Briavel Holcomb

While over the last quarter century the focus of Urban Studies at Rutgers has moved from community development to urban planning and management, curricular consistencies in core courses fit current University-wide goals. The major continues to attract students seeking pre-professional training, social activists, and those preferring an interdisciplinary program. The Department has incubated other majors and departments, but has the advantage of drawing on faculty from the graduate planning program to teach undergraduate courses.

Reflections on Silver:

Twenty-five Years of Urban Studies at Rutgers

The Department of Urban Studies and Community Health, originally the Department of Community Development, was founded a quarter century ago as a major building block of a new entity of Rutgers University - Livingston College. Originally projected to become "the MIT of the social sciences," the direction of the new undergraduate college changed almost overnight following the civil disturbances in central cities across the country in the summer of 1967. Central to the new mission was the need to address the critical problems of cities, especially in the most urbanized state in the nation, both by providing a college education accessible and appropriate to inner city students, and by focussing on research addressing the crises of racism, poverty and the "two Americas." The small, conventional program in urban planning at Rutgers expanded rapidly, creating an undergraduate department with a faculty diverse in ethnicity, gender, disciplinary and professional backgrounds, and a graduate department with a preponderance of faculty with professional planning degrees. The two departments today are the largest teaching units of the newly formed Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy of Rutgers University.

From the beginning, urban studies at Rutgers has infused interdisciplinary perspectives with pragmatic experience. Faculty included former administrators of central city housing, education, and social welfare programs, a Baptist minister with an inner city congregation, and journalists, as well as more conventional academics such as geographers, political scientists, and sociologists. We were women and men; Black, Latino, Asian, and Jewish; gay and straight....but most of us were under forty years old.

The student body was equally unconventional. Compared to the elite university, founded in 1766, of which it was a part, students taking urban studies were disproportionately from minority groups, and, as members of the first co-educational liberal arts undergraduate college of the

university, were about equally divided between men and women. There were, however, a significant number of mature students — including Vietnam veterans, homemakers entering college on the wave of the new women's movement, and, importantly for urban studies, people who had considerable employment experience in urban services and anti-poverty programs. The latter group typically had much knowledge of the reality of urban conditions which some of the faculty knew only vicariously.

While the curriculum of Urban Studies has evolved over the years, it still contains important legacies of the late 60s and early 70s. The large, first year course was one of my first teaching assignments. I team-taught with two women colleagues, one Puerto Rican, the other African American. Though disparate in life experience and disciplinary backgrounds, we were feminists and political activists whose friendship encouraged an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in the classroom. It was, for me, a very empowering initiation to a teaching career and remains one of the pedagogic highlights of my life. In Fall, 1994 during a colleague's sabbatical, I again took responsibility for the course which I organized as a lecture series on Urban Futures to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Livingston College . The final lectures of the series on "The University and the City" were given by the founding dean of Livington and editor of this journal — Ernest Lynton, and the founding dean of the Bloustein School and guest editor of this journal — Mark Lapping. Team teaching was exceptionally beneficial to both students and faculty, but the resource realities of today's university preclude assigning three faculty to team teach a single course of 150 students. The graduate assistants who lead the weekly discussion groups are as enthusiastic as I was about the opportunity to explore with first year students such current controversies as workfare, the "Bell curve" (shades of Shockley and Jensen!), and inequality in school funding. The lecture series format had the benefit of introducing students to senior faculty in the School who otherwise do not teach first year students, but it was at the cost of some continuity and possible flexibility which a conventional course offers.

Other "staples" of the curriculum include a second year basic statistics course (taught throughout the quarter century with great concern for and patience with the math-phobic by the same professor), a third year internship (of which more later) and a senior seminar in which the main task is writing a senior thesis. In addition, students take courses in a "concentration" — either urban planning, urban management, or individually designed interdisciplinary programs of urban courses in various departments (e.g. public finance, urban history, urban politics, environmental planning).

