

Hunter College
Department of Urban Affairs and Planning
URBAN PLANNING INTERNSHIP
URBG 776, 777, or 778

Spring Semester 2009
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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The planning program's internship course is designed to give students practical experience working in a real planning or policymaking setting. Generally, the internship course is taken at the midway point in the program. This allows students to bring to the experience academic skills they have learned so far. Not only does the internship experience allow students to practice and expand upon these skills, but it also offers a view of the wider planning and policymaking environment, politics that surround planning and policymaking decisions, and the needs of the client organization within this larger setting. Planning students are required to complete at least one internship for the MUP degree; students may, however, complete more than one internship experience (not to exceed three in total).

CLASS FORMAT:

Students are required to complete 180 hours of the internship experience at the agency of their choice. In addition, students will meet as a class four times during the semester to discuss this experience with their peers. Written assignments, as specified below, accompany these class sessions.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. High quality work performance. As an intern, you will work for a company or other organization to gain knowledge and experience about urban planning and policymaking. You should be aware that you represent the university to the larger community and the impression you create will have long-lasting effects for yourself, the organization, and on this internship program. Consequently, the main objective of your internship is conscientious performance of the tasks defined by you and your internship supervisor. This is known as due diligence—the hard (often tiring) work—that is required to achieve success.

2. Enriched academic learning. The internship is part of the academic curriculum for the urban planning degree that will supplement the theory and academic preparation with practical field experience. This learning requires you to become not only a responsible staff person but also a participant observer. That is, to observe continually and closely as you are participating and to reflect continually on what you are observing. You should ask yourself, how does this internship relate to your broader academic and professional interests? This requires you to go beyond the basic job requirements and do such things as read material available in the office, attend meetings, seek out opportunities for discussion with your co-workers, and so on. Finally, it requires you to articulate your observations and analysis both in the internship seminar and in the written assignments.

3. Professional development. The internship allows you to develop knowledge, skills, and personal contacts that will contribute to your own career development. It offers you the opportunity to see how you like working in the field/organization of your choice, to obtain some of that critical experience that so many jobs require, and to learn about employment in urban-planning-related fields. Properly utilized,

the internship can be invaluable by introducing you to professionals who can provide recommendations and developing your own network of contacts that will help you gain access to this field.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

(1) Internship Fieldwork: 180 hours in total.

(2) Seminars: four sessions per semester. The seminar meets for two hours. The purpose of the seminar is to allow you to learn from each other. Sharing your observations as participants and developing connections between these observations and the broader issues addressed in your academic curriculum is the most important function. Helping each other develop strategies for dealing with problems and getting the most out of the experience is also important. Finally, the seminar offers an opportunity to learn about different types of organizations and career opportunities.

(3) Short Writing Assignments, discussion of papers in class, and a final presentation: There will be three short papers (discussed below) that students will complete. Students will discuss these papers and their internships in class. Students will prepare a short powerpoint presentation for the final class. All written assignments must be typewritten, double-spaced, and use 12 point font. All papers must include standard features (i.e., an introduction and conclusion, citations and bibliography if appropriate, clear writing using topic sentences, subheadings if appropriate). Papers must be received on or before the deadline. Late papers will be penalized.

GRADING: The internship will no longer be graded pass/fail but utilize the regular A-F grading scheme. The internship grade is based on the following.

• Attendance, participation in discussions	10%
• Paper 1	20%
• Paper 2	20%
• Paper 3	20%
• Powerpoint presentation	10%
• Successful completion of internships hours	20%
TOTAL GRADE	100%

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Class 1—Course overview, listing of placements, and selecting meeting dates.

Class 2—Substance of internship; professional development resources at Hunter.

First short written paper is due and will be discussed in class. Career and other professional development resources available at Hunter will also be presented (e.g., resume and cover letters, interviewing techniques, business etiquette, etc.)

Writing Assignment #1: Objectives and Substance of Internship

This writing assignment must address the following items in approximately 4-8 double-spaced typewritten pages. Bring your papers to class for a roundtable discussion.

