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The Urban/Housing Issues Symposium:
A Proposal for an Interdisciplinary Capstone Problems Course

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Introduction

From January, 1992 to December, 2008¹, we participated in an interdisciplinary course, the Urban/Housing Issues Symposium, which included students and faculty from five disciplines (Architecture, Law, Planning, Public Policy and Social Work) in two universities (Saint Louis University and Washington University of St. Louis). Graduate business students also occasionally have participated. Students work in teams under the guidance of participating faculty members to prepare concrete housing and community development proposals in response to Requests for Proposals (“RFPs”) prepared by faculty in conjunction with cooperating municipalities and community organizations. We did not have any grand international, interdisciplinary concept in mind when we began the course, but on reflection after twenty years, we believe the course can serve as a template for more ambitious efforts to respond to global issues that are interdisciplinary in scope.

The Millennium Project, a collaborative of the United Nations University (“UNU”), Smithsonian Institution, Futures Group International, and the American Council for the UNU, that seeks to “provide context for global thinking and potential for better understanding”² has

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¹ In August, 2009, both of us transitioned out of the course to take on new responsibilities within the University (Domahidy) and in anticipation of beginning a phased retirement (Salsich). Other faculty from our disciplines have replaced us, as the course continues to be offered.

² [Http://www.millennium-project.org](http://www.millennium-project.org)
identified 15 Global Challenges for Humanity, including Sustainable Development and Climate Change, Rich-Poor Gap, Peace and Conflict, Transnational Organized Crime, and Global Ethics.\textsuperscript{3} The interdisciplinary nature of the challenges is evident.

The Challenges are interdependent: an improvement in one makes it easier to address others; deterioration in one makes it harder to address others. Arguing whether one is more important than another is like arguing that the human nervous system is more important than the respiratory system. These challenges are transnational in nature and transinstitutional in solution. They cannot be addressed by any government acting alone.\textsuperscript{4}

The Challenges raise the stakes for education at all levels, not only because of the complexity of the Challenges, but also because of the interdisciplinary nature of any effective response to them. But interdisciplinary education, particularly at the undergraduate, graduate and professional levels, has not been a high priority.

In his recent article, \textit{The Impending Train Wreck in Current Legal Education: How We Might Teach Law as the Scientific Study of Social Governance},\textsuperscript{5} Professor Thomas S. Ulen\textsuperscript{6} argues that the traditional, appellate case-oriented, method of legal education is “seriously out of alignment with recent developments in the legal academy and legal scholarship.”\textsuperscript{7}

[T]he academic study of law has been moving from a relentlessly doctrinal focus to one in which, although doctrine figures importantly and necessarily, knowledge of other disciplines has become an increasingly important part of the well-educated lawyer’s toolkit. In the future, the knowledgeable lawyer

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{3}The Millennium Project, Global Challenges for Humanity, available at \url{http://www.millennium-project.org/millennium/challenge.html}.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{4}Id.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{5}6 U. St. Thomas L. J. 302 (2009).}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{6}Swanlund Chair, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Professor of Law, University of Illinois College of Law, and Director, Illinois Program in Law and Economics.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{7}Ulen, \textit{supra} note 5, at 303.
will need to know, I believe, some economics, history, political science, empirical
techniques, anthropology, sociology, basic science, and more.  

In addition to an interdisciplinary education, lawyers must be able to “learn the gist of other
disciplines quickly, thoroughly, and with nuance.”

Professor Ulen advocates viewing the study of law as the study of the “mechanisms of social governance.” He believes that “because there is no core methodology that defines the study of law, consolidating knowledge from other disciplines will not present a conflict with the existing methodology of law,” something that can, and does, happen in other disciplines.

Among his recommendations for “incremental changes” are a required empirical methods course and a capstone problems course in which students would focus on a “single problem [covering] as broad a set of issues as feasible.” He gives as an example of the type of problem that would lend itself to such a course “the issues surrounding the construction of a nuclear power plant.” He cautions, though, that creating such courses “will not be inexpensive.”

Public Policy Studies as a discipline has its origins in recognition of the complexity of social problems and the need for interdisciplinary, applied approaches. Harold Lasswell was one of the earliest to articulate a vision of the policy sciences. Writing in the 1940’s he included “the social and psychological sciences; in general, all the sciences that provide facts and principles of

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8 Id.
9 Id.
10 Id., at 304.
11 Id., at 320. For a discussion of Law as the Study of Social Governance and Law as Solving a Scholarly Anticommons Problem, see id, 314-320.
12 Id., at 334.
13 Id., at 335. He gives three reasons: 1) the time and energy required to develop an interdisciplinary course, 2) the “uncertain payoff” to the course, and 3) “very comfortable” returns to continuing to teach current courses. Id.
direct importance of the making of important decisions in government, business and cultural life. His view incorporated engagement in the field, working with agencies to address issues.

In 1974, Derek C. Bok, former President of Harvard University, recognizing the complexity of social problems, noted that “professional education for the public sector is a task that cannot be left to a single graduate school. It requires the participation of a number of different faculties within the university.” More recently, Ernest Boyer’s call for a scholarship of engagement has resonated across the academy. Service learning courses, centers for civic engagement, and journals focused on higher education engagement illustrate the response. Such engagement with communities recognizes the need for interdisciplinary approaches to address holistically the challenges communities face. The RFPs provided to students in our Symposium brought them in contact with a variety of neighborhood organizations, municipal officials and not-for-profit organizations.

