Reflections on Experiences of a Visiting Scholar at Urban & Regional Studies Institute: Minnesota State University, Mankato

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INTRODUCTION

An eminent economist, E. F. Schumacher, wrote a book entitled Small is Beautiful to make a case “for economics as if people mattered” and by that emphasized development through strengthening small and medium level enterprises in various countries. Since my arrival in Mankato in August, 2008, the title of Schumacher’s book has been ringing a bell in my ears as a result of what I have seen at Minnesota State University, Mankato. By many standards Minnesota State Mankato is a small university but its beauty is indescribable. Let me salute students of Minnesota State Mankato for the elegant Centennial Student Union structure they built to add extra beauty to the physical structure of the university.

Having appreciated the small size of Minnesota State Mankato and the beauty that goes with it let me comment on my experiences here in Minnesota State Mankato. The foundation of the KNUST-Minnesota State Mankato collaboration was well designed and built by all standards. No sooner had Professor Kwasi Kwafo Adarkwa, Vice Chancellor (President) of KNUST, paid a working visit to Minnesota State Mankato than a team of Professors of Minnesota State Mankato including Dr. Scott R. Olson (Vice President for Academic Affairs), Dr. John Alessio (Dean, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences), Dr. Anthony Filipovitch (Chair, Urban and Regional Studies Institute) and Dr. Raymond Asomani-Boateng (KNUST Alumnus at Minnesota State Mankato) to mention just a few, arrived at KNUST for further discussions. My presence here was the outcome of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between KNUST and Minnesota State Mankato, signed in October, 2006 to promote collaboration and internationalization of higher education.

REFLECTIONS IN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Before the arrival of Minnesota State Mankato delegation on KNUST campus to discuss issues on collaboration, the KNUST Department of Planning had been involved in twenty-five years of collaboration with Technical University (Dortmund, Germany) in training graduate students from developing countries in Development Planning and Management. Eventually, the high performance of alumni in various countries expanded the collaboration to cover a network of planning universities from the Philippines (East Asia), Republic of Chile (South America) and Tanzania (Africa). In appreciation of the effectiveness of that intercultural educational training, KNUST has been selected as a Centre of Excellence for training planners from developing countries with sponsorship from the German government. The spillover effect of this achievement on the Minnesota State Mankato collaboration cannot be overemphasized as professors who will pay working visits to Ghana in the future, as well as students from Minnesota State Mankato on study abroad missions to Ghana would be integrated into the intercultural planning education in terms of teaching and research. The expected outcome would be enormous, as alumni from this process of training would rise to become the main directors of planning and development institutions in their respective countries. This international approach to higher education would earn many alumni international positions.

Continued on page 4
Letter from the Chair (2009)

"When life gives you lemons, make lemonade." That could be the motto of URSI. Despite the cuts in our budget (see "Doing More with Less") and the shocks to local economies (are I saying anything here that you don't already recognize?), the Institute remains strong and continues to push the envelope.

Our enrollments continue to grow (steadily, not precipitously)—and our students are doing great things! One team did a community marketing plan for St. James, another studied the economic impacts of a community arts fair in Mankato, another developed a plan for downtown revitalization in Waseca, and yet another team prepared a strategy for developing a bicycle-friendly campus for Minnesota State Mankato.

Sam Woods, a graduate student in Planning, was elected Student Director of the MN Chapter of the American Planning Association. And this year's Barrett Fellow, Clay Willhart, has already been hired as economic development director for Hartford, SD.

