

**CE 3070: Urban & Environmental Planning**  
**Writing Intensive Courses Pilot Summary**  
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**Learning Objectives:**

- Introduce students to a sampling of the social, physical, economic, and environmental attributes of urban, suburban and rural development.

*This objective is addressed by assigning a significant amount of reading. Writing about what has been read reinforces the concepts and allows the students to make their own connections between the material, its application in real-world situations, and ultimately, to themselves.*

- Convey a sense of what planning is and what planners, engineers, and citizens need to do to promote sustainable development and improve quality of life.

*A significant function of the urban and environmental planning profession is communication. Planners are called upon to write a very diverse set of products: Master Plans, regulatory language, advertisements for public meetings, position papers, and many more. Some of the writing needs to be very objective, and other jobs need a persuasive piece. The audience may vary from highly educated to average residents to people with language barriers. Designing assignments to reflect this diversity is a challenging, but effective exercise.*

- Provide an understanding of the complexity of the relationship between the built and natural environment and to instruct the student in the principles and techniques used in planning to address these issues.

*Public problems can be very complex, but they often appear to be the result of a poor decision. The term project tasks the students with tracing the planning process that led to a perceived public problem and offer recommendations for an improved process. This kind of investigatory process builds an appreciation for accurate, organized, and thorough documentation of decision-making processes.*

**Writing Assignment Examples**

- Discussion Board Posts – These are graded as part of the student’s “participation,” the posts are student responses to reading assignments and material presented in lecture. They are often extensions of class discussion.
- Essays – A higher expectation for polished writing is expected in an essay. Key elements are organized structure, providing evidence to support claims, and a clear and convincing argument
- In-class writing – These mini-assignments are not turned in for grading, but are usually assigned as a way of initiating reactions to material presented in lecture. They can be redrafted into an essay submission.

**The Term Project**

“The Project involves identifying an element in the community that is problematic, out-of-place, not functioning well, or generally prompts you to wonder about its origins or cause you to believe that “someone should do something about that.” Your group will write a problem statement, conduct background research on the topic, identify contributing factors to the problem, and document the process by which the problem can be addressed. The process can be discussed in the past tense: i.e. what *should have taken place* to avoid the issue or in the future tense: i.e. what steps need to be taken to address the issue in retrospect. The goal is not identify a design solution to the problem, but to demonstrate a clear understanding of the planning process.”

- 2007 Deliverables: Problem Statement, Outline, Final Presentation, Final Report
- 2008 Deliverables: Problem Statement, Outline, **Status Report Presentation**, Final Report  
*Presentations moved to middle of term to allow for feedback and refinement*
- 2009 & 2010 Deliverables: Problem Statement, **Resources**, Status Report Presentation, Final Report -- *Resource submission replaced outline to better evaluate research progress*
- 2011-2013 Deliverables: Problem Statement, Resources, Status Report Presentation, **Optional Draft Report or Point-Driven Outline**, Final Report - *Optional Early draft review opportunity created to provide more opportunity for revision and improvement of final product*

### Responding to Student Writing

- The course typically hires a Peer Learning Assistant (PLA) in addition to the Teaching Assistant (TA). Both attend a training session regarding effective ways of responding to student writing, and both are utilized for grading writing assignments.
- Rubrics are often provided to students ahead of time as a way to clarify expectations for particular assignments.

### Opportunities & Plans for the Future

- Consider reinstating weekly summaries of reading material – but with a more concerted effort to select one topic each week to be redrafted as an essay or position paper
- Continue to review and enhance the suite of assignments to achieve an appropriate diversity of writing genres that are aligned with course topics.
- Expand in-class writing opportunities and coordinate with break-out group/workshop-style classes.
- Improve/reinforce the importance of writing for presentations (beyond PowerPoint design – effective word choice)