In January, 2009, the authors embarked on a research project to seek to understand 1) how the course has impacted professional practice of those students who were in the course and


17Representative examples of cooperating organizations include Affton Community Partnership, Beyond Housing, Inc., Central West End Midtown Development, Inc, City of Alton, IL, City of Clayton, City of Maplewood, MO, City of University City, MO, Culver Way CoHousing, LLC, Grand Center, Grand Roc/Covenant Blu Community Development Corporation, Old North St. Louis Restoration Group, St. Louis Housing Authority, St. Margaret of Scotland Housing Corp., St. Patrick Center, and Vashon/JeffVanderLou Initiative.
2) how the proposals prepared by the teams have impacted the organizations for which they were developed.\textsuperscript{18}

Faculty members from law and public policy surveyed 100 alumni of their programs to see how the alums have utilized their experience in the course. In addition, the researchers interviewed community sponsors of the projects undertaken by students to learn how the proposals impacted the organization. The findings together provide information for shaping future interdisciplinary efforts designed to prepare students for working in community settings.

This paper provides a review of the course history and an explanation of the research project. The premise of the research project is that inter-disciplinary course work at the graduate and professional school level can help break down the barriers to collaboration and innovation that may exist at the “boundaries between disciplines or specializations.”\textsuperscript{19}

II. The Urban/Housing Issues Symposium

1. Origins of the Course

During the spring semester, 1991, two law students from Saint Louis University collaborated with ten architecture students from Washington University on the design and feasibility analysis of a hypothetical affordable housing development for a four-acre tract of land in Kirkwood, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis. Although their designs differed, several teams of architectural students proposed the same number of units, 24, for the tract because that was the number necessary to enable a profit to be realized from the venture, a local developer told the students. When the architecture students rejected, because “it would cost money and time,” the

law students’ offer to pursue a zoning amendment or a variance, made necessary because the law students had concluded that the projects were too large for the existing zoning of the tract, the two faculty members supervising the exercise agreed that “we have to get these students talking to one another.” From that experience the Urban/Housing Issues Symposium, which completed its 20th year this past fall semester, was born.20

Our experience that first year provided a dramatic illustration of the “‘knowledge boundaries’” that exist between “specialized domains” (e.g., architecture and law),21 and the insight that “knowledge is ‘both a source of and a barrier to innovation.’”22 Kirkwood officials had sought an innovative solution to the problem of a vacant four-acre tract located between single-family, multi-family and industrial uses. The architecture and law students worked separately on their assignments. When they came together at the end of the semester, the architecture students discovered that a crucial barrier to implementation of the housing proposals, the current zoning of the tract, had not been considered, and that the failure to consider that element required the students to go back to the drawing board. The law students had not considered the impact a re-zoning or variance hearing would have on the development’s budget and timeline. While both sets of students expressed general satisfaction with the course, they acknowledged a sense of frustration with the “surprise” ending.

2. Organization of the Course

20The story of the beginning and early years of the Symposium is told in Peter W. Salsich, Jr., The Urban Housing Issues Symposium: Interdisciplinary Study in a Clinical Setting, 44 ST. LOUIS U. L. J. 949, 950-957 (2000). The research reported in this paper is a follow-up to anecdotal information gained from that initial experience about the importance of cooperation among disciplines in the solution of a development problem and the value of collaboration among disciplines rather than professional isolation that can border on arrogance. Id.


Over the years, the course has grown into an inter-disciplinary offering for graduate and professional students in architecture, law, public policy, social work and urban planning from the two universities, with faculty from the various departments and schools collaborating in the design and conduct of the course. Each faculty member takes responsibility for handling administrative details concerning course scheduling, student registration, grade reporting, etc for students in his/her department and school. One faculty member volunteers to take responsibility for coordinating communications with students, including preparing the syllabus, organizing an introductory bus tour of the RFP sites, and scheduling guest speakers. All faculty members read and grade the final proposals student teams submit in response to the RFPs they have selected. Proposals are ranked based on the quality of the student submissions. Each faculty member then assigns individual grades for students in his/her discipline according to that discipline’s grading standards.

a) Course Goals and Organization

A major goal of the course has been to introduce students to the dynamics of interdisciplinary transactional collaboration. Professor Tom Thomson, now retired from Washington University School of Architecture and one of the co-developers of the course, emphasized the difference between what he called “tame” problems (1 + 1 = 2) and “wicked” problems (1 + 1 = 6) containing no firm definitions, thus “solutions come only by collaborative effort to achieve a good result.” Dr. Mary Domahidy suggests groups go through four phases in making decisions: 1) “forming” – getting to know one another (polite, little or no challenging of others), 2) “storming” – how will I interact in

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23 In 2009, a social work professor from Washington University joined the course faculty.
24 Thomas L. Thomson, Professor, School of Architecture, Washington University, *Class Lecture* (August 30, 2001).
this group? (not so polite), 3) “norming” – identifying spokespersons, roles people will play, and 4) “performing” – group actually functions.\(^{25}\)

Participating faculty assume that students bring a set of core principles and skills from their disciplines. Aside from an introductory lecture by each faculty member in which interests and concerns of the particular discipline with respect to the RFPS for the particular class are highlighted, students are expected to do their own research. Guest lecturers are invited to give students particular perspectives about the current climate, culture and economy in St. Louis, as well as technical information about specific programs, such as how the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) is administered by the Missouri Housing Development Commission and the role played by the St. Louis Equity Fund in the LIHTC program.

