

NOTE FROM THE DEPARTMENT HEAD

Each issue of FOCUS is a wonderful happening. For the reader it provides an insight into our world and the projects that engage the students, faculty and alumni. For us it is a chance to reflect on what has been done and the meaning of our engagement. The fact that FOCUS is supported solely by private donors, companies and foundations that believe in this project validates the value of the educational and scholastic experience we offer at Cal Poly. This year we received a generous donation from the LEF Foundation. So, I invite you to enjoy this edition and share it with others.

This year the City and Regional Planning Department has much to share with our readers. First, the California Chapter of the American Planning Association gave FOCUS its award of excellence in the journalism category (under 50,000 circulation). This is a major recognition. It validates the quality of content and the journal's relevance to the state's planning professionals. We give special thanks to Vicente del Rio for proposing the journal and becoming its senior editor, without whom there would be no FOCUS.

We wish to give special recognition to City and Regional Planning Senior Mike Marcus, who was chosen by the American Planning Association to receive its Distinguished Student Leadership Award for 2006. Mike is a special student who, among many accomplishments, has lead Cal Poly's student group EmPower (that addresses energy issues). He is the third CRP student to receive this national award in the past six years, making our department the country's leading program for student leadership. It is clear why we believe this is simply the best undergraduate program in the nation.

How good is the City and Regional Planning Department compared to other programs in the nation? This question was answered, in part, by the first national ranking of masters programs conducted by Planetizen, a private on-line planning news service. The CRP program ranked 19th nationally, by reputation overall. In the categories of special skill areas, it is a pleasure to tell you that we ranked first in zoning administration; sixth in plan making; and ninth in technology. This means that we are viewed as a top program in the same peer group as MIT, North Carolina, UCLA, Berkeley, Penn, and Cornell. This is simply an outstanding performance by a master's only public university. The ranking was based on responses from more than 2,000 academics and professionals. For more information visit the Web site at www.planetizen.com.

The high national ranking reflects CRP's focus on engaging in plan making with real community clients. This year we are fortunate to have worked in several communities in the Central Valley (Traver, Armona, Kettleman City), King City in the Salinas Valley, and with the City of Ventura on the Central Coast. In each project, our students have worked with local groups and designed work of local utility. We are proud of this wide ranging effort.

We are thankful when private donors make an investment in the betterment of our department. This year the Errett-Fisher Foundation chose us to receive five years of support for improving the technology and the studio spaces for our program, as well as supporting student professional development. This type of support is essential to the department as the funds provided by the state are not sufficient to provide the quality educational experience we wish to provide our students.

Since 2001, America has been faced with multiple catastrophic events; starting with 9/11 through the California Cedar Fire, to Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf Coast. Each event revealed a different form of vulnerability which is present in American society, and a need to recognize that “risk” is a structural part of the urbanization process and something that is never eliminated. Over the past years, the CRP Department has assembled an especially talented faculty group with special expertise in hazard mitigation planning at the national and international levels, which was recognized this year by the State of California. The California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services (OES) asked CRP to be its academic partner in rewriting the state’s Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan for submission to FEMA in the fall of 2007. This effort is being led by CRP faculty including Ken Topping, Michael Boswell and William Siembieda. A talented group of graduate students also are part of the effort. The objective is to integrate all the great efforts of many state agencies into a single plan document that provides overall guidance to the state and local governments.

Many CRP faculty are becoming more engaged in the discussion of sustainability and how its sub-sets (LEED, energy planning, urban ecology, hazard resilient community planning, suburban regeneration) are to play a role in planning education and the profession. How to formulate a post-modern approach to improving the environment will be an area of central concern for us in the upcoming years. To do this will require building partnerships with the profession and non-profit organizations. These partnerships will help us frame the question and to engage in appropriate pilot programs and projects of social merit. We hope you can be part of these emerging partnerships.

You, the reader of FOCUS, is encouraged to participate in the efforts of the CRP Department. We also encourage you to provide feedback for FOCUS, with suggestions and by letting us know how you would like to work with us.

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