URS Senior Seminar
Fall Semester 2013
Assessment

Overview. Four students were enrolled in the URS Senior Seminar during Fall Semester, 2013. This low number of students preparing for graduation in Fall 2013/Spring 2014 is not acceptable. As a group, the students do not seem well prepared as URS graduates, in large part due to the disparate paths by which they reached the program: two are recent transfer students, one entering the program as a senior; another is a returning adult student admitted under the UW-System amnesty program. Only one of the students will be graduating with the skills that we have come to expect of our majors, and that is because of year-long study at another institution during her junior year.

Group project. This is the second group of URS students who failed to complete a group project for the course. They were unable to follow through the group project, largely because they could not manage the group dynamics required: one student wanted to redefine the work tasks because he did not know how to work with excel spreadsheet, and the other students gave in to his demands because it was the easiest path for them to follow. The student was hostile when I asked that they go back to original instructions. I eventually asked Dr. Adolfo Garcia (Communications) for an intervention to come to the class to talk with the students about the group project. Dr. Garcia teaches a course in Small Group Communication that deals with these issues.

Recommendation: Comm 237 Small Group Communication should be included in URS requirements.

The group project involved research on history and development of local institutions (in this instance, church religious congregations). The students had difficulties with the project on several levels: they were unaware of possible sources of information, they were not able to connect the information to a larger urban/regional process, and they were not able to present the information effectively. Part of this relates to basic conceptualization of the city and metropolitan region, a discussion that we would expect students to have acquired from required coursework at the lower- and upper-level.

Recommendation: Independent assessment of learning outcomes for required lower- and upper-level core courses should be completed to help us learn more about what students are taking away from the required courses.

Students appeared ill-prepared to tackle an independent research project and seemed unable to move beyond basic descriptive level in their presentations and analysis.

Recommendation: COMSCI 301 Foundations for Social Research should be reinstated as required course for URS Majors.

As a final note, the new General Education program requirements stipulate that all students must take a senior seminar course, with a specific focus on interdisciplinary

problem-solving. The senior seminar course has been changed from earlier content to match the new requirement; it is an evolving course.

Recommendation: There should be assessment of objectives and learning outcomes of the URS Senior Seminar.

Learning Outcome #1. Students who have completed the major in Urban and Regional Studies will have the ability to conceptualize, analytically define, and treat urban and regional places as meaningful entities, and will have developed an understanding of the interaction and relationship between population groups, economic activities, and the natural and built environments from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Learning Outcome	Not measured	Not Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Conceptualize urban and regional places		X	
Interdisciplinary perspective		X	

Assessment: Students were not able to conceptualize/present information about development of local institutions within broad framework of urban-regional-metropolitan system. Applying interdisciplinary perspective was weak at best.

Learning Outcome #2. Students who have completed the major in Urban and Regional Studies will have developed an understanding of social science methodology, including the analysis and interpretation of both quantitative and qualitative data appropriate to the study of urban areas and regional places, and will have an understanding of and commitment to ethical standards for conducting research, for reporting findings, and implementing the results of those findings, including ethics in decision making for urban and regional planning and public action.

Learning Outcome	Not measured	Not Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Social science methodology		X	
Ethical standards			X

Assessment: Students did not demonstrate understanding of research methodology and were unable to make effective use of data in presentations and in written assignment.

Learning Outcome #3. Students will have gained the technical knowledge, analytical tools, critical thinking and teamwork skills necessary to (a) qualify for entry level employment in positions in urban planning, economic development, and comparable areas in the private or public sector at local, regional, state, and national levels; (b) qualify for admission into graduate programs in Urban and Regional Studies, Urban and Regional Planning, Environmental and Behavior, Architecture, and related professional fields.

Learning Outcome	Not measured	Not Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Critical thinking and teamwork skills		X	
Admission to graduate programs		X	

Assessment: Students did not demonstrate technical knowledge or mastery of analytical methods, and we unable to work as a group or to complete group project. Only one (of four) students in the Senior Seminar is prepared for graduate level work.