\section*{b) Interdisciplinary RFPS}

In the early years of the course, faculty members developed hypothetical problems designed to mirror needs and concerns within the St. Louis region. Following the suggestion of students who had completed the course, the faculty began soliciting RFPS from various organizations in the St. Louis region. By collaborating with public and private not-for-profit organizations, participating faculty have endeavored to create a course environment that replicates, as much as possible, the analytical and planning components of the RFP phase of public/private development activity. For example, the fourteen-week semester period corresponds roughly with a typical 90-day window for responding to RFPS issued by public and private funding organizations.

\section*{c) Student Work Product – Responses to RFPS}

Students have prepared approximately 60 proposals, 41 of which have been mapped by the University’s GIS lab. While projects have been proposed in Affton, Clayton, Lemay, Maplewood, O’Fallon, Pagedale, University City and Wellston, Missouri as well as Alton and Washington Park, Illinois, the great bulk of the proposals have been centered in the northern part of the City of St. Louis.

Over the years, students have prepared proposals for the restoration and preservation of specific buildings. A representative sample includes the Freedom School, on the campus of the former St. Joseph’s School of the Deaf in University City (2006), Joe’s Place, a house in Maplewood being converted into an adult-supervised boarding house for high school boys during the school year (2006), Mullanphy House, a port of entry for Irish immigrants during the 19th century in the Old North St. Louis neighborhood (2007), Rosati House, a transitional and permanent housing development on North Grand operated by St. Patrick’s Center, the Salvation Army’s complex in O’Fallon, Mo. (2005), the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood Mother House in O’Fallon (2007), and the Woolworth Building at Grand and Olive (1994).

Student teams also have developed plans for neighborhood restoration and development in Affton, an unincorporated part of south St. Louis County (2008), the Wellston Loop, the site of a former bus terminal on the city/county line (2007), the Midtown portion of the Central West End (2006), the central business district of Pagedale, a first tier suburb in northwest St. Louis County (2007), a transit-oriented development at the intersection of Hanley and Manchester roads in Maplewood (2008), as well as a LEED®-certified “green” infill housing proposal for the Northeast neighborhood of University City (2008), a proposal to implement a 1996 revitalization plan for the 8-block Hunterstown neighborhood of Alton, Ill. (2001). Other proposals include an affordable workforce housing development in the Gaslight Square neighborhood (2004),

d) The Challenge of Group Dynamics

Over the years students have found the group dynamics challenging. Perhaps the most dramatic example we experienced concerned the Lemay project in 2000. The RFP requested proposals for the comprehensive redevelopment of the unincorporated area of St. Louis County that joins the City of St. Louis at the confluence of the River Des Peres and the Mississippi river.26 Half-way through the course, the student team developed a strong conflict between two competing ideas – preservation/restoration of housing along the River Des Peres and major commercial and park development along the Mississippi river. The conflict escalated to the point that a faculty member was asked to mediate. When the suggestion was made that students consider recommending a two-phased project, the conflict was resolved and the students were able to produce a document that articulated a sophisticated approach with very creative proposals. Preservation and restoration of existing housing was recommended for the first phase, with the larger commercial/park proposal being proposed in a later phase.

An early participant in the course emphasized the group dynamics point in a reflection on her experience in the course.

Most of my graduate coursework was taught vertically…. The result is that students are not prepared to operate in the real world where challenges and issues are multi-

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26 The River City Casino opened in March 2010 in the vicinity of the proposal area. Tim Logan, River city Opens With Questions, and a Dollop of Spectacle, STLtoday.com (March 2, 2010), retrieved March 25, 2011 from http://www.stltoday.com/business/columns/building-blocks/article ...
disciplinary and responses must be holistic. …The Housing symposium exposed me to the exercise of working with a group of professionals to achieve a realistic product….In the case of my group’s project, “Why Should Clayton Care? A Strategic Approach to Affordable Housing in the St. Louis Region,” we felt that the City of Clayton actually learned something from our work….the Housing Symposium was the turning point in my professional development….It also taught me to think more horizontally – incorporating all disciplines in an attempt to revitalize communities.27

The student, a graduate student in social work, later obtained employment with a major national housing and community development firm headquartered in St. Louis.

III. The Research Project

In 2009, we developed a research project to understand how the course impacted both alumni and the community partners for whom the projects were conducted. We divided the research into two parts: 1) analysis of the impact, if any, of student proposals for, and interaction with, cooperating organizations,28 and 2) analysis of the impact, if any, on the professional careers of law and public policy students who took the course.29

Questionnaires were sent to representatives of more than 40 cooperating agencies and organizations, as well as approximately 100 law and public policy alumni. Interview questions for agency representatives sought to determine the extent to which the student proposals were useful and what, if anything happened as a result of those proposals. We knew, for example, from earlier conversations that a student proposal was instrumental in Saint Louis University’s

27 Lisa MechamAngstreicht, Reflections on the Housing Symposium – Fall 1996 (undated) (copy on file with authors), quoted in Salsich, supra note 17, at p.962.
28 IRB # 15873, supra note 22.
decision to add down payment assistance as a fringe benefit for first-time home-buying employees who plan to live in the City of St. Louis. We also knew from these conversations that an Urban Planning graduate student later went to law school on a fellowship from the American Planning Association and received the Community Development award from the University of Maryland School of Law for her work with a neighborhood corporation. Her motivation to attend law school and become involved in the neighborhood development clinic was her experience as a planning student in the Symposium working on a proposal to expand a day-care center in an inner-city neighborhood.30

1. Agency Interviews

Interviews were held with fourteen agency representatives, several of whom were familiar with more than one project. For some projects, the length of time between the research and actual course experience limited the number of interview respondents. In several instances those responsible for the project had left the agency or had only general recall of the experience.

