

# Planning Students in a City’s Planning Department: the view from both sides of the fence

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## Abstract

*The big “finding” here—which is actually not that remarkable when you stop to think about it—is that “academic” and “professional” planners live and work in different worlds, and have developed different worldviews as a result of their respective perspectives. In structuring and developing partnerships between academic and applied planning—whether single semester research projects, internships, or ongoing university/community efforts—we would be wise to pay attention to these differences to ensure success for all parties. The paper begins by discussing the source and nature of these differences and closes by exploring some potential partnership models that address them.*

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## 1 Introduction

This paper<sup>1</sup> explores differing perspectives between the worlds of “academic” and something alternatively-called “applied”, “professional”, or “public-sector” planning.<sup>2</sup> To some extent this paper builds on the decades-old debate concerning the respective roles of “theory” and “practice” in planning (Hemmens, 1988; Feldman, 1994; Baum, 1997b; Shepherd and Cosgrif, 1998; Ozawa and Seltzer, 1999), but the focus here is more on the people, attitudes, perspectives, and cultures of these two spheres of planning, *both* of which are occasionally concerned with theory *and* practice.

A central thesis of my thinking on this matter is that while both academic and professional planners are concerned with the same subject matter—the growth and healthy development of our cities and regions, the sustainability of our economies, the empowerment of our communities and strengthening of our democratic institutions, and so on—the very different situations of these two groups bring about core differences in perspective and worldview that must be considered as we explore their relationship and potential for partnerships in planning education and planning work.

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<sup>1</sup>Presented at the Eighth Annual Conference of the Committee on Industrial Theory & Assessment at UMass—Lowell

<sup>2</sup>I have never been fully comfortable with any of these terms: many academics are “professionals” working on “applied” topics, and some even work for “public” universities. Nonetheless, these seem to be the best words we have, so I will use them.

## 2 Statement of Qualifications

In preparing this paper, even the question of stating my qualifications—what I bring to the table to make me worthy of your attention—raises important differences between the public sector and academic realms. From the point of view of my professional experience, I am the Director of Community Development for the City of Lawrence, Massachusetts, a post-industrial city of approximately 72,000 people located in the Merrimack Valley north of Boston. I serve at the pleasure of the Mayor and am generally understood to carry his authority with me on matters related to housing and community development, at least within the six-square-mile realm known as the City of Lawrence. When I am asked to speak in this capacity at conferences or other events I typically rely on this single credential, and the size of my staff<sup>3</sup> and budget,<sup>4</sup> as a statement of qualifications. If necessary I add a host of professional affiliations (I serve on the Board of Directors of the National Community Development Association and the Somerville Community Corporation, and am a past Board member of the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Planning Association; I represent the City on various regional boards and advisory committees; etc.), and occasionally use the letters “AICP” after my name. To a certain extent I could simply assume that you, the audience at this academic conference, are interested in my thoughts in a sort of “gritty,” even “slumming” attempt to bring in the “real-world” perspective into your “ivory tower” conference.

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<sup>3</sup>Approximately 18 planners and project managers

<sup>4</sup>“Over \$7M” at last (albeit-puffed) count

However, I am also an academic of sorts. I pride myself in having a somewhat esoteric master's degree in social anthropology, rather than a more "professional" degree in public policy or urban planning. As much as possible, given my day job, I have struggled to keep active in the academic world. Over the last five years I have worked as an internship advisor or project sponsor for graduate and undergraduate students in planning, architecture, and community development programs from the University of Massachusetts, Tufts, MIT, Harvard, and Northeastern University in nearly every academic semester. For the past two years I have taught the Community Mapping class at UMass-Lowell, and prior to that I taught on Urban Planning and Urban Politics at Tufts University. My participation with the American Planning Association has tended towards the more academic side of the field: first as newsletter editor, later as conference planner and "Planning Historian" for the Chapter. Beyond these credentials, I have tried to base my comments and findings here on interviews and case studies, and not simply my own reflections.

