

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (PD) AND THE SCARP MASTERS DEGREE**

### **Ideas for Discussion**

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#### **1.0 Introduction**

During last year's strategic planning students and practitioners identified a number of ways in which SCARP graduates need to be better prepared for beginning their planning careers. One immediate response was to organize a short non-credit workshop on interviewing for jobs that was offered in the Spring by Chris Marshall, a member of PIBC Council.

A second response was that Penny began discussions with a student Professional Development Committee on further initiatives. Out of these discussions and a student survey came proposals for two 1.5 credit courses to be offered Pass/Fail during 2009-'10 (Attachment 1).

- The first would be a lecture series offered both terms, addressing a wide variety of topics relating to perceived PD needs and delivered by various speakers. Students registered for credit would complete a 2-3 page reflection paper at the end of each term.
- The second was a proposal for a 1.5 credit intensive course offered in the Spring for second years and addressing a number of specific PD needs as students prepare to seek employment. After the highly successful experience with the workshop delivered by Chris Marshall, it was proposed that the sessions be offered largely by practitioners.

Following discussion of these ideas with the faculty, Penny brought a revised 1-credit proposal for the second initiative to the TLC committee meeting in September (Attachment 2). Discussion of this led to the recognition that the new course needed to be designed so that it built on other PD learning opportunities available during the student's time in the SCARP program and that a faculty member would be needed to lead and organize a pilot version for pilot delivery in the second term of this year. I offered to take this on and this discussion paper summarizes my thoughts on how I am proposing to proceed.

My approach below is in three parts.

- First, I look more broadly and precisely at what I understand to be variously meant when people speak about "PD". This includes reviewing what the PAB and CIP accreditation requirements say about PD and what was identified by students and practitioners as enhancement needs during last year's strategic planning. I conclude by electing a pragmatic and incremental approach to strengthening PD offerings.
- Second, I overview how we are presently providing PD opportunities for students in the program. My conclusion is that we need to do better in

ensuring that students take courses that meet their particular needs and that we should selectively add to our present offerings.

- Third, I suggest how we might take next steps towards strengthening SCARP's PD offerings by building on what is offered in the Omnibus, introducing not only the course that was proposed for second years but also adding a 1-credit course in Spring of first year that helps students prepare for and arrange internships and a 1-credit post internship reflection and assessment course in the Fall of second year. I see the three short course additions as being ways to build more effectively and incrementally on what has been introduced in the student's first term as they proceed through to the completion of their program and launch their planning careers. I am willing to organize the three short courses and offer them on a pilot basis beginning next term.

## **2.0 What is Professional Development (PD)?**

As indicated by the first two-part proposal from the student committee PD for some people includes almost anything that could be taught in the masters program with their initial list identifying some of the perceived shortcomings of the present offerings. The revised proposal brought by Penny to the September TLC meeting focuses on specific practical needs of SCARP students as they begin to seek jobs and launch their career (i.e. the second component of the original proposal). The importance of better preparing graduates to do justice to themselves in job seeking was strongly re-enforced by comments from potential employers in their inputs to the strategic planning process.

### **2.1 PAB Accreditation Requirements and PD**

Attached are copies of the curriculum requirements of the PAB and CIP. Attachment 3 is the current PAB requirements, which include the recently approved changes and are the terms of reference for the upcoming re-accreditation with the site visit November 2-4. PAB presents the curriculum in terms of the knowledge, skills and values that are minimally expected to be developed by any graduate planner. In the current accreditation renewal the emphasis has been shifted to evidence of outcomes in terms of "competence, satisfaction and recognition indicators". In our present consideration of PD the PAB requirements are helpful to us in laying out what is broadly expected to be the minimum content and results of any degree program but are not specific in discussing preparation for seeking employment. As described by PAB, PD could include parts or aspects of each of the specified knowledge, skill and values components.