These interviews suggest that what influence student proposals may have had on subsequent agency decisions are more likely to be of the “nudge”31 character rather than direct. For example, Chris Krehmeyer, Executive Director of Beyond Housing, a not-for-profit housing development and management company, helped prepare RFPs for Beyond Housing in two St. Louis County locations, Castle Point, an unincorporated area in north St. Louis County (1997) and the City of Pagedale (2007). Reflecting on those experiences, he recalled that the students “raised interesting questions.” While he could not point to a specific proposal that Beyond Housing adopted, he noted that the students’ perspectives concerning specific goals and

30 Phone conversation between Dr. Mary Domahidy and Gwendolyn Allen, MA, Urban Planning and Real Estate Development, Saint Louis University (2003); Request for Proposal, The Learning Tree Intergenerational Center, Inc. (2002).
objectives of Beyond Housing in the target areas “force us to re-think our suppositions about what we are doing.”

Sean Thomas, Executive Director, Old North St. Louis Restoration Group worked with students in 2004 and 2007. The 2004 RFP sought a plan to redevelop a two-block area of 14th Street that was closed to vehicular traffic in 1972 to implement a pedestrian mall plan funded through the Model Cities program. The mall plan had promised to revive the local market area by creating an attractive shopping area. However, the plan was not successful and businesses began leaving the area. The 2007 RFP sought proposals to restore the historic Mullanphy Emigrant Home, a point of entry for Irish immigrants in the 19th century which was in serious disrepair after two walls were blown down by severe storms.

While the students’ proposals “did not automatically transfer into development, they both were helpful,” he stated. He stressed that the proposals were “good sources of information and provided good feedback.” In fact, the students “were ahead of the curve on what might be possible” with their 2004 proposal, which provided “good visuals that we were able to use,” Mr. Thomas stated. Their proposed streetscape was “not that far from what our architects came up with two years later,” he noted. The goal of the 2007 Mullanphy RFP was to save the building. Students proposed a mix of uses, including a museum, restaurant and bar on the first floor, a youth hostel for travelers of modest means on the second floor and a for-profit boutique hotel on the third floor. Mr. Thomas noted that their proposal was quite similar to one proposed by Hostelry International, and was “more appealing” to him. He commented that his conversations

32 Interview with Chris Krehmeyer, Executive Director, Beyond Housing, May 11, 2009.
33 Interview with Sean Thomas, Executive Director, Old North St. Louis Restoration Group, May 19, 2009.
34 Id.
37 Thomas, supra note 34.
with the students “have helped me articulate” our desires for the building. He also stated that student work on Historic Tax Credit standards and requirements was “very helpful.”

Other interviews with representatives of sponsoring organizations revealed that the student proposals were particularly useful in stimulating discussion among staff and/or board members about alternatives not previously identified. They found this as its greatest advantage. One explained that the students “see the community in a different way from us…we have blinders…they bring cutting edge ideas.” Such openness may not, however, be accepted by the community. One disadvantage of the course is the limits on timing imposed by the semester format. Sixteen weeks does not provide adequate time to understand issues and prepare a response. Still, such limits reflect professional practice in consultation work. Faculty oversight is important to keep students focused to address specific aspects of the project most important to the community.

2. Alumni Survey

We surveyed 99 course alumni through a mailed questionnaire sent in June, 2009, yielding 18 responses. Eleven law students responded and seven from policy backgrounds. Questions included whether participants found the course beneficial to their educational and professional goals and reasons why the course was or was not so beneficial; whether or not participants obtained better insight into the urban planning and development process and why; whether and how participants utilize awareness of other disciplinary perspectives in their work; whether or not the interdisciplinary component of the course has proved beneficial to their academic and/or professional careers, and whether or not the experience of preparing a response

\[ld.\]
to an RFP from an agency affected their practice and why. A final question asks for suggestions to improve the course, including the interdisciplinary perspective.39

In explaining how the course benefited them, the course alumni responses share four themes. Most found that the course provided an opportunity to “work with other professionals in other disciplines,” and they elaborated on how they utilize an interdisciplinary perspective in their work now. Secondly, they reported that the “team approach was useful in teaching about ‘group dynamics.’” Third, they saw the course providing “insight into ‘real world’ urban issues.” Finally, some cited the course as “sparking their interest in urban issues” and stimulating their desire to focus their career in such work.

a) “Work with other professionals in other disciplines”

Characteristic of this theme, one alumnus recognized that “multi-disciplinary teams figure into community development projects” and another explained that

The interdisciplinary nature of the course really made me understand that there are numerous languages involved in urban issues. In each of my roles, I needed to be able to speak and understand as an attorney, a banker, a developer, and accountant, a politician, and engineer, an architect, a citizen, a government employee.

Another explained that “working with an interdisciplinary group on a real project helped to understand the thought process, strengths and weaknesses of other disciplines.”

The alumni reported that the interdisciplinary perspective was useful. One explained that it was

…beneficial to utilize the viewpoints from the 3 disciplines to complete a real world problem. It made me more open to using the other experts from other disciplines to solve legal problems.

39 IRB #16094, supra note 30, at p. 11.
Another elaborated that the course “provided a glimpse into the types of issues that the others need to cope with as we all worked toward the same goal.” Such ability included seeing “the complementary goals of each discipline and how they can work together.” As one commented, “I am very good at knowing what I don’t know and who to go to on particular questions.” One found that such perspective was useful in starting a “site of a national mentoring program that required a lot of coalition building.” Another saw that such “problem solving is a great experience for lawyers. It takes you away from the adversarial role and into advocacy.”

