

Survey of Urban Studies Programs

Atlee E. Shidler, Director of Educational Programs at the Washington Center for Metropolitan Studies, has issued a summary report of a continuing survey of urban studies programs at colleges and universities. The preliminary report is entitled "Urbanizing the University," and is available from the Center, 1717 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Shidler reports that a typical pattern of urban studies curriculum development "would include, roughly in this order, the appearance of urban-hyphenated and conceptually-based courses in sociology, political science, economics and, though less frequently, geography and history; the urbanizing of traditional courses here and there in a wide range of disciplines by expanding and adding urban subject matter; the development of new courses on specific problems, such as urban renewal, housing and transportation; the development of urban concentrations in one or more disciplines, most often political science, sociology and economics; the introduction of honors courses and senior seminars; the addition of a core set of interdisciplinary courses such as Metropolitan Analysis, Policy for Urban Systems, or Urban Social Problems and Planning; the development of work-experience and internship opportunities; and, finally the organization of these elements into a coordinated urban studies program.

"Most of the newer programs, graduate and undergraduate, offer degrees. They tend to view the field as itself a broadly-based discipline, supported by minors and urban-related courses in traditional disciplines. Programs that do not offer degrees, which include some of the oldest and best established, tend to view the field as a common or generalized aspect of various traditional disciplines in which the basic in-depth educational experience should continue to be provided.

"Where urban research centers already exist, they have customarily played a leading role in the organization and administration of interdisciplinary urban studies teaching programs. Otherwise, the initiative usually has come from political science or sociology, occasionally from economics or geography, and, less frequently, from schools of architecture or urban planning.

"Urban studies is still a very new field for most colleges and universities, but it is fashionable and is spreading and developing rapidly. Unlike its relatives, city planning and architecture, or other professional fields and academic disciplines, it has no journal and no national association. That there

is no common definition of its content or agreement about its form of organization is, therefore, not surprising and probably advantageous."

The general characteristics of Urban Studies Programs are summarized by Shidler as follows:

- Few universities yet have both graduate and undergraduate programs, but many that have one are developing the other.
- While a majority of the programs offer degrees, very few, and none of the undergraduate ones surveyed, are organized as departments.
- Only a few programs approach urban affairs in terms of systems and processes rather than problems and issues.
- Very few programs deal with the city as an independent variable, and what many call "urban problems" too often turn out to be any and all problems that people have in cities.
- There is a considerable tendency, especially in newer programs, to define urban as meaning central city and, to some extent, as basically black and poor. Suburban, suburban/central city, and metropolitan-wide affairs are in most cases neglected.
- Among the social sciences, political science and government are most likely to offer courses with metropolitan perspectives. Although economics is not as strong in this regard as political science and government, it is far stronger than sociology.
- There is a widespread preoccupation with urban pathologies and relatively little attention to the future and to ideal possibilities. This is less the case where professional schools of architecture and/or urban planning are participating.
- Philosophy, religion, literature, psychology, environmental sciences, and professional fields such as law, engineering, health, social work, business and education are, far more often than not, absent from interdisciplinary urban studies programs.
- History is involved in only about half the graduate programs surveyed and about one third of the undergraduate programs; and its involvement is almost entirely confined to U.S. history.
- Architecture and planning schools and the social sciences are showing signs of moving toward each other – the former by adding courses and other activities dealing with race, social justice and

The Profession

Survey of Urban Studies Programs

social planning, and the latter by giving increasing attention to the sociology, politics and economics of the urban development process broadly considered.

- Urban studies programs customarily view the communities in which they are located as sources of student internship and work-study opportunities, as places in which to perform services for the needy, as laboratories for developing knowledge and testing ideas, as bodies of officials who need training, and as sets of problems to be researched and solved. But very few institutions have approached their environs as communities with which to cooperate in a continuing effort to achieve collective self-understanding.
- Very few programs include any concern with the international dimensions of urbanism.
- There is almost no apparent inter-university cooperation in urban studies instruction.
- Teaching programs are frequently tied to research centers and institutes and sometimes to community service programs, but urban research, teaching and service are still very much a "trinity in search of a theology."

Note: A fuller preliminary report of this survey, including brief descriptions of several outstanding programs, is available from the Center upon request. The collection of materials analyzed includes brochures, pamphlets, reports and other printed matter describing urban studies teaching programs operating or being developed at some 40 colleges and universities, including 25 graduate and 22 undergraduate programs. The collection of these materials is part of a continuing survey of urban studies teaching programs. The materials are available for use in the Center's library.