### **2.2 CIP Accreditation Requirements and PD**

Attachment 4 is the revised list of competencies that a CIP committee has recently proposed. They have not yet been adopted but the thinking behind them will undoubtedly be influential in the review by the PIBC/CIP re-accreditation team when it visits in early 2010. Beginning on page 5 they outline what they mean by "competency standards" and go on to compare (Figure 1) the present competency

requirements as expressed in terms of "knowledge" and "skill" standards, to the proposed new set, now worded in terms of "functional" and "enabling" competencies. The new proposals are helpful in that they are more specific than the existing set and are clearer as they are elaborated in terms of learning objectives. The enabling competencies perhaps come closer to indicating what some people might think of when they speak about PD. In some ways the new CIP competencies would go further than the PAB specifications in expressing requirements.

Thus the PAB and CIP requirements are important and generally useful in identifying what should be covered as a minimum in the curriculum but don't help as much as we might like in being more specific about how to define PD for present purposes.

### **2.3 A Way Forward For SCARP**

I therefore have decided to take a pragmatic and incremental approach in proceeding with the development of new course material that responds to perceived needs to enhance our "PD" offerings, which I lay out in the following sections.

SCARP needs to ensure students graduate with the knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSAs) needed for launching and advancing a career in planning practice. Most SCARP masters students aspire to developing a career as a practicing planner employed in government or private sector or civil society organizations, perhaps moving between these as they progress. A relatively small proportion intend to go on to doctoral studies, either immediately or possibly in the future, and only some of these doctoral candidates are clear that they want to pursue an academic career. A few SCARP graduates expect to return to homes abroad, others intend to practice outside Canada either permanently or at least for some time.

Today more than ever practitioners and academics believe that the planning curriculum should prepare students for the long term development of their planning capabilities by providing foundational understanding and the capacity to learn and adapt as well as the KSAs students require in order to secure an initial job and flourish in it. Given the constraints of a two-year masters program and that students come to SCARP with widely diverse training and experience, it is a challenge to find an appropriate balance between these nearer and longer term learning goals. Further, rapid changes in the field of planning as a result of developments in research, technology and practice and shifting contexts of planning, make it particularly difficult to maintain an appropriate balance. It is in this context that we need to assess how best to respond to the perceived needs for strengthening the School's programs that were identified during last year's strategic planning.

Thus, I am interpreting what has been generally articulated as the need to enhance the "**professional development**" (PD) of master's students as a need to focus on strengthening the capacities of graduates that are required to secure employment as

a planner and to practice planning, in Canada and internationally, in the initial and long term of their career. It includes the need for students to understand what is necessary to be a strong professional. And I am recognizing that some students, but not necessarily all, may want to become recognized members of professional planning institutes (i.e. PIBC/CIP in Canada; AICP in the US; RTPPI in the UK etc).

### 3.0 What Does SCARP Offer at Present?

It is from this perspective that we should consider the adequacy of the School's course offerings for preparing students for careers in planning practice. Accreditation requirements of PAB and CIP are expressed as minimums and only provide general guidance for deciding what the SCARP curriculum should include. In the case of PAB it is explicitly expected that each School will hone a program of studies that meets its vision and focus (i.e. in SCARP's case: sustainability planning). Now that we have established a Teaching, Learning and Curriculum (TLC) Committee, continuing refinement of all aspects of the masters program, of which PD is just one part, is its continuing responsibility and a long-term project.

Given the opportunities and constraints it is essential that we consider the array of ways in which students can enhance their PD while they are in SCARP's program. In doing this it is important to recognize:

- Entering students will have vastly differing PD needs as long as we continue to admit students with widely varying training and experience.
- There are significant ways in which students can enhance their PD from courses that they are required to take or can elect to take while in the SCARP program, some of which are offered by the School and others by outside organizations both on and off campus.
- Graduates will inevitably need to further enhance their PD as they begin and advance their career. It should be noted that most planning practitioners identify the term "PD" as being this continuing process of learning while they are employed and that there are now minimum annual requirements for maintaining good standing as a member of PIBC/CIP. In my view this is the new frontier for development of planning education.