Alumni provided examples of how they continue to use their awareness of other disciplinary perspectives in their work, especially when that “requires … work[ing] with a variety of professionals…” For example,

In affordable housing law we are regularly interacting with auditors, architects, policy makers and planning professionals. It helps to be aware of the perspectives of others and what they bring to the table.

Also, another has to

...consult with private planning firms and with city governments. ..do appellate arbitration and mediation …all in administrative land use areas. Urban poverty issues have much to do with these.

Other examples of how they use an interdisciplinary viewpoint include work with:

• principles of community organizing and communication surrounding a neighborhood issue,

• financial vehicles, laws about conservation easements, etc.,

• clients with kids in custody [who] are always involved in multiple systems with different approaches,

• the occasional pro bono work I do with indigent clients,
• a variety of people [in the role of a planner],

• coordinating the efforts of three institutions,

• architects when doing a build out of commercial space.

Beyond actually using the perspective to deal with urban issues, an alumnus notes that

I am responsible for hiring, training, and development of our staff…I work with HR professionals, accounting professionals, real estate professionals, and other attorneys. It is important to recognize and utilize their expertise.

b) “Team approach useful in what it taught about group dynamics”

The course requirement for an interdisciplinary group project also received attention in the alumni responses. They found it “helpful to develop a team approach to solving a problem” and “interesting to consider how people with different skills and interests could contribute to a project”. Also, “leadership experience in this class helped me.”

c) “Providing insight into ‘real world’ urban issues”

Alumni focused on the “real world” aspects of the team project as the major way in which the course “…showed practical application of the theories.” At least one “…loved the complexity of the process.” Pragmatically, another found that “the project is a good discussion piece for portfolio I can use to network to apply for jobs.”

Respondents saw that the project “provided groundwork for honing in on ‘real world’ skills used in everyday practice” [that] “…exposed me to other aspects of the process…” to better comprehend how various urban issues are interconnected.” More specifically, the “real life” experiences of dealing with various organizations and individuals both government and NGOs [showed] how community development projects unfold and the real time they can require.
Beyond that, [the] “program forced you to look at issues beyond your area of
expertise…understanding only legal aspects of a project limits your ability to meet the needs of
the community. Understanding the needs of the clients served is vital to a successful project.
“[Such]… insight into the complexities of working with the people involved as well as the
interdisciplinary perspectives on neighborhood issues…” “…gave me firsthand experience with
the different types of people (and their particular agendas) that you encounter.” Further, “…
[the community] still struggles with many challenging issues that I would not have understood
unless I was there in person….although I have lived [here] my entire life; I had no knowledge of
the efforts at urban planning already in place in my own city. The tour of the various project
sites was one of the most beneficial aspects.” Another had “…never before considered the
impact of urban sprawl, a community underutilizing its utility infrastructure and the benefits of
mixed income housing in improving a neighborhood. I have a deeper appreciation for the
changes [the area] has gone through since I moved here in 2000.”

d) “Sparking … interest in urban issues”

For some respondents, the course had more profound impact. One explained that it
“Sparked…interest …and was the catalyst for me to learn more about urban issues as they relate
to planning and laws.” For another, “…it gave me interest to work more at creating and/or
enhancing urban neighborhoods.” A third found that it “gave me a comprehensive view of the
issues involved in land use planning for a neighborhood. Several found that it “raised
awareness” or “…gave me a new perspective on many issues I had not considered previously.”
One “later shot a documentary that led to first job…. “Another stated it “inspired me…”
IV. Discussion of research findings

The course alumni responses together with those of community partners inform an outcomes-based approach to course design and placement in the curriculum. Such information shapes course goals as well as content and method. This section explores these dimensions of course development.

Based on the outcomes identified among the alumni, the goals of an interdisciplinary course focused on urban issues should be to develop awareness and knowledge of the complexity of those issues as well as their interconnections and to develop skill in the processes for dealing with them. Developing awareness includes developing attitudes that support openness to other points of view, appreciation for the contribution of other perspectives, valuing a problem solving approach, and a desire to work to enhance urban environments. For some this becomes a passion.

The voices of these alumni indicate that the knowledge component of such a course should provide a comprehensive view of urban issues including interdisciplinary views on neighborhood issues and development in an urban area. Even more specifically, the content should address principles of community development law and practice, the impact of urban sprawl, the problem of underutilizing infrastructure, the benefits of mixed income housing, and the real time that projects require as well as how they unfold. Closely related to the latter, the content should explore developing alternative financial vehicles and options such as conservation easements. Finally, the course should incorporate discussion of group dynamics.

Course design also includes identifying and articulating skills necessary to apply knowledge to situations the future professionals likely will encounter as part of their practice. From the experience of the alumni, the skills they call upon and value include the ability to look
at issues beyond their expertise, to know their limits and whom to seek for consultation, to work as part of a team, to coordinate with others, to work with different types of people, and to practice leadership in the process.

How students gain the attitudes, knowledge, and skills incorporated into the sixteen week course plan remains to be addressed. The alumni assessment of their experience directs attention to three items: 1) the project RFP to which an interdisciplinary team of students will respond, 2) the introductory tour of project sites, and 3) the importance of talking with community stakeholders. The project provides the meeting ground for applying knowledge and developing attitudes and skills. In the project setting, students meet with colleagues from other disciplines as well as with neighborhood residents, community activists, and agency representatives. Here they learn to “hone the real world skills.” The tour of community project sites introduces them to the different contexts that make up the complex and interconnected urban setting. Representatives from the sites speak to the students to introduce the projects and their context, their hopes and expectations.