### 3 Literature Review

Were I a true academic, this paper would begin with a brief literature review discussing work already done on my chosen topic; of course, were I a true academic I would have access to one or two graduate students who could write the thing for me (see section 4.4.3 on page 8 for more on this). As I don't I will simply suggest that a lot of good work has been done, the surface of which I have scratched.

Nearly every issue of the *Journal of Planning Education & Research* and perhaps ev-

ery other one of the *Journal of the American Planning Association* has some sort of article related to the question of how to educate planners and what role should be played by fieldwork and applied internships in this education. In general these can be grouped into those discussing the "theory/practice" divide as it relates to planning education (Ozawa and Seltzer, 1999; Throgmorton, 1999; Throgmorton, 2000),<sup>5</sup> those describing attempts to bring students/academia into "the field" (Ussach, 2004; Freestone et al., 2006; Silka, 2006) and those advocating for bringing "the field" into the university (Shepherd and Cosgrif, 1998; Stockhausen and Zimitat, 2002).<sup>6</sup> Some focus exclusively on what to teach students as we train them to become planners (Feldman, 1994; Baum, 1997a; Baum, 1997b; Dalton, 2007); others raise the ongoing question of how to continue to train, certify, and otherwise improve the practice of those planners already out of the academy (or those who were never in it) (Mandlebaum, 1993).

Two especially radical (and therefore interesting) lines of inquiry raise more fundamental questions: one looks to completely reorient our thinking of what sort of thing academia *is*, and challenges us to "restructure" or "reinvent" the university as "transformative" agent of change (Checkoway, 1997; Farrant and Silka, 1999; Wievel and Knaap, 2005); the other grounds our thinking by noting that for all intents and purposes, the field (i.e., the planning office, the town meeting, the political circus) *is* the institution that trains planners, and we should not fool ourselves to think that plan-

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<sup>5</sup>Interestingly, some articles do so as an academic exercise, while others seem to be pushing for some real world reason to revise theories or reemphasize practice. . . .

<sup>6</sup>Note that these last two are *not* the same.

ners are minted in the University in the first place (Mandlebaum, 1993).

Lastly, there are a number of comprehensive “backwards glances” on the topic, including a (slightly dated) retrospective by Hemmens (1988) and an excellent annotated bibliography by Frank (2006).

## 4 Reflections on Two Different Perspectives

As planners we are generally trained to seek out and recognize differing perspectives in the groups we interact with; we live in a pluralistic society in which differences in class, education, race, language, gender, geography, and a dozen other factors conspire to create different ways of understanding and defining the world around us. However, despite this awareness of difference, both public and academic planners seem to suffer from a blind-spot when applied to themselves, failing to recognize the different worlds they live in and very different perspectives they have developed.

When considering partnerships between academic and applied planners—often with students serving uncomfortably as the medium and the currency between them—it is essential that these differences be considered. What makes sense from the point of view of a graduate student or an academic advisor might hopelessly complicate matters from the point of view of a planner “in the trenches” (and vice versa: what might lead to a meaningful project from a City’s point of view could be an intellectual dead-end to the student involved). Importantly, this is not simply a matter of different goals (although these are important, and I will speak to them first): to truly think about the different *worldviews* of these two cultures, we

must think not only of *outcomes*, but also motivations, language, training, and a host of other factors.

Being someone occasionally obsessed with typologies, I have grouped these factors broadly into differences of “What,” “Why,” “When,” “Where,” and “How.”

### 4.1 Differences in “What” and “Why”

Both academic and professional planners are concerned with the same basic subject matter—the growth, development, and sustainability of our cities, communities, and regions—but beyond this similarity there are significant differences that must be considered. In addition to the baser motivations that probably apply to all people in professional and political settings (money, status, power, sex appeal, etc.), a consideration of both goals and fears of these two groups will help frame the discussion that follows about how they think and act differently.