### 3.1 Omnibus

It is from this view that I re-designed Omnibus when I was asked to begin teaching it again in 2008 and changed the sub-title to **Becoming a Good Sustainability Planning Practitioner**. Now that it is again a required course, all students will be exposed to its new content that includes a much stronger focus on PD. Among the most relevant items examined are the following:

- What it is to be a planner and do planning in varied contexts is explored term long including case studies of planning practice in groups.
- Diverse perspectives on what is sustainability and its implications for planning and planners practices are examined throughout the term.
- Evolving ideas on what it is to be a professional and meet the ethical and technical challenges of being a sustainability planner are discussed throughout.

- Introduction to the requirements for becoming a member of a planning organization such as PIBC/CIP and discussions of their strengths and weaknesses, including comparisons with APA/AICP, RTPI and planning related organizations such as for architects, landscape architects, engineers etc
- Basic skills of group work including facilitation are introduced and practiced.
- Essential requirements of writing strong analytical reports and communicating effectively are introduced in preparation for generating the Group Assignment product.
- The Individual Assignment is designed to help students achieve several key goals:
  - Reflect on how their previous training and experience provides a comparative advantage for themselves and a foundation upon which to develop their own capabilities as a sustainability planner.
  - Identify from the course the personal principles and practice strategies that will guide their career as sustainability planners.
  - Craft an individual strategy for the courses they will choose to take during their time at SCARP so as to prepare themselves for the career they aspire to and including the further PD they will want to undertake post graduation.
  - Learn how to produce a web page.

Please look at the course outline, assignments and class agendas for further details on the ways in which Omnibus begins to address topics that have been identified as PD needs < <http://tonydorcey.ca/Omnibus/08Omnibusindex.html> > If you look at agendas for particular Omnibus classes you will see how they include references to the SCARP courses and those offered by others that students should consider taking if they want to pursue the particular topic in more detail.

### **3.2 Other SCARP Credit Courses**

The School's credit courses meet what are perceived to be PD needs in varied ways that are not always recognized in discussing this aspect of our curriculum. For example both of my other two courses, Negotiation, Facilitation and Mediation (595) and Planning for Water Resources Management (597), develop not only understanding of theory and history relating to the field but also a knowledge of practices and skills needed by practitioners in the field. To emphasize the dual learning components and their integration I added the sub-title to each course: Principles and Practice. I know other SCARP instructors' courses incorporate these twin goals in varying ways and degrees. It would be helpful in advising students more effectively if we could bring this out more clearly in course outlines and in the AOC guidelines. The TLC Committee could assist by providing guidance on what should be included in course outlines with respect to their contributions to PD.

### **3.3 Non-Credit SCARP Courses**

SCARP's short non-credit courses, such as those offered recently by Carol Boothroyd on making presentations, Chris Marshall on interview skills, Gordon Harris on

project planning and management, and Scott Hein on the Vancouver City planning process are providing very well received opportunities for PD. It would be most helpful to have a list of these on the SCARP web site to make information on them and their future scheduling as readily available to students and faculty advisers as the list of the School's credit courses. The TLC Committee could take the lead on this.

### **3.4 Other PD Learning Opportunities**

There is a wide variety of short non-credit courses offered by other units on campus that can be taken by SCARP students that are either free or cost \$25 or less. During last summer Dear prepared an initial list for me of those that could be readily identified from sources such as CFIS, FOGS, Student Services and TAG (see attachment 5). Again student advising could be greatly facilitated by providing a consolidated listing of these on the SCARP web site with the list of upcoming offerings updated for each new academic year. The TLC Committee could facilitate this.

### **3.5 Conclusions**

My conclusion based on this quick review is that we need to consider two types of initiatives to strengthen SCARP's PD offerings.

- First, better assist individual students to identify and take courses that are relevant to meeting their individual PD learning needs by improving the information available on the SCARP web site for students and faculty advisers. The TLC Committee can take the lead on this.
- Second, selectively add course offerings to enhance the masters degree program in a small number of PD topic areas where there are specific needs relating to becoming a stronger planning practitioner. Suggestions for doing this follow.