- Summary of your work schedule (days/hours per week) and the major tasks assigned.
- What do you hope to gain from the internship--what kinds of knowledge, skills, work experience, contacts, career and personal development?
- How is your job structured? Who do you report to? How does your supervisor relate to the rest of the agency?

- Who are your immediate clients or constituency that your activities will serve?
- What broader issues do you hope to explore? What questions about the relationship of theory to practice do you hope to explore? Give some specific examples of general issues and/or questions that you would like to be able to explore during the internship.
- What specific challenges have you faced (or expect to face) in this internship? What specific strategies have you developed to deal with the challenges?

Class 3—Discussion of Agency Background

The second short written paper is due and will be discussed in class.

Writing Assignment #2: Agency description and planning perspective

This writing assignment is an opportunity for you to make sure that you are getting "the big picture" in regard to your work. It requires some research: use of agency documents, internet materials, newspaper articles, and perhaps interviews with your supervisor and others in the organization. Be sure to explain why you need the information. The bottom line is to come some conclusion about the effectiveness of your organization in addressing the issues you are concerned about? For example, if you are interested in affordable housing, working at a planning department, and are interested in the effectiveness of city planning as a way of helping to increase affordable housing, does city planning seem to offer an effective tool for this purpose? Why or why not?

In assessing your organization's effectiveness, you should also think about how your organization fits into the wider environment of planning and policymaking organizations in the city and region. What is your organization's point of view or perspective in regard to the issues it works on? How well does its perspective match your own? Does this present any challenges?

You may want to refer to readings you've had in other classes that speak to planners and their effectiveness when thinking about this paper. For example, Davidoff's article on advocacy planning, Arnstein's ladder of participation, Fogelson's critique of planning in general, or Hoch's evaluation of what planners do. Try to be critical here and identify both the weaknesses and strengths of your organization and role as a planner.

Your paper should discuss the following items in 4-8 double-spaced typewritten pages.

- Origins, brief history of the agency;
- Overall goals, organizational mission;
- Main types of activities and how they contribute to the overall goals and mission;
- Major accomplishments; contribution to the larger community;
- A description of organizational "capacity" (i.e., the resources—budget, staff, technology, and qualifications) and discussion of whether sufficient to work effectively and achieve its mission;
- Organization chart; your position within it;
- Political factors (e.g., power relationships with groups and individuals--be they elected officials, community residents/organizations, funders, etc. who represent allies and opponents) that influence the operation of your organization. These factors also include level of resources, e.g., money, knowledge, and activism, which defines power and political influence;

- Peer planning or policymaking organizations (e.g., other organizations conducting similar work and their relationship to your organization).

Class 4—Assessment of internship experience

Third short paper is due; students will present a short powerpoint presentation on their internship experience.

Writing Assignment #3: Final assessment

The final assessment has three separate parts, to comprise from 4-8 double-spaced, typewritten pages.

- **Overall placement assessment.** This is the opportunity for your final assessment of the internship experience and the organization that provided this opportunity. The assessment should include responses to the following: what was the most important thing that you learned during your internship? What did you learn about the role of your organization in addressing the issues you are concerned about and how does this knowledge affect your career plans? What qualifications should an intern at this organization have; what difficulties might he or she expect at this placement; what have been the major benefits of this internship?
- **Overall curriculum assessment.** What courses have been most helpful to you in this internship? What changes would you suggest in the courses you have taken and/or in the overall planning curriculum (and/or concentration)?
- **Self-assessment and debriefing.** How would you evaluate your own effort as an intern? How have you gone beyond the “call of duty” to demonstrate initiative and with what impact? How has the internship influenced your career plans? What would you do differently next time?

Powerpoint Presentation

Students will prepare a powerpoint presentation that incorporates information from the various papers to explain succinctly the nature of their internship position, how it fits into the overall agency mission and objectives, how the agency fits into the larger field of planning, and other thoughts about the internship experience.