

On-Line Planning Education Program Designed for Working Professionals

Jennifer Evans-Cowley, PhD, AICP

Professional planners are busy people, between work during the day, public meetings at night, and obligations at home it can be a challenge for planners to find the time to go back to school. Five years ago The Ohio State University launched the Planning Education at a Distance (PED) program to provide continuing education opportunities to planners in an online format. This program has been successful in providing public officials and professional planners with continuing education credit.

Since the inception of the program, the program director received repeated please from professionals asking for graduate level for-credit courses. Two years ago the Planning Education at a Distance program responded by creating a series of four graduate planning courses designed specifically for professionals working in planning to provide advanced skills that upon completion leads to a graduate certificate in Facilities Planning and Management. Participants learn how to manage a planning department, how to design spaces to meet user needs, the fundamentals of real estate finance, and ultimately integrate everything they have learned into a capstone project.

“Reviewing the capstone projects is my favorite part of the curriculum,” said Jack Nasar, Professor of City and Regional Planning in the PED program. The participants always produce very interesting projects. One student conducted an analysis of the need for low income housing after a fire destroyed homes, stores, and schools in a nearby community. Her project looked at how to engage the public, identified funding, a site, and the design of affordable housing in Alaska. A student working for the Navy in Japan evaluated base closures to determine successful redevelopment projects and the lessons learned that can be applied to communities facing base closure. Another project in Texas evaluated the need for a dementia focused living facility in Collin County, identified alternative sites, and developed a facility master plan. A participant in Ohio evaluated the reuse of a municipal facility for municipal offices. The project made recommendations on how to renovate the facility in order to most effectively accommodate city employees. Jackie Graham, Instructor in the PED Program, remembers her favorite project, a proposal for a Gelato franchise. The participant had tried a gelato during a vacation and liked it so much he thought perhaps he should open a gelato store as a side business. He went through the entire process of conducting a market analysis, selecting a site, developing a project management plan, and determining the cash flow. In the end he discovered that while the concept was a good idea, the net revenue wasn't likely to be enough to make the venture worthwhile.

Through the integration of audio/video components, PowerPoint slides, and reading materials, PED provides participants with hands-on training to strengthen skills needed to both manage land development through planning and bring new planning techniques to their practice.

The participants come from an array of backgrounds, some with planning degrees others without. Some selected the program to help them in pursuing a graduate

education, while others participate as a way to advance their skills. For example, one past student works for a consulting firm in Alaska and did not have access to a nearby planning school and participated in the program to enhance her planning skills. A participant in Arizona chose to enroll because of the convenience of taking courses online. A participant from Alabama took advantage of her employer's tuition assistance program to further her planning education.

With the new Mandatory AICP Certification Maintenance Program, courses offered by an accredited planning program qualify for continuing education credit. This curriculum provides a way to meet the continuing education needs of certified planners.

Program Director, Jennifer Evans-Cowley notes, "we have been fortunate to be able to make an arrangement with Ohio State University to charge a fixed tuition, rather than a different rate for participants living out of state or out of country. We've worked hard to try to create an affordable graduate education program." The tuition for the 2008 program is \$1,200 per quarter or if a participant pays in full upfront the cost is \$4,400.

For more information on the Planning Education at a Distance Program visit our website at <http://knowlton.osu.edu/ped> or contact Jennifer Evans-Cowley, PhD, AICP Planning Education at a Distance Program Director at 614-247-7479 or cowley.11@osu.edu. Applications for the January 2008 graduate certificate program are open now and available through October 31, 2007. Participants can register at any time for the continuing education courses.

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