#### 4.1.1 Goals

In the public sector, goals tend to be rather limited and concrete: planners are typically more concerned with completing a particular project (a new park renovation; a downtown plan; a housing development) than with loftier, more over-arching goals (reducing greenhouse emissions; ending poverty). Work is bounded in time and space (see section 4.2 on the next page and section 4.3 on page 6), and ambition is generally curtailed through an understanding of limited resources (see section 4.4.3 on page 8). Even when working on plans (as opposed to projects), public sector professionals approach the work as a “task” to be “completed” (i.e., a document formally adopted

by City Council or approved by some funding agency).

Academic planners, on the other hand, think more of longer term—often more-abstract—goals, putting together a planning program rather than simply completing a particular plan or project. The work of an individual, or even a group, should build in some meaningful way, and lead to both deeper understanding and more profound change. Any individual project is not a success in and of itself, but rather a case to be studied or a pilot to be promoted.

#### 4.1.2 Fears

The discussion of goals above must be tempered with an understanding of fears as well; in highly-charged arenas such as academia and politics, actions can sometimes be better-understood not as “goal-seeking” but rather “problem-avoidance.”

In the public sector, the biggest fear tends to be job security; as political appointees, we are vulnerable to both the political whims of election cycles and our highly-political employers (typically Mayors or Boards of Selectmen, neither of whom have reputations for being cautious and balanced in their responses to crises). Despite an occasional rule-proving exception (“power brokers” such as Robert Moses—wonderful stories, but hardly archetypal planners (Caro, 1975)), public-sector planners tend to be cautious. Coupled with the lasting shell-shock from the Urban Renewal era and the ongoing two-front trench-warfare of budget cuts and private-property interests, it is no wonder most public planners shy away from overly-strong opinions on most contentious issues, even when attempting to “make no small plans.”

In the academic world, the biggest fear

is quite the opposite: obscurity is the fate worse than death. While governments tend to be late-adopters and slow to change, academics often embrace new ideas as if they were the new Spring fashions. This fear is especially acute in younger academics, who must distinguish themselves from their peers, their mentors, and the body of work that preceded them. Conferences seeking papers typically have names such as “New Ideas in . . .,” not “The Ongoing Challenge of . . .” (One area of academia that may provide a helpful exception to this rule is the sciences, where researchers are more often to consciously build on the work of others; we will explore the implications of this idea later in this paper.)

#### 4.2 Differences in “When”

Nowhere is the difference in perspective easier to demonstrate than the question of time and schedule. In academia, the semester rules supreme and all other schedules must fall into line with it. Projects begin in September or February and must reach some meaningful milestone within three month’s time. Work is not steady, but typically back-loaded to the end of semester, when the final project is due. And after this deadline, even the most committed students have trouble offering additional follow up to inspired-but-confused “clients”.

In the public realm, other more-prolonged and shifting calendars must be considered: the impossibility of conducting public meetings in the summer; the peaks and valleys of our bi-annual local election cycles; the absurdities of our fiscal calendars and budget processes. Even on a smaller scale, differences in the perspective of time can be seen: in government work, a contract can take six weeks or more to be finalized; meetings of

city boards occur only once every 2-4 weeks, with little activity in between; and a dizzying array of public notice and statutory timetables must be constantly considered and accommodated.

At the same time, public planners often have difficulty keeping focus for three or four months time without interruption. While an academic project is expected to grind away all semester on a single theme, those same few months could see a host of different policy opportunities and hot-button issues passing through City Hall, each demanding a significant share of the city planner's time. Importantly, however, when an issue is "backburnered" it does not fade away: most planners have worked long enough to know these pots always boil over again, requiring fresh attention at a later date.

### 4.3 Differences in "Where"

Urban and regional planning are essentially geographic undertakings: to paraphrase two truisms, we plan because "place matters," and (like politics), "all plans are local." Two aspects of location are worth consideration as we look to the different situations of academic and professional planners: one concerns the scale at which these planners work—the natural units of inquiry and intervention—and the other relates to the planner's own geographic identity as it relates to an individual's "sense of place."