The faculty have also been very active. Miriam has spent the year at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, Ghana, teaching local government administration. In exchange, Dr. Kwaku Kessey (Chair of the Planning Program at KNUST) has been teaching with us [Intro to the City and Urban Economic Development]. Since Miriam was unavailable, I have been teaching the Public Achievement Program for the Social Studies Education Program (Miriam will take it over next year when she returns). David received an "Excellence Award" from the University for his success in obtaining external support for research. Beth and Raymond both received tenure and were promoted. Beth enjoyed presenting her forthcoming book chapter on the image of public administrators in film at the Midwest Political Science Association conference in Chicago, and Jan published two papers on marketing smaller communities. Jan also brought a team from Springsted, Inc. and the League of Minnesota Cities to the campus and invited local government practitioners to join her class to hear about their new fiscal analysis software. Raymond proposed and got University approval for a permanent course on Environmental Planning. Perry is coming up on retirement in May, 2010, but he continues to be heavily involved with a number of local communities on water and transportation issues (the final leg of the bike loop that he helped plan around the city and out to Minneopa Park should be completed this summer).

And there are a number of new initiatives that you will be noticing. URSI has committed to be a regular part of Minnesota State Mankato's new distance campus at 7700 S. France in Edina. We plan to offer 3-4 classes each semester. We have committed to two years, and intend to continue indefinitely—if we can get the enrollments that we need (it takes at least 1-2 students to pay for a class; 20 students to pay the full cost). Please help us get the word out. URSI has an agreement with Normandale Community College that streamlines baccalaureate completion for an URSI major, so we expect to see undergraduate as well as graduate enrollment in our courses in Edina. URSI faculty are also expanding our online presence. By the end of next year, almost all of us will be teaching at least one course (most generally education offerings) online. We realize that we already make such intensive use of computer technology in our classrooms that the step to completely online was not that daunting. Finally, "global" is becoming the password of the day, and planning and city management are not exempt. "Best practices" are being found in communities abroad and familiarity with other places reinforces the creativity to think of alternatives to "the way things are done here." And our student body is becoming increasingly international. This year, we have students from Ghana, Nepal, Somalia, Canada, and from around the world (you might remember classmates in your time who came from Iran or Saudi Arabia or China or Rwanda or...). International students must demonstrate sufficient funds to support their educational program before they can obtain a student visa; the award of a full graduate assistantship automatically establishes full financial support. Raymond and Tony are working to develop external funding to support international students who come here for our Master's degrees.

We couldn't do all of this without you, the alumni and community. Your support and encouragement are the fuel that propels us, and your support of the students carries them into successful careers. Thanks for all you do.
Service Learning and the Urban & Regional Studies Institute
by Dr. Janet Cherrington

In the educational realm, there has been much discussion on trends in community involvement and service learning (SL) across America’s K-12 institutions, colleges, and universities. While SL is still evolving and has not settled into a shared language, it has established a set of common ideas and theories and generally accepted approaches. One characteristic of SL is that it be reciprocal in nature; that is, beneficial to both the community and the service providers by facilitating a service experience with a learning experience.

Unlike typical classroom credits, SL credits are earned through a combination of community service and classroom activities. In effect, the goal of faculty is to teach students about—while involving them in—community issues to produce adults who are active participants in their communities and have some understanding of the challenges communities face and the strategies to meet these challenges.

URSI faculty member Dr. Janet Cherrington, as well as adjunct faculty (Bob Hugg and Dave Schooff) have developed a variety of projects and curriculum centered on SL. In their general education Community Leadership course they incorporate volunteerism with nonprofit agencies in the Mankato area. An important course requirement is that students complete 30 hours of SL during the semester they are enrolled. In the classroom, core concepts include: leadership, problem-solving, critical thinking, and project management.

Dr. Tony Filipovitch has taken a writing emphasis approach to SL wherein Community Leadership students are required to reflect on their 30 hours of SL in three papers. In the first, they reflect on their organization as an example of a “community institution,” the second, they reflect on the theme of “community leadership” as they saw it practiced in their organization. The third paper focuses on other SL objectives to his Non-Profit Leadership courses NPL 273, 473, 673, wherein students are required to identify a mentor in a nonprofit organization and then “give back” to the organization for the mentoring by volunteering with that organization. The final paper of the course requires the students to reflect on the themes of the course as they saw them carried out at their SL organization. In his URB 4/553 Grants course, student engage in SL by writing a grant proposal for a community organization seeking funding. Last semester all students did this, and the Community (Mapleton) selected what they considered the “best” proposal to submit to the funding agency (AgStar Foundation). In the spring 2009 semester, the opportunity was optional and, in the end, no students selected it.

