Public and Urban Affairs and Environmental Policy and Planning Communication Goals

The Public and Urban Affairs (PUA - B.A.) and Environmental Policy and Planning (EPP - B.S.) majors of the Urban Affairs and Planning Program in the School of Public and International Affairs share a number of curricular goals:

- Both programs seek to equip graduates for life-long learning by assuring high-level communication capacities. Students will be able to communicate clearly and effectively—orally and in writing—to a variety of professional and non-professional audiences and to employ appropriate tools and techniques to do so.

Objectives:

Upon completion of the Bachelor of Arts in Public and Urban Affairs or the Bachelor of Science in Environmental Policy and Planning, the student will be able to:

- Describe and explain pertinent laws, rules, policies, programs and plans to professional and nonprofessional audiences alike in clear and understandable ways both orally and in written forms.
- Design and deliver oral and written presentations that effectively portray data and information regardless of audience type (technical or non-technical)
- Effectively employ graphics, photographs and other visual communication media to support oral and written presentations

UAP Students’ Direction

Since most high schoolers are unaware of these majors, most of our students “discover” our programs once enrolled at Virginia Tech. As such, they are a diverse lot but these generalizations appear to apply to the group with more than average frequency:

- Many majors exhibit strong interest in what might be termed the physical and social evolution of the built environment—broadly understood. Some are focused on how public decisions affect urban and community design, some are interested in social regulation, some are deeply interested in the implications of social choice and cultural norms for democratic processes of choice-making, some are out to make a difference in a public policy domain—whether the environment, transport or some other. Regardless of their substantive interest, the major share of our graduates wind up in leadership roles at the “seams” of social decision processes; that is, in roles in planning or policy that demand both analytic sophistication and high-level communications capacities
- A sturdy share of our graduates go on to graduate or legal study perceiving, rightly, that the professional degree of currency in planning and policy and related fields is rapidly becoming a master’s or law degree.
In keeping with the first point above, our graduates routinely find opportunities in all three sectors of society. This occurs in part because of the diminishing boundaries among for-profit, nonprofit and public institutions but also as a matter of their substantive foci that also typically demand wide-ranging capacities. The environment is important to everyone as, of course, are issues of the built environment and the wide range of wicked problems that our citizenry routinely demands that its social sectors confront in which these individuals will spend their professional careers.

**Developing the Communication Capacities of our UAP Students**

Attachment A lists the wide variety of written, oral and visual communication demands placed upon our graduates as they enter and advance through planning and policy careers. These are shown in the form of products or deliverables, which we will use as a reference for creating assignments, with the ultimate objective of building an equally broad array of *communication competencies*. We have identified three courses in the public and urban affairs curriculum and three courses in the environmental policy and planning curriculum that will serve as the focus for the development of basic, intermediate, and advanced communication competencies specific to our disciplines; however students will also acquire the knowledge and skills they need in the other courses that comprise our majors.

**Public and Urban Affairs**
- UAP 3014 Urban Policy and Planning
- UAP 3714 Policy Process
- UAP 4714 Seminar in Public and Urban Affairs

**Environmental Policy and Planning**
- UAP 3354 Intro to Environmental Policy & Planning
- UAP 3714 Policy Process
- UAP 4364 Seminar in Environmental Policy & Planning

In the basic courses (UAP 3014 or 3354) students will learn and communicate in the language of the discipline; identify and use planning and policy data and information sources; and understand how laws, rules, regulations, plans and policies are developed, adopted and implemented.

The intermediate course (UAP 3714 in both majors) will ask students to critically evaluate proposed and existing laws, rules, regulations, plans, policies and programs; to consider in their evaluations differing opinions and attitudes, confounding factors and a potentially intricate array of outcomes; and to frame and provide quantitative and qualitative support for their arguments.

In their senior seminars (UAP 4714 or 4364), PUA and EPP students will prepare and present new or amended laws, rules, regulations, plans, policies or programs; using both primary and secondary data sources; and based on input from stakeholders and decision makers, the experiences of other organizations, departments, agencies, or levels of government, and research in the discipline. Students will be expected to develop materials suitable for multiple audiences, i.e., researchers, policymakers, professional staff, or the public, using a variety of media.

This plan does not modify our curriculum in any way. Two courses (UAP 3014 and UAP 3714) have served to meet our writing intensive requirements in previous years, and the other courses, such as the senior seminars (UAP 4714 and UAP 4364) typically engage students in projects involving an array of communication-related activities, e.g., mapping, presentations.
In addition to the three courses identified above, students in the environmental policy and planning major will be required to take COMM 2004 Public Speaking, ENGL 3764 Technical Writing, and ENGL 3824 Science Writing. Public Speaking and Technical Writing are already a part of the EPP major and will not increase enrollments for those courses. We will work with the English department regarding the additional Science Writing requirement.

**Assessing Student Progress**

Instructors for the three classes in each major will be responsible for evaluating the quality of student work relative to the learning objectives of that course and the curricular objectives outlined here.

In addition, we will take advantage of the university’s ePortfolio system to archive and document each student’s development during his/her years in our programs. Access to assignments and instructor feedback from other courses in the curriculum will afford us the opportunity to identify specific problems or issues that need to be addressed and provide guidance to both the student and to future instructors regarding the student’s development.

An exit interview and ePortfolio evaluation will be required as part of the seminar courses (UAP 4914 and UAP 4364). The program chair will annually create a committee of faculty for this purpose. The committee will make a report to the faculty regarding its findings, not only on individual student achievements, but also on any changes it recommends with regard to curriculum, assignments, grading strategies, etc.
ATTACHMENT A

Planners and policymakers are generally responsible for two basic types of written communication. The first includes written communication related to interactions with other professionals or the public:

- **routine correspondence** – memorandum, letter, email
- **dissemination of information** – press release, legal advertisement, postcard, brochure, newsletter
- **documentation of work performed** – time sheet, meeting notes, meeting summary, meeting minutes, reconnaissance report
- **materials related to project administration and project management** – meeting agenda, project schedule (critical events and/or deliverables), outline, training curriculum, meeting handouts

The second includes written communication specific to plan and policy development, implementation and administration:

- **drafting of law and/or policy** – resolution, statute, ordinance, regulation (including development regulations, design guidelines, etc.), administrative rule, policies and procedures, capital or operating budget, contract
- **analysis of laws, programs and policies and their implementation** – legislative impact statement, policy report or policy memo, program evaluation report, zoning/planning analysis (including development plan and subdivision plan review), budget analysis
- **preparation of studies and plans** – comprehensive plan, neighborhood/area/sector plan, staffing study, executive summary, white paper, technical report, program or project proposal
- **creation and/or use of instrumental tools for policy development, implementation and evaluation** – grant application (forms and supporting text, etc.), survey, questionnaire, interview

Written communication forms the basis for much of their work, but planners and policymakers are frequently engaged in activities that take advantage of, or require visual communication:

- **presentation materials** – poster, presentation board, storyboard, map, electronic media (i.e., Powerpoint presentation, slide show, video)
- **graphical support for reports, newsletters or other written communications** – table, chart, diagram, photograph, map
- **web design and internet-based information**.

And the work of a planner or policymaker often demands the use of oral communication:

- **conversations with other professionals or the public** regarding specific planning or policy issues (one-on-one or small groups)
- **formal and prepared presentations or speeches** before appointed and elected officials, other professionals, or the public, in groups of varying sizes
- **respondent** in a question and answer period, or in an interview
- **meeting convener, moderator or chair**.