#### 4.3.1 Scales and scopes

One key difference between public and academic planners is the question of defining the physical extent of the problem being studied. For professional planners working in local government, this question seems almost absurd: despite a deeper understanding of the

importance of regionalism, watersheds, inter-local partnerships, and the like, local land use planners live in small worlds bounded by their own municipal borders. Participation in any larger organization, institution, or partnership is generally viewed as an academic luxury in and of itself; far more pressing are the demands *within* the city. More often than not, local planners find themselves at odds with their counterparts in neighboring cities, not in partnership with them, and sharing is typically kept to the minimum warranted by professional courtesy.

In the academic world, planning is more often envisioned as a continual process spanning from neighborhood to region and beyond, where patterns, trends, networks, and generalities are more interesting (that is to say, more important) than provincialism. Even local studies, when considered, are more likely to be presented as cases or types from which greater truths can be extrapolated. (In contrast, most local planners seem convinced that each town is unique, even if they are all unique in the same way.) Thus, what is simply "local color" to the academic is "sense of place," "community character," or even "home" (see next) to the public-sector planner.

#### 4.3.2 Being "of the community"

Although it may seem unintuitive at first glance, public sector planners are more apt than students and faculty to consider themselves "of" the community. They typically live where they work (and are sometimes required to under local residency requirements), and have often grown up there. Students and academics, on the other hand, may be from anywhere, and may be headed anywhere; the current study is often just a temporary project (see above), and locales are

chosen based on intellectual curiosity, not parochial loyalty or local ties.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, while academic planners at times purport to serve the interests of “the community” (as opposed to “the administration” or “the City”), most public planners bristle at this, feeling that *they*, not the academics, have devoted themselves to serving their hometowns and neighborhoods.

#### 4.4 Differences in “How”

Lastly, we can consider differences in *how* academic and public-sector planners approach their work, looking at training, resources available, and even the language used to describe (and think about) one’s work.

##### 4.4.1 Training

Increasingly, planners—whether academic or professional—pass through the gates of a degree program at a university or other planning school. APA membership surveys show the number of planners with master’s degrees in planning at 44% in 2006 and steadily increasing over recent years (Dalton, 2007).<sup>8</sup> Accreditation of university planning programs, certification of planners, and requirements for continuing education are all active efforts of APA and AICP, the two largest professional organizations representing planners. Given this, one would expect a good deal of common ground between planning professionals, professors, and students seek-

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<sup>7</sup>In the Northeast this difference of local-identity is even more stark, as our public planners tend to stay put and our students pass through like a migrant labor force; in the West matters could be less clear cut.

<sup>8</sup>Dalton’s own 1999 survey shows the figure to be closer to 60%, plus another 17% with master’s degrees in other fields.

ing internships and service-learning opportunities.

Nonetheless, there are some important differences related to training that must be considered. First, even though these professional education figures may be high and growing, they still mean that roughly 30-45% of professional planners *do not* have a relevant planning degree (whereas by definition 100% of students and faculty will have been associated with such a program). Second, a professional planner who received a degree in 2000 or 1995 (or even 1985—approximately 30% of planners have over 20 years work experience (Dalton, 2007)) learned a dramatically different skill-set from one freshly-minted. This disparity is especially acute in the more technical fields of GIS and statistical analysis (although conversely, older planners tend to have a better sense of how data is actually collected and generated, having worked in a time before everything was simply downloadable from the internet). And finally, as Mandelbaum has pointed out (1993), professional planners are trained more on-the-job than we appreciate: planning programs prepare one to *get* a job, but (at least until recently) only actual work in planning trains one to *do* the work.

##### 4.4.2 Language

The language of planners is remarkably similar regardless of situation: both academic and professional planners pepper their discussions and presentations with buzzwords such as “smart growth,” “transit-oriented development,” “inclusionary housing,” “linkage,” and a host of others (making it easier for them to communicate with each other and equally impossible for the lay public to understand any of them). Despite this broad overlap, two distinct areas show some diver-

gence.