Other URSI courses include different interpretations of SL as well as different objectives and contexts. One of the earliest approaches was retired Dr. H. Roger Smith’s “studio” projects wherein students would engage in community-based problem solving that centered around a particular community project or problem, e.g., assisting cities with downtown revitalization. The traditional URSI studio course is now a required course in both the URSI planning and management degree programs. Not only does it undertake projects proposed by Minnesota cities, counties, and nonprofits, it provides an excellent opportunity for graduate students to engage in applied research in a “learn-by-doing” context. Mainly Drs. Perry Wood and David Laverny-Rafter teach studio with Dr. Minam Porter assisting in the spring of 2005.

Dr. Beth Weide-Heidelberg has taken yet another approach by adapting field education that provides students with a combination of service opportunities that are related to, but not fully integrated with, their formal academic studies. As

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1 The URSI 230W Community Leadership course is taught by Dr. Tony Filipovitch

Continued on page 5
“Visiting Scholar” continued from page 1

REFLECTIONS IN KNUST-MINNESOTA STATE MANKATO CONTEXT

My experience at Minnesota State Mankato is an observation of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the operational environment of the university. Among the strengths observed in Minnesota State Mankato are the many planning courses offered, which address modern development planning problems such as growth management in municipalities, sustainable communities, community development, public achievement, community leadership, and environmental planning to mention a few. These courses make the planning program at Minnesota State Mankato current and relevant as observed in many international planning schools I have visited.

The general education courses in Minnesota State Mankato arrange according to goal areas also give the students great opportunity to acquire additional knowledge from other disciplines. In other words, students of Minnesota State Mankato should count themselves fortunate for such an opportunity.

Again, Minnesota State Mankato runs an open door management system which gives professors direct access to information from various levels of the university administration. Also, the involvement of students and faculty in university administration is appreciable. Like many universities there is a high degree of academic freedom in Minnesota State Mankato. The books, equipment and materials available at Minnesota State Mankato for teaching and learning are excellent for progressive knowledge acquisition. I was impressed by the exhibitions mounted by both the undergraduate and graduate students in the university. That gave the public an opportunity to observe and appreciate what the Minnesota State Mankato students are doing in the area of research. The exhibition also integrates the society and university.

One major weakness I have observed since my arrival at Minnesota State Mankato is the limited number of international students in the university community.

The international students are about 6 percent of the total student population.

According to records, during the fall semester 2008 when I arrived, there were only 636 international students from 72 countries in Minnesota State Mankato. In this respect, I consider marketing Minnesota State Mankato across the globe an important goal. With Minnesota State Mankato’s current dynamic effort at internationalization of education, there is a big opportunity for building bridges to link other parts of the world. This will enrich the syllabi of the university; joint researches by faculties, and cultural orientation. In this context, former Minnesota State Mankato visiting scholars would become the Minnesota State Mankato ambassador extraordinary throughout the world. This implies that the International office should establish strong links with all former visiting scholars alumni. In other words, to bright international students and scholars here to study and work respectively is one side of the coin and establishing a foundation to promote this idea would be a step in the right direction. The same of an academic institution is developed by its alumni, many of whom work with international organizations. Minnesota State Mankato should follow up its international alumni to demonstrate to the world that it has entered a new phase of raising its international image.

If there are threats to Minnesota State Mankato administration, that will come from other universities’ strategies to attract students away from Minnesota State Mankato.

Therefore Minnesota State Mankato has to strengthen its position in USA by:

- Attracting renowned academics to their faculties.
- Developing its faculties to become academics of international fame.
- Promoting knowledge through scientific research.
- Providing education that combines knowledge and confidence in the students.
- Promoting a high degree of performance in sports.
- Developing a strong capital base to carry out its activities.