While other majors offer optional internships, Urban Studies may be the only one at Rutgers in which an internship has always been required. Originally, everyone took a semester-long, four day a week (or equivalent) internship with a government agency, non-profit organization, or private sector firm, returning to campus once a week for the internship seminar during which students compared experiences and discussed how things worked in "the real world." Today, due in part to limited faculty resources, there is no seminar accompanying the internship, but the faculty supervisor meets with student interns periodically during the semester and maintains contact with on-site supervisors. The range of internship placements is wide and reflects varied student interests and career ambitions. There are staples such as the local Urban League, community school, city planning and economic development office, the county planning office and State agencies in nearby Trenton. But students have also done internships in places as distant as a land reform pro-

gram in Guatemala, a women's shelter in the Virgin Islands, the planning department in Casper, Wyoming, and a housing and services program for AIDS victims in Los Angeles. Several years ago, a certificate program in Real Estate Development was instituted in the Department and some students choose to do internships with commercial real estate firms or the property management departments of corporations.

Students commonly rate their internship experience highly, consider that they learn a lot, and — importantly — make contacts which quite frequently lead to employment after graduation. Typically, internships are not paid positions and many of them constitute the kind of community service which President Clinton urged in an address at Rutgers in 1993 about the national community service corps established that year. Five years previously, in his commencement address, Rutgers' late President Bloustein had proposed a mandatory program of citizenship education and community service as a graduation requirement for all students at the university. Although there are strong arguments against such a requirement (not least the logistics of finding suitable placements and supervision for thousands of sometimes naive and untrained interns, and the dubious virtue of "mandatory volunteer" work), many more Rutgers students now have some experience of the kind of internship which urban studies students have had from the start.

Similarly, the "Rutgers Dialogues" — a university-wide reexamination of the undergraduate curriculum — recently recommended that all students take a "capstone" course in their senior year. Urban Studies majors have always been required to take the senior seminar in which career alternatives, job and graduate school applications, and discussion about values and life decisions are combined with the writing and presentation of a senior thesis.

Over the years the Department has "incubated" programs in social work and journalism which have become separate majors and departments. Currently the Department offers two majors — in Urban Studies and in Public Health. More than half the faculty teach primarily in the latter program which has an urban health emphasis, but we have the distinct advantage of being able to staff undergraduate courses with faculty from the graduate program in Urban Planning and research faculty from the Center for Urban Policy Research. Hence, although there are currently only four faculty members whose primary identification is with undergraduate urban studies, a reasonably wide selection of especially upper division courses are available, some of which have combined graduate/undergraduate enrollments.

In light of Scott Cummings' observations on undergraduate urban studies programs, it is worth noting that the Rutgers' program conforms in part to his generalizations. Although we are a "free standing" Department which has received strong external reviews and at least adequate support from the University given the leanness of resources in recent years, new faculty have been recruited for the public health program in order to maintain professional accreditation and the only new faculty member on the urban studies side in the last decade has only a quarter line in the Department. It is also the case that none of the urban studies faculty are particularly active in the urban professional organizations, choosing instead to participate in our individual disciplinary organizations. However, this is offset by the active participation of the Urban Planning faculty in such organizations as the American Planning Association and the Associate Collegiate Schools of Planning.

There have, inevitably and appropriately, been shifts in emphasis in the curriculum and content of courses over the years. One can perhaps argue that the young, liberal (before that was pejorative), idealistic faculty of a quarter century

ago who had come of age during the War on Poverty and the Vietnam war, had faith in the power of social movements, of activism for social change, and of "teaching as a subversive activity." We taught about advocacy planning; planning with and by, not for, people; we believed in "power to the people" and rejected "culture of poverty" arguments as racist. Today we are older. Some of us did not survive the rigors of academic natural selection and, one could show, frankly, that the more conventionally academic thrived while those who most challenged the traditional wisdom and mores of academia fell by the tenure wayside.

Our students, too, have changed. While we still probably attract the more "socially responsible" — or at least aware — segment of the much-maligned X Generation (to which our children belong), they are young adults who face a future of diminishing economic opportunities, increasing uncertainty, continued (if less overt) racism and classism, and an atmosphere of distrust in government and in the ability of individuals to make a difference. In response to changes in both faculty and students, urban studies today has more theory and less exhortation, more marketable skills and less community organizing, more courses which lead to professional accreditation than neighborhood activism.