V. Recent Course Organization and Activities

Substantial transition occurred in 2009-2010. By the fall, 2010 semester, the three founding instructors, Mary Domahidy, Public Policy-SLU, Peter Salsich, SLU-Law, and Thomas Thomson, WU-Architecture, had transitioned out of the course. New faculty partners stepped in and the course retained its interdisciplinary flavor. Interdisciplinary student teams in 2010 responded to four RFPs from a variety of agencies and organizations, including the East St. Louis Parks District, Habitat for Humanity St. Louis, a partnership between Sunny Mount
Baptist Church and Bellefontaine Cemetery in St. Louis, and the Skinker DeBaliviere (St. Louis) Community Council.\textsuperscript{40}

The East St. Louis Park District RFP requested a “sustainability strategy for the Jones Park Community Garden and Greenhouse.” The RFP represented the second phase of a project begun during the spring 2010 semester by a group of students in practicum with the Alliance for Building Capacity (ABC) of the Washington University George Warren Brown School of Social Work. Working with the East St. Louis University Collaborative of five university partners, the ABC students identified “an increasing interest in creating and sustaining community gardens” in East St. Louis. Jones Park was selected as the site for a community garden and greenhouse and the RFP asked the student team to develop a “sustainability plan, including a financial/business case and a strategy for engaging community residents/volunteers to maintain and develop the garden as a vehicle for building social capital and neighborhood/resident empowerment.”\textsuperscript{41}

Habitat St. Louis now builds approximately 30 for-sale homes a year, and has plans to increase that number to 50 homes a year within the next five years. Finding available lots in suitable neighborhoods is an increasingly complex problem for Habitat. The Habitat RFP (Appendix A) asked a student team

“to suggest a 2013 build site(s). They will need to (1) find the location (either in the city or county, or a split build between both), (2) explain why it is a good location, (3) identify possible funding sources HFHSL could tap into, (4) analyze real estate legal issues including, but not limited to: land use, development plans, variances, re-subdivision, tax abatement, set-backs, etc., (5) identify issues and resources available to, and possibly confronting, the new homeowners in the areas identified, and (6) create a

\textsuperscript{40} Urban Issues Symposium, Syllabus (Fall 2010), copy on file with authors.
\textsuperscript{41} East St. Louis Parks District RFP, Syllabus, \textit{supra} note 40.
house design that will meet LEED and UD standards, as well as fall within a design style, and cost parameters, suitable for a Habitat home.\textsuperscript{42} Students were asked to pay particular attention to design issues as well as land use regulatory issues associated with neighborhood infill development.\textsuperscript{43}

The Sunny Mount Baptist Church / Bellefontaine Cemetery Partnership RFP asked two student teams to assist partnership members in the development of a redevelopment strategy for the Mark Twain Northeast Neighborhood in St. Louis.

Group A will work on the development of a health clinic and senior housing/services for the neighborhood. Housing ideas may also include planning and services for housing for grandparents raising their grandchildren, if such needs are identified.

Group B will work on the development of a grocery store and youth services/resources as well as a youth gathering place. Youth services will include the church’s Summer Youth Program, as well as a pre-school YMCA Head Start program.\textsuperscript{44}

Students were asked to develop recommended neighborhood designs, cost estimates and funding options, research potential business partnerships, incorporate “tenets of sustainability and community health,” and research “tax, funding, legal and zoning strategies.”\textsuperscript{45}

Lucier Park, a 2.97 acre vest-pocket park in “an isolated section of the Skinker-DeBaliviere neighborhood” in St. Louis was the subject of the final 2010 RFP. Students from nearby schools and residents of the neighborhood use the park for athletic team practices and

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{42}Habitat for Humanity St. Louis 2013 RFP, Syllabus, supra note 40.
\item \textsuperscript{43}Id.
\item \textsuperscript{44}A Redevelopment Strategy for Mark Twain Northeast Neighborhood, Syllabus, supra note 40.
\item \textsuperscript{45}Id.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
informal pick-up games. Gang presence and reports of drug use and drinking in the park have raised concerns among residents. The Lucier Park RFP asked students to articulate[e] and evaluat[e]…alternate strategies to better integrate Lucier Park into the fabric of the SkinkerDeBalieviere community and transform it from a ‘liability’ to a community asset.46

Students were asked to research development rights within Lucier Park, adjacent land uses and development plans, and meet with community and agency stakeholders “to gain insight into the community.” Following a brainstorming session, students were asked to evaluate up to six alternate development strategies and “agree on three strategies / concepts to be further developed.”47

RFPs for the 2011 course included two requests from the City of Ferguson in northwest St. Louis County, a community that suffered major damage and destruction from a tornado that swept through the community on April 22, 2011. More than 180 properties in Ferguson suffered heavy or moderate damage in a narrow, two-block wide swath through residential neighborhoods. One of the RFPs (Appendix B) asks students to “assist in developing a comprehensive recovery plan for dealing with the housing issues as a result of the tornado and to address the long-term rebuilding of the area.”48 The other asks students to prepare plans for the future reuse of the land in a 1950s era subdivision that has gone through a cycle of disinvestment and currently is being transitioned into a land bank. Most of the slab-on-grade houses have deteriorated to such extent that they have been or are being demolished.49

47Id.
48City of Ferguson Tornado Recovery Project RFP (2011) (copy on file with authors).
49Draft Plaza Heights Redevelopment RFP (2011) (copy on file with authors).
VI. Recommendations for Course Refinement

As the 2010 and 2011 RFPs suggest, students are being asked to respond to increasingly sophisticated urban planning and design issues. This added complexity puts a premium on early faculty course planning as well as early organization of student teams. The involvement of as many as five graduate and professional school disciplines from two universities, coupled with a variety of neighborhood groups, non-profit organizations and municipalities in a two-state region requires faculty and student coordination earlier rather than later.

