Media Experience Lab, GIS labs, etc). The program recognizes that space allocation is a multi-level issue including the school, faculty and university. The program will continue to lobby space expansion and sharing and investment in computing infrastructure in line with the expected growth and success of the MPl program.			

A report on the progress of these initiatives will be provided in the Follow-up Report which will be due in one year from the date of Senate approval.