In a slightly ironic twist of fate, urban studies is an academic field which has gained in respectibility. A quarter century ago urban studies was perceived somewhat on the same radical fringe as Women's Studies or African-American Studies (two other departments which, along with the more "respectable" innovations of Computer Science and Comparative Literature, were brought to Rutgers at the opening of Livingston College). Today "the urban" is a unifying theme of such cross-disciplinary scholars as Manuel Castells, David Harvey, Richard Sennett or perhaps even Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. Once on the frontier of academic activism, Urban Studies is part of the intellectual cutting edge of critical theory! However, perhaps mercifully, the new scholarship has yet to trickle down to the average undergraduate. What it has done, though, is to add intellectual legitimacy to research and scholarship in urban studies, a legitimacy urgently needed by junior faculty seeking the approval of promotion committees, or applying for research grants and fellowships.

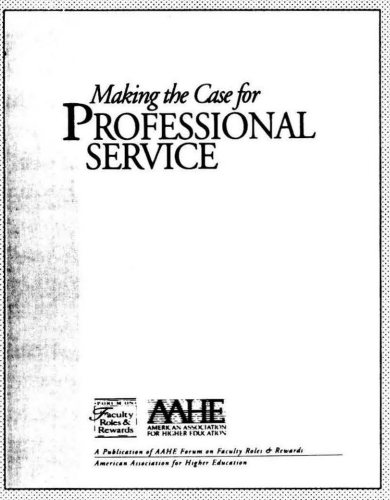
In these days of Total Quality Management universities (which includes Rutgers), one of the quality control questions I sometimes ask myself is: "Would I want my daughter to major in urban studies?" The answer, while not always unequivocal, is generally "yes." A main reason is that urban studies offers an equivalent flexibility to students as it does to faculty. It can accommodate those looking for pre-professional certification, those with a strong social conscience who want to learn not only about the world but how to change it, and others who seek a liberal education with strands of various disciplines woven into a common thread. It is perhaps the first group which is largest today. Many students majoring in urban studies hope for a career in urban planning or administration.

Over the years the questions of whether to offer a major in urban planning, rather than in urban studies, has been repeatedly mooted. To date, the argument that planning is a profession requiring a graduate degree and professional licensing has discouraged such a development (although students quite often announce on their resumes that they have a degree in planning!). The urban management concentration has proved attractive to students who are interested in the public sector, and who lack interest or qualifications for entry to the School of Business where the management major is housed. To borrow another term from the business world to which our students must inevitably learn to adapt, even if they work in the public

sector, the urban studies program has maintained a certain level of flexible production, graduating majors with the ability to find employment in a wide variety of niches. Among our former students are planning officers, enterprise zone managers, US senatorial aides, transportation and housing administrators, a senior officer in the Resolution Trust Corporation, and professors of economics and urban affairs, *inter alia*.

It would be pleasant to imagine that on the Department's Golden Anniversary, urban studies as conceived of today would be redundant. It could be argued that in a society without distinctively urban problems, with universities where feminist and multicultural perspectives and people have been integrated into the academic mainstream, separate programs such as urban, women's or African American studies should not be necessary. However, in light of the trajectories in American society today, such hope seems wildly optimistic. Rather, with technological change driving an increasingly greater wedge between those with meaningful and rewarding jobs, and those who provide their support services or have no job, urban crises are likely be be exacerbated. As the world's population rapidly urbanizes, cities everywhere will be faced with squatter settlements, homelessness, pollution, crime, poverty, and the whole litany of urban problems. Thus is seems unlikely that urban studies as currently conceived will be obsolete in 2020. Perhaps the interdiscipliniarity of urban studies, now seen too often, as Cummings notes, as an intellectual weakness, will be recognized as a strength as the boundaries between disciplines continue to collapse. Perhaps, too, as solutions to urban crises are found, that urban studies can focus more on the accomplishments and opportunities city life provides.

Making the Case for Professional Service



By Ernest A. Lynton

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Commonwealth Professor and senior associate of the New England Resource Center for Higher Education at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, **Ernest Lynton** is the author, with Sandra Elman, of *New Priorities for the University: Meeting Society's Needs for Applied Knowledge and Competent Individuals.* An AAHE senior fellow, he has worked with the AAHE's Forum on Faculty Roles & Rewards since its inception.

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