Planning and coordination of an interdisciplinary course like the Urban/Housing Issues Symposium takes place in two phases: early faculty planning of the course themes, including the recruitment of RFPs, and early organization of student teams. Course planning and recruitment of RFPs should begin at least six months prior to the start of the semester. Four or five RFPs are needed for a typical course of approximately 20 students. The process of contacting neighborhood groups, non-profit organizations and municipalities for RFP ideas, and refining those ideas into workable RFPs can take weeks, even months. Ideally, one faculty member will take the lead in organizing the four/five member faculty team. Our practice has been to ask each member of the faculty team to take responsibility for recruiting and preparing one RFP.

The second planning and organization phase takes place during the first two weeks of the course. Sixteen weeks appears long to students (and faculty) at the beginning of a semester. But that length can shrink very quickly if faculty and students aren’t well-organized at the beginning. The dilemma we faced each year was how to help students from different disciplines become comfortable with what often appeared to them to be new languages and points-of-view they were encountering, and at the same time helping them organize themselves into functioning interdisciplinary teams ready to focus on particular RFPs. This “comfort” issue sometimes takes
several weeks to resolve. But if teams are not organized within the first two or three weeks, including the tour of the RFP sites, students likely will have greater difficulty in creating an effective response to the RFP they have selected. Our experience has led us to believe that early team organization must take precedence over a more leisurely interdisciplinary discussion process which can and should be integrated into the remaining class sessions.

**Conclusion**

Professor Ulen includes a capstone problems course in his recommendations for law school curriculum change. While we did not operate the Urban/Housing Issues Symposium as a capstone course, it certainly could be structured in that way. The course is not designed for entry-level students because we believe that students need a basic foundation in their own disciplines before engaging in interdisciplinary work. Ideally, the course would extend over two semesters – the first semester would be the course we have described in this essay and the second semester would engage students in the process of implementing one or more of the proposals prepared in the first semester.

We established the Urban / Housing Issues Symposium on the assumption that students would benefit from an interdisciplinary, problem-based course. Alumni who took the time to respond to our questionnaire confirmed that their experiences in the course have been useful to them in their professional lives. Our findings also indicate that cooperating agencies and organizations have benefited from the fresh perspectives students have brought to their activities. These findings strengthen our belief that interdisciplinary coursework is a worthwhile addition to graduate and professional schools’ curricula.

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50Supra note 5, at 334.
Appendix A

Urban Issues Symposium – Fall 2010

Habitat for Humanity St. Louis 2013: build site, design and financing

Habitat for Humanity St. Louis (“HFHSTL”) is the local affiliate of Habitat for Humanity International. As one of the largest Habitat affiliates in the United States, HFHSTL currently produces approximately 30 for-sale houses a year. Plans for HFHSTL are to produce at least 50 houses a year within the next 5 years.

HFHSTL develops and sells homes to qualifying homebuyers at a 0% interest mortgage, which is the major reason why Habitat homes are so affordable. Homebuyers contribute at least 350 hours of “sweat equity” into the production of their new home. For more information about HFHSTL, and Habitat for Humanity’s mission, principles, requirements, etc. in general, see: www.habitatstl.org.

One of the challenges HFHSTL will face in the future is finding enough lots, and the right kind of lots in suitable communities, to develop an increasing number of homes each year. Future planning efforts for HFHSTL will be vital to the success of the organization in order to give it the time it needs to plan, fundraise, design, and develop financing for future build projects, as well as anticipate the organizational growth which will necessarily occur with the development and sale of more homes, and the creation of more homeowners.

HFHSTL’s Real Estate Development Manager is Virginia Williams (who took the Urban Issues Symposium class in the fall of 2009). More information about Virginia can be found here: http://www.habitatstl.org/aboutus/ourmanagementteam.htm. Virginia is interested in having a team of students from this class put together the following proposal/project:

Students will be asked to suggest a 2013 build site(s). They will need to (1) find the location (either in the city or county, or a split build between both), (2) explain why it is a good location, (3) identify possible funding sources HFHSTL could tap into, (4) analyze real estate legal issues including, but not limited to: land use, development plans, variances, re-subdivision, tax abatement, set-backs, etc., (5) identify issues and resources available to, and possibly confronting, the new homeowners in the areas identified, and (6) create a house design that will meet LEED and UD standards, as well as fall within a design style, and cost parameters, suitable for a Habitat home. Ideally, the proposal from these students will go to HFHSTL’s internal “Project Development Committee” for consideration as a future build project.

Students will meet with and work with Virginia Williams during the course of this project. It is expected that Virginia will help the students get started with this project so they are not casting about, without any direction whatsoever, with respect to what areas, neighborhoods, and/or municipalities to even begin considering with respect to a future, proposed build site. Additional team time and efforts will involve meetings and work with other HFHSTL staff as needed, or in individual and team capacities. Students have a responsibility to manage their contact with the
project champion efficiently and effectively, respecting the individual’s time, responsibilities, and perspectives.