These ideas among others have the tendency to ward off all threats in the way of Minnesota State Mankato from becoming an educational giant. For Minnesota State Mankato to become an educational giant in the U.S. and abroad would require all hands on deck. All stakeholders including students, alumni, faculty, staff, parents/guardians, employer-Minnesota State and friends of Minnesota State Mankato, both home and abroad, should prepare to embark.
Faculty Updates

for both the Janesville Planning Commission and Economic Development Authority. If you would like more information about the courses Janet teaches, feel free to contact her with the e-mail link on her web page at http://www.intech.mnsu.edu/cherrington/


Tony's work extends beyond the academic realm, advocating for communities at the local, regional, and state level. He contributed the article, "legislature should revisit nonprofit law," to the Mankato Free Press, in the January 29, 2009 issue. He testified before the Minn. House K-12 Education Finance Division, School Construction Work Group, on the issue of removing State minimum coreage requirements for school construction; and later testified before the House Education Policy Committee on minimum site standards for schools for HF 898 in March. Tony was also appointed to the Research Committee of the Center for Rural

Continued on page 6

URSI Comes to the Twin Cities

URSI is proud to announce that it will be offering three courses at the new Edina campus at 7700 France Avenue during the 2009 fall semester. Students can complete some of their core courses and electives for the Bachelor's and Master's degree without making the commute to Mankato.

Three courses will be offered during the fall semester: Urban Design focuses both on the principles of the design aesthetic and the public policy process behind project implementation. Economic Development teaches students the policies and practices of business attraction and retention. Long Range and Strategic Planning will prepare students to look into the future, and how to guide citizens and government officials in the development of comprehensive and long-range plans for communities.

URSI anticipates Spring 2010 offerings to be Foundations, a core course for any URSI major that examines local government structures, planning, and management basics; Urban Analysis, the second in the foundational set, with an emphasis on analysis techniques and other basic skills a local government employee will need; and Planning Process, a course that addresses the role planning plays in developing "good" cities and regions within the confines of capitalism and political realities.

For more information about the 7700 France campus, visit http://www.mnsu.edu/7700france/. Urban Studies specific information is not yet available on the site, but the department is working with the webmaster to get updated information online soon. For past course syllabi, visit URSI's web site, http://sbs.mnsu.edu/ursi/

"Services Learning" continued from page 3

a case in point, students developed a series of architectural pattern books under Dr. Wiebe's direction for the City of Mankato for specific districts. In this field project, students learned how to connect with the community by taking inventory, analyzing existing building stock, and identifying their overall architectural themes. Dr. Asamani-Boateng's Environmental Planning class took an ecological approach to SL by having his students evaluate two artificial wetlands in Mankato and in another instance conducting a needs assessment survey for a city's Chamber of Commerce.

Public Information and Involvement (PII) is a combined senior undergraduate and first-year graduate course that Dr. Janet Cherrington teaches. It focuses on the concepts of marketing and media relations and promotes learning through active student participation. In this type of experiential learning, the intention is to benefit the provider (students, URSI & Minnesota State Mankato) and the recipient (a town or small city) of the service equally.

Part of the learning process is teaching future city administrators, planners, and economic development directors how to create a brochure that promotes tourism and economic development for a city. Since 2003 Dr. Cherrington has directed students in producing four of these PII studio projects. They promoted the towns of Saint Peter, Janesville, New Prague, and St. James. PII also explores how a multi-disciplinary collaboration between two institutions of higher learning can jumpstart the connection between SL for students and a community's successful public information effort. The results have been win-win situations; the students gained 21st century skills and valuable real work experience while the communities gained timely, professional products to successfully compete for place recognition.

While it takes quite a bit of effort to successfully implement SL into existing curriculum, it is well worth it. Whatever form SL takes—volunteerism, community service, field education, or internships—the core concept is one that contributes to the personal and professional growth of professors, students, the URSI department, Minnesota State Mankato, and the broader community.

2 Minnesota State University's Urban & Regional Studies Institute's Public Involvement/Information class and South Central Community College's Applied Production class.
Faculty Updates

Policy and Development in 2008. Locally, he was elected Chair of Mankato’s new Historic Preservation Commission in February, and selected as Vice-Chair for the Mankato Area’s Envision 2020 implementation team, 2009.