### **4.0 Steps Towards Strengthening SCARP's PD Offerings.**

The new approaches to Omnibus are now in their second year. I have been deeply impressed by the unprecedented insight that the assignments and associated class discussions have given to me about our incoming students as individuals. In particular I have a heightened appreciation of the extraordinary diversity of their backgrounds and consequent strengths and weaknesses in being prepared for the masters program and ultimately employment in planning practice. A relatively small number enter with significant planning practice experience; most have some work experience although not necessarily in relation to planning; and a small number are very short of relevant experience. I believe that the changes in Omnibus are a good beginning and can be further refined with more experience, to better meet these diverse needs. But there are some important ways in which we could advantageously build on and extend the learning and development that is started in Omnibus during the other 75% of the student's degree program by just small innovations.

In this section I outline proposals for an integrated series of three 1-credit courses that build on what is initiated in Omnibus during the student's first term and strengthen our program offerings relating to PD through the two years to graduation and securing employment as a planning practitioner. They focus on getting more out of the internship and strengthening students' capabilities to seek and gain employment. The proposals are influenced by not only our own experience but also an article that I assign in Omnibus that presents results of assessing approaches to internships in the UK that involve associated seminars for preparation and reflective learning from the work experiences (attachment 6).

#### **4.1. Arranging and Preparing for an Internship.**

An internship during the summer between first and second year can be an immensely valuable PD experience. It not only provides the opportunity to learn about what is involved in the day-to-day practice of planning but in the best of all worlds it

- connects the student with a topic for project or thesis research;
- refines their thinking on a focus for their degree that can guide courses selected for second year; and,
- leads, not infrequently, to a future employer.

However, while most students eventually find an internship, the search can be challenging and the productivity of the internship experience can fall short of its considerable potential for both the student and the host organization. Feedback from some of those who have hosted our students indicates that students are not always adequately prepared for seeking internships and entering the world of planning practice and thus to benefit from the internship.

I, therefore, am interested in offering a 1-credit course for first year students in the second term of their first year, which would prepare them to seek and capitalize on an internship. It would be offered as a pilot for the first time next term and likely as 9 sessions of 90 minutes each scheduled 12.30-2.00 every second Monday of classes. I would organize and lead it but part of the time will be reserved for guest speakers. Together we will:

- review the purpose of an internship and the key roles of the student, faculty supervisor, and the host organization;
- guide students in developing their personal goals and strategies for getting the most out of an internship;
- describe internship opportunities and expectations of host organizations;
- advise students on how to search for suitable internship opportunities;
- prepare them to present themselves to best advantage in making initial contacts and conducting subsequent interviews;
- provide students with fundamental understanding of planning workplace ethics and practices;
- develop an appreciation of the critical components of an internship agreement that includes consideration of all items that are essential for a productive experience for everyone involved; and,

- set up the record keeping of work activities and reflections that will be the basis for assessing the internship and learning from it.

Student assignments will involve (grading to be determined):

- Preparation for each class: sometimes involving reading, other times preliminary drafting for the other two assignments or preparing to work with the guest.
- Revising the initial CV prepared in Omnibus to meet the specific purposes of searching for an internship.
- Developing a strategy document for acquiring and carrying out an internship and its assessment.

The individual web sites created in Omnibus will be used to post revised CVs and draft strategy documents so that they can be reviewed and discussed by members of the class including the guest practitioners.

Guest practitioners will be chosen so as to provide a diversity of perspectives from planners who bring experience from practicing in varied planning specializations and contexts (i.e. urban/rural, social/environmental, domestic/international, government/business/civil society etc). Class sessions will in part focus on developing specific skills relevant to obtaining an internship, such as interviewing.

#### **4.2 Learning from the Internship Experience**

Our present procedures for administering the internship include brief mid-term and completion assessments by the host organization supervisor and a post internship assessment by the student. The internship, however, has the potential to provide much richer learning if the experiences would be exploited for more concerted reflection and exploration.