On the one hand, public sector planners are more familiar with the acronyms and complex procedural language of working planning systems such as zoning, mandated planning, environmental protection, state funding, and other areas related to implementation and regulation. Thus, when a local Massachusetts planner gets specific and moves from talking of “smart growth” to advocating “40R zoning,” or a project manager shifts from the generalities of “community development” to raise questions of “National Objectives” and “Eligible Expenses” for the CDBG Program, we enter a realm of language that the University is less familiar with. Of course, all of these things can be learned by academics, but it takes time and practice to do so.

At the same time, public planners are much less well-equipped with the abstract language to actually discuss and think critically about the work they do. Thus, for example, academics are more comfortable debating questions of “communicative planning” versus “the rational planning model,” which public planners (if they hear it at all) simply dismiss as theoretical gibberish. A good example of this is the contrast between the *Journal of the American Planning Association* and *Planning* magazine (the latter of which is almost exclusively dedicated to legislative updates, success stories, and profiles of new planning tools, with little attention to larger professional questions of what it means to plan in the first place).

#### 4.4.3 Resources

To the public-sector planner, nothing is felt more acutely than the lack of resources: whether one is considering time, money, tools, or personnel, the planning office is

stretched thin. At the same time, public planners are envious of the wealth of resources that academics enjoy (time free of citizen- or Mayoral-pestering; competent and eager graduate students; journal subscriptions, libraries, and easy access to data; computers, GIS programs, GPS gadgets, flashy websites, and on and on). Indeed, this is one of the prime reasons professional planners seek out student interns: to cash in on these resources to help with the host of important projects that have been put on the back burner. The arrangement is never expected to be mutual, but rather an in-kind service the university is to provide to the over-taxed and under-funded government office.<sup>9</sup>

Interestingly, academic planners may also feel under-resourced when compared to their public-sector counterparts. Truly, university planners (and even more so, their students) lack important resources that they consider central to their goals: namely, access to information and to decision-makers. A Planning Director has a wealth of information on zoning, permitting, funding, and past projects at his or her fingertips; that same director meets regularly with the Mayor, other department heads, local and state legislators, and other “key players” in planning and development—contacts an academic must work to cultivate.

Thus, as is so common in relationships, both parties may come to the table envious of the assets of the other while feeling one’s own deficiencies all too acutely. But rather than growing discouraged by these different perspectives, we can draw strength from them: after all, a central tenet of all

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<sup>9</sup>Consider the analogy of the Peace Corps: sure, volunteers benefit immeasurably, but the basic relationship is one of assistance; the work is to aid and build capacity for the client.

mutually-beneficial exchange is to exploit a differential in the valuation of resources, so that both parties come out ahead.

## 5 A Good Internship: getting the most out of the relationship

### 5.1 A good internship: the academic perspective

From the point of view of the student and the academic advisor, a good internship or student project typically involves a number of things, but can be summarized as “learn something, meet people, make a difference.” (Note the similarity to Army recruitment posters....)

#### 5.1.1 Learn something

For one, the student must learn something—although it may not necessarily be clear from the outset exactly *what* it will be. In theory, the project should teach something that cannot be learned in the classroom or library; research projects alone, even if for a “client,” are often not much more than glorified independent studies. Typically, skills are more likely to be developed than knowledge; the trick is finding time to mentor these techniques in a meaningful and productive way (somewhere between “watch me and learn” and “throw the baby in the pond to teach him to swim”).

Importantly, learning skills often involves not being very good at them at first. People learn to ride a bike by getting skinned knees; people learn to fall in love by having crushes on jerks; and people learn planning, political, and communication skills by having things go terribly wrong. As discussed above

(section 4.1.2 on page 5), the Planning Office is not always the best environment to make mistakes, so care must be taken to allow a “safe” space for trial and (inevitable) error.