Tony has actively been presenting his work, both solo and in panel discussions. He presented for a panel, “Real Life Civics Lessons. Bringing the Community into the Classroom,” at the MN Council for the Social Studies conference in March, served as panel chair, “Planning to Keep All 10,000 Lakes,” American Planning Association Conference, Minneapolis in April of 2009, and will be presenting, “Planning Ethics,” MnAPA Conference, Brooklyn Park in September of 2009. He is also working on modeling impacts of six business industry sectors targeted by the Southern Minnesota Competitive Project, an interactive display for the Children’s Museum of Southern Minnesota called “Seeing the Community,” and surveying the nonprofit sector in Ghana with colleagues at KNUST in Kumasi, Ghana.

Professor Laverny-Rafter, AICP, has continued his involvement in transportation research and was invited to present a paper at the 2008 national American Evaluation Association conference titled “Implementing Mandated Transportation Evaluation Research.” Using an Urban Studies faculty research release time grant, this research is now being converted into a journal article.

In addition to research, Professor Laverny-Rafter contributed to several planning conferences. In the Fall, 2008, he conducted a session on Planning Ethics at the conference of the Minnesota Chapter of the American Planning Association in Duluth. The conference room for this session was packed which testifies to strong interest among planners in ethical issues facing the profession and the recent

Continued on page 7

Minnesota State Mankato-KNUST Partnership: Visions for the Future
Dr. Raymond Asomani-Boateng

As one through whose efforts the Minnesota State Mankato-KNUST partnership came into fruition I am glad to briefly comment on my vision for the future. This partnership is in its 4th year and growing from strength to strength. A lot of things have happened within these four years. One of these important components has included faculty exchange. Three faculty members from KNUST have been at Minnesota State Mankato whilst three from Minnesota State Mankato have visited KNUST, myself, Dr. Tony Filipovitch, and Dr. Miriam Porter, who served an academic year teaching students at KNUST.

Student recruitment has also played a strong role in the program - the number of Ghanaian students studying at Minnesota State Mankato has increased significantly in the last four years. In the summer of 2009 three mechanical engineering students were at KNUST’s engineering department on a three week study.

Finally, an important component of this partnership is the Ghana Study Abroad Program. In 2008 Minnesota State Mankato Ghana Study Abroad Program was initiated—the first of its kind at Minnesota State Mankato. Six students and two professors undertook a two-week study in Ghana. The next trip will take place in 2010.

My vision for the future is to identify and create opportunities for Minnesota State Mankato to partner with public and private sector institutions in Ghana in areas of research and consulting. I also plan to tap the skills, experience and knowledge of retired and retiring Minnesota State Mankato faculty to benefit Ghanaian society by creating opportunities for them to work on projects in Ghana as volunteers. In my part of the world, seniors are revered, they embody knowledge, experience and wisdom and are the building blocks and foundation of our society. We hope to share the wisdom of former URSI faculty to create an international bond.

Doing More with Less

Your city’s budget has probably been cut; your retirement fund has probably shrunk, and possibly even your household’s current budget. It has been no different for us. The University has done what it could to protect the teaching part of the budget, but with 80% of this budget directly tied to classroom activity, we still had to bear some of the pain. All of our adjunct positions were taken, and we lost two permanent graduate assistant slots (we did get one-time money to fund them for next year, but beyond that…). All vacant faculty positions are taken, so we stand to lose Perry’s position when he retires next year.

But, like you, we looked for efficiencies. We have been able to protect our core teaching, and while we have had to put many of our elective courses on 2-year cycles, so far we have not had to cut too drastically into our programs. In the past, we would put ourselves and our students at the service of communities for little more than out-of-pocket expenses. In the future, we might have to include the cost of an adjunct to cover the time that the faculty put into the community service activities. We were fortunate in the past to receive a number of HUD (and before that, Pat Harris) Fellowships that supported our students, but Congress has not funded that program for three years now. Alumni donations have provided student support through the Barrett Fellowship. We hope in the near future to have raised enough funds to begin awarding the Smith Fellowship.