**Project Requirements:**

1. Student disciplines are expected to contribute items including, **but not limited to**, the following:

   a. **Architecture/Design:** propose a 2013 house design that: (1) fits within Habitat’s mandate to produce simple, decent housing, (2) is within Habitat’s financial capabilities to produce, (3) is within Habitat’s staff capabilities (noting heavy use of volunteer labor) to produce, (4) is energy efficient, and meets the “LEED” standards HFHSTL strives to achieve, (5) incorporates “universal design” principles and requirements, and (6) balances the existing aesthetics of the proposed build area with all of the above criteria.

   b. **Law:** analyze all aspects of the (1) zoning, (2) land use and division, (3) redevelopment strategies, plans and/or resources, and (4) “subsidies” that may be applicable to the proposed build project.

   c. **Planning/Public Policy:** (1) utilize the LEED for Neighborhood Development criteria as a checklist for finding a 2013 build site location, and (2) identify and discuss public policy issues, goals, etc. associated with the development of for-sale, affordable, single-family homes in the areas considered, and/or the final area identified, (3) identify and discuss political issues associated with the potential development.

   d. **Social Work:** (1) research community resources, including: schools, grocery stores, drug stores, job centers, child care and development resources, transportation, etc. Also, (2) consider the opportunity of ownership of a Habitat home as a vehicle for “wealth creation” for the homeowner and his/her family, and consider the long-term value and viability of the home as an “investment” made by the homeowner in the areas considered, and/or the final area identified.
Appendix B

Name of Project: City of Ferguson Tornado Recovery Project
Date: June 27, 2011
Project Champion Name: Rosalind Williams, Director of Planning and Development
Project Champion Contact Information: City of Ferguson, 110 Church Street, Ferguson, MO 63135. Phone: 314-524-5181. E-mail: rwilliams@fergusoncity.com

Project Background:

The City of Ferguson experienced a major tornado on April 22, 2011 that left in its path the destruction of homes and commercial properties. Large mature trees fell or were blown into houses, resulting in damage to individual homes. High winds from the tornado took off roofs of homes, several churches, an elementary school and some commercial buildings. Neighborhood areas affected by the tornado varied socio-economically in regards to the variety of the housing stock and in the tenure of the occupants. Those with insurance coverage and higher incomes are able to recover and make repairs to their homes fairly quickly. The areas where there were substantial numbers of rentals and bank-owned properties, those homes are not being cleaned-up and repaired for a variety of reasons.

The tornado primarily affected a narrow two block wide swath through the City. Three neighborhoods North Dade, Jeske Park, and Robert Superior were most impacted by the tornado. The North Dade Neighborhood has the largest number of properties that have not been cleared of storm damage debris and houses repaired from tornado damage. Twenty-six out of a total of about 68 heavily or moderately damages homes are considered by the City to be vacant and/or neglected homes due to tornado damage. The area has the largest number of licensed rental properties, although that does not necessarily explain the purported abandonment of these houses.

The Jeske Park Neighborhood is the oldest neighborhood in Ferguson and is known for its large homes and heavy canopy of trees. Approximately 22 homes were heavily damaged and 19 homes moderately damaged within a four block area. Two of these are rented properties and one property is considered vacant and neglected. A church completely lost its roof and plans to rebuild.

The Robert Superior Neighborhood on the east end of the affected tornado damaged area experienced less severe damage to homes. However, 9 of its 30 damaged homes are either vacant or not being worked on. Two abandoned homes were found to be banked owned.

The following statistics underscore the problem the City is now facing:

Total of 183 Properties in Ferguson with heavy to moderate tornado damage:
• 108 w/Moderate Damage
• 75 w/ Heavy Damage

10 Commercially zoned properties damaged (including First Baptist Church of Ferguson):
• 4 w/ Moderate Damage
• 6 w/ Heavy Damage
165 Residentially zoned properties damaged (including First Christian Church of Ferguson and Griffith Elementary):
- 98 w/ Moderate Damage
- 67 w/ Heavy Damage

35 Residential rental properties damaged:
- 24 w/ Moderate Damage
- 11 w/ Heavy Damage

2 Bank owned properties damaged:
- 1 w/ Moderate Damage, 300 Coopinger Dr. (FRONTENAC BANK) 1-877-205-5777
- 1 w/ Heavy Damage, 528 Royal Ave (FORTUNE BANK) (636) 464-9003

Total of 38 Homes with little to no cleanup and/or repairs made

Scope of Work Required

The City is interested in having the class assist in developing a comprehensive recovery plan for dealing with the housing issues as a result of the tornado and to address the long-term rebuilding of the area.

Before the tornado, the City had a substantial number of foreclosed homes and single family rentals in the Robert Superior and North Dade neighborhoods. Many of the homes are considered obsolete, because of their size and lack of modern amenities. Investor-owned properties make up over 20% of all single family homes in the City as a whole and many of these were properties that were not desirable to homebuyers. The City, in the past five years, instituted a rental license program to make landlords more accountable for the maintenance of the outside of the structure. Last year the City started inspecting the interior of these homes upon occupancy. Recovery from the tornado will not only involve immediate repairs and clean up of yards, but will also have to address the underlying housing market situations that existed before.

Issues and concerns to be addresses and suggested strategies include:

1. What constraints are preventing homeowners from rebuilding or repairing their homes?

2. Is insurance coverage sufficient to cover the cost of repairs?

3. Is FEMA assistance being used in recovery and if not, what are the issues?

4. How can the City address abandoned properties including bank-owned properties?

5. Provide design assistance to property owners undertaking the rebuilding process to maintain the character of their neighborhood.

6. Develop prototypical designs to enhance the desirability of smaller obsolete homes and improve energy efficiency.

7. Develop strategies for replacing trees and re-establishing the natural environment in the neighborhoods.
**Project Timeline**

Week of 9/15/11 – Students meet with Project Champion
Week of 10/3/11 – Students present preliminary project to Project Champion
Week of 11/14/11 – Students present draft final project to Department Heads
Tuesday, November 22, 20011 – Students present final project results to Ferguson City Council.