#### 5.1.2 Meet people

Often, beyond simply learning in a traditional sense (encountering facts, practicing skills), the student is benefiting from something more nuanced and rare: *exposure*. By working with and around real planners in an applied setting, students come to appreciate the work in a way that is nearly impossible in class, and also develop invaluable relationships and the interpersonal and political skills that are so central to planning.<sup>10</sup> Thus, if a project or internship is to be successful from the student’s perspective, they must have real face-time with the applied professionals, and ideally work collaboratively. Sadly, most planning offices are more likely to assign a student or team to some independent project which fits better with the student’s schedule and interests, stripping the experience of one of the main benefits.<sup>11</sup>

#### 5.1.3 Make a difference

Added to these considerations, students, faculty, and universities involved in applied projects also hope to actually make a difference: to help a client, to further a project, or to otherwise improve the community. This can be extremely frustrating, as the timetables involved usually mean that work completed in December (or May) will not ac-

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<sup>10</sup>When given a chance to impart wisdom to planning students, my first advice is always, “It’s all about relationships.”

<sup>11</sup>A corollary benefit to this exposure is the possibility of finding a job, although the hope of this can also complicate the relationship. (See section 5.2.2 on the next page, too.)

tually change anything until many months (or years) later when the next policy window opens up. On a number of occasions I have had students draft proposed zoning changes, develop outreach materials for a new initiative, or gather baseline data for a planning project, knowing they would be shelved until needed (but absolutely helpful at that point). Conveying to students the importance of their work and continuing to involve them even beyond the close of the semester are both worthwhile considerations.

## 5.2 A good internship: the public sector perspective

From the public-sector planner's point of view, these three components can be turned on their heads: "make a difference" becomes more task-oriented ("get something done"); "meet people" is less important, except when it becomes time to "hire someone"; and the student's goal to "learn something" corresponds to the intellectual and emotional boost professional planners get by teaching and mentoring ("recharge your batteries").

### 5.2.1 Get something done

Public planners often use interns, students, and academic partnerships for the same reasons they use consultants: to complete something they have not found time or staff power to finish. Most planners can easily name a dozen such projects they would like to advance, though many are not suited for student work (either too technical, too sensitive, too large, or too dull). To the extent that students can be steered towards these tasks—or these tasks can be broken down into components appropriate for students—a project will be successful. (Note that in pushing students towards the most *use-*

*ful* projects, rather than the most *interesting* ones, we must struggle against an ongoing academic trend towards the indulgence of student interests—not necessarily a bad trend in a free and creative society, but something to consider nonetheless.)

An ulterior motive many public planners have is to benefit from the expertise and efforts of faculty members associated with students teams. Many planning professors run consulting firms on the side, and drafting students into a project may be a clever strategy to get free professional consulting from their advisors, especially where a larger or ongoing project is involved.

### 5.2.2 Hire someone

Even though they are under-funded, local planning offices do occasionally hire people (especially in the more entry-level positions, where turnover is greater), and often directors and managers look to hire people they know. Being exposed to a steady stream of potential recruits and encouraging the best and the brightest is a good way to keep a competent staff and assemble a team that works well together. (That said, do *not* approach an internship looking for a job; as with friends that later become romantic partners, it must evolve more naturally, and you risk poisoning the early stages by pushing for—or even hinting at—more commitment too soon.)

### 5.2.3 Recharge your batteries

An often overlooked benefit to the applied planner is the fact that being around students—and engaging in the academic side of the field—is inspiring. Once they get over their initial feelings on envy and resentment, most public planners admit that they enjoy

teaching and mentoring others, and it serves to remind them that (a) they actually know a lot and (b) they actually enjoy the work they do, when they stop to think about it. These small moments for professional reflection are rare, but treasured.

Related to the boost that comes through this relationship, working with the academic side of the profession can also bring more notice to the work of the planning office, especially if one's project is featured in a conference session, newspaper story, or journal article (all areas in which academic planners are viewed as "resource rich"—see section 4.4.3 on page 8).