I, therefore, am interested in offering a 1-credit course for students who have completed their internship, which would seek to learn from the internship experiences by more structured individual reflection and group discussion. It would be offered as a pilot for the first time in the fall of 2010. It will require preparation of a report by the student that reflects on the experience, following the guidelines established in the preparatory course and drawing on the records kept during the internship. It will likely be offered in an intensive form (such as over two days of a weekend in late September or early October) and the class sessions will be designed so that students can learn from each other's experiences and reflections on them.

I will organize and lead the discussions with substantial student involvement. Individual reports would be available for students to read in advance as background for discussion. The discussion agenda would be organized around the insights and issues raised during internships. Thus, for example, there might be a section of the agenda addressing ethical questions, another dealing with employee/employer relations, another on experiences with theory in practice, etc. There would also be discussion about lessons for the individual in terms of better advancing their



preparations for planning practice and for the School relating to how future students can better prepared for and undertake internships.

### **4.3 Getting a Job and Launching a Planning Career**

If all students have taken Omnibus and to the extent that students have chosen to do an internship and the preparatory and post internship assessments, they will be better prepared for seeking a job and launching a planning career. In the case of those students who entered the program with limited planning work related experience they should be strongly encouraged to include an internship and the two supporting short courses. Nevertheless there would be much to be gained by adding a capstone opportunity to enhance the skills essential to obtaining a job in planning practice and to get better informed about emerging opportunities for planning employment.

I, therefore, am interested in offering a 1-credit course for second year students in the second term, which would prepare them to seek their first job upon graduation. It would be offered as a pilot for the first time next term and likely as 9 sessions of 90 minutes scheduled 12.30-2.00 every alternate Monday of classes (alternating with those for the proposed Internship preparation course). I would organize and lead it but a substantial part of the program will involve guest speakers.

The course content will be designed to build on what students will have already achieved by taking Omnibus and other courses. In the first offering next term it will be necessary to take account of the fact that a third of entering students in the fall 2008 elected not to take Omnibus and that no students will have taken the two proposed supporting courses for the internship. Listed below are the topics that will be covered in the pilot version but in future years it should be possible to address some of them in greater specificity given all students will have taken Omnibus and if they have taken the courses supporting their internship.

The following topics will be covered with each of them being addressed in the specific context of preparing to get a job and launching a planning career:

- Understanding the range of planning employment and career development opportunities in government, business and civil society organizations.
- Weighing the pros and cons of working internationally at the beginning of a planning career.
- Developing a job search strategy to meet your interests.
- Locating specific job opportunities.
- Making the first contact with potential employers.
- Customizing a CV for specific job opportunities.
- Designing a web site to supplement a CV and include information on yourself appropriate to pursuing employment.
- Preparing for job interviews.
- Being knowledgeable about the requirements for becoming a PIBC/CIP member and its Statement of Values and Code of Professional Practice.
- Conducting job interviews by phone and face-to-face.

- Negotiating employment agreements.
- Preparing for the first day on the job.
- Finding a mentor.

Guest practitioners will be chosen so as to provide a diversity of perspectives from planners who bring experience from practicing in varied planning specializations and contexts (i.e. urban/rural, social/environmental, domestic/international, government/business/civil society, federal/provincial/local etc). Class sessions will in part focus on developing specific skills relevant to obtaining employment, such as interviewing, and in part on building an understanding of current job prospects, career development paths and employer expectations of interviewees and employees.

Student assignments will involve (grading to be determined):

- Preparation for each class: sometimes involving reading, other times preliminary drafting for the other two assignments or preparing to work with the guest.
- Developing a strategy document for seeking and obtaining the job you desire.
- Developing a CV to meet the specific purposes of searching for the type of employment opportunity being sought.

CVs and draft strategy documents will be posted to either the individual's web site or to the course web site so that they can be reviewed and discussed by members of the class including the guest practitioners.