## 6 Conclusions

I have attempted to call attention to some of the differences in perspectives of academic and applied planners, with a discussion of how they play out as the two cultures interact around field work in planning education. As the discussion in the previous section hints, a successful internship or fieldwork project is possible, provided there is care and attention to these worldviews. When scoping out a project and agreeing to a relationship (after reading this article to develop cultural sensitivity, of course), both parties should be cognizant of differences in situation, perspective, resources, language, and divergent expectations, and look to address these issues.

The next obvious thing to do would be to call for a "new model" for academic/applied partnerships and present it in a journal article and conference session; unfortunately, this paper is long on reflection and short on concrete proposals for such solutions (although I still cannot figure out whether this makes me strong on theory and weak on practice or *vice-versa*). With an eye to-

wards a sort of "lessons learned" conclusion, I would suggest the following lines of discussion as we continue to refine the role of applied practice and fieldwork in both the education of planning students and the improvement of planning practice:

- ***All knowledge is contextual.*** In planning, it is nearly impossible (and actually problematic) to separate knowledge and information from the context that makes it meaningful. In addition, context is one of the most difficult things to teach after the fact—in order to appreciate the subtleties of history, geography, politics, emotions, personalities, and host of other relevant factors, one must spend forever unravelling the tapestry of these relationships. Very few people can actually accomplish this in isolation, or even with instruction; like humor, "I guess you just had to be there" to relate. For this reason alone, it is essential that we continue to weave together education and practice, and we may be wise to consider even more dramatic changes to our concepts of education.
- ***Relationships matter.*** In planning, it is oft noted that "the process is as important as the plan." So, too, with field projects, which should be as much about cultivating relationships as they are about completing some product or other. Importantly, these relationships can be between working planners and students, between students and each other, or even (my own personal favorite—see the bullet after next) the ongoing relationship between professors and the communities they continually seek projects in.

- ***Allow the work to build.*** Good planning cannot be rushed, and will never be able to accommodate the schedules of the academic calendar. At the same time, our educational system is essentially modular in nature, and is unlikely to change anytime soon. Rather than be frustrated by this dilemma, we should be inspired by it to develop more lasting partnerships for comprehensive planning partnerships that build from project to project and semester to semester. An exciting and useful analogy would be research programs in the hard sciences, where dozens (or even thousands) of researchers collaborate on projects spanning long periods of time, all coordinated by some organized (but still fluid and semi-democratic) research program.<sup>12</sup>
- ***Put the professor in the middle.*** As a capstone, the one shift I would call for would be to move professors from their “waiting in the wings” support-capacity to serve instead as the principal points of contact between the university and the community. Doing so would cement the real relationship between the University and the City (students are ephemeral, professors are not), and would also provide a consistent point of contact to help build context around the work. Together with public sector counterparts, professors would then sketch the outlines of a broad, multi-year effort, and then staff it from semester to semester with student projects (much as a prime consultant completes a master plan by

coordinating the sub-consultants).

In Lawrence, I have had the pleasure of working with a couple of groups on more lasting university-community partnerships that begin to address the issues I have discussed; I suspect there are similar models elsewhere. One is the new “MIT@Lawrence” partnership, funded by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development and led by Lorlene Hoyt<sup>13</sup> at MIT’s Department of Urban Studies and Planning; another is the emerging partnership between the City of Lawrence and the University of Massachusetts at Lowell on a number of fronts (some of which are being discussed in other sessions of this very conference), addressing public health and education, among other topics.<sup>14</sup>

Both initiatives stress the need for a multi-year research effort involving multiple partners and projects across a wide variety of topics, and both include strong faculty leaders serving as facilitators, lead consultants, problem solvers, and even fund-raisers. Both offer real promise, and have already begun to show results that would make any scientific research program proud.

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<sup>12</sup>There is a “cobbler’s children go shoeless” irony to the fact that planners, of all groups, lack a clear research program for the advancement of their art and goals.

<sup>13</sup>[www.mitatlawrence.net](http://www.mitatlawrence.net) for more info

<sup>14</sup>My main contact into this partnership has been Linda Silka of the Department of Regional Economic & Social Development and the University’s Community Outreach Partnership Center, though there are multiple partners and efforts.

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