Thanks for your generosity. It has played a vital role in helping our talented and dedicated students go further than they thought possible. A gift to URSI is a great, immediate investment in the future (just as you were the beneficiaries of the investments of those who came before you). We are committed to generating real-world solutions that will make a difference in the lives of people, at home and across the globe. This is your legacy and our future.
Sibley Park Historic Survey and Pattern Book

The City of Mankato, in collaboration with Minnesota State Mankato, is nearly finished with an architectural pattern book for its Sibley Park district. The Sibley Park Pattern Book started as a template for individual property owners to guide restoration efforts on their building, but evolved to include a historic resources survey to delineate architecturally significant buildings in the neighborhood. The goal is to have a neighborhood that celebrates its architectural heritage, and integrates it into its future planning and design.

Student field researchers combed the district, documenting and evaluating each property for potential historic resources. Professor Beth Wielde Heidelberg then used this data to create a neighborhood profile, and offer restoration suggestions specific to the historic architectural styles. As a bonus to the pattern book, several Sibley Park properties underwent a ‘makeover’ of sorts – showing the property as it is, with distinct modernizations such as porch enclosures and modern windows, and what it might look like if it was restored to its original era of construction (see accompanying pictures).

Use of the pattern book is voluntary: no Sibley Park property owner is required to undertake any restoration work. The pattern book is meant to ensure it is done correctly, according to original materials, color palettes, and in consideration of the guidelines set forth by the Secretary of the Interior and the National Park Service, who oversee preservation efforts in the United States.
URSI Profiles Alumni Jennifer Mocoll Johnson, Rice County Water Planner

An Urban Planning degree isn’t just about plat review and zoning ordinances. It doesn’t even necessarily mean landing a career in the public sector at all! Jennifer Mocoll (MA-Urban Planning) has shown the diversity of the MA in Urban Planning, and how it can be parlayed into a diverse range of career opportunities. Mocoll has navigated both the private and public sector, and is now serving as the Water Planner for Rice County.

Even as an undergraduate studying water sampling, and GIS, Mocoll had an interest in urban planning. After graduating with her undergrad, before starting the Master’s program, Mocoll veered into the private sector as a GIS technician with Xcel Energy in Minneapolis. When she entered the URSI program, she was a grants coordinator for J.R. Brown MN River Center based in Henderson while working with Dr. Raymond Asomanig-Bocklet, URSI’s environmental planning expert. While studying environmental planning, she became interested in the conflicts and coordination of issues between preservation, conservation, and development. She enrolled in URSI’s graduate courses and held a graduate assistantship to pursue these interests.

Today, Mocoll’s position at Rice County allows her to directly apply her training and interest in environmental planning. She works with homeowners on shoreline issues, trying to assist people that need help with their natural resources but are unaware of the resources available to them. Mocoll cites one case that particularly stands out — receiving a Clean Water Legacy Grant for the Roberts Lake Watershed to inventory septic systems and upgrade the ones deemed an “imminent public health threat.”

When asked about the skills she uses in her work, she cited public speaking and presentation, and “an analysis of comprehensive plan, setbacks and other day-to-day zoning related issues, strategic planning I used when making my 2009-2014 Water Plan—it helped me work with homeowners and try to understand long range natural resource related issues.”

Mocoll says the variety of the job is what keeps her coming back. “When I answer the phone, I never know what type of question the person on the other end has. It always makes me think, and I like that. My job keeps me on my toes.” Mocoll’s work with the public means she has become adept at explaining the rules and regulations to a diverse population, ensuring that they understand the policies Rice County has set forth to protect the natural resources.

Given the breadth of her experience in the private and public sectors, she leaves current URSI students a word of advice, “Any time you sit at home studying for a test, and think to yourself: “When am I ever going to have to know this…” you will be amazed at just how much you use your education.”
Faculty Updates

changes made by AICP to the planning code of ethics. Also, Professor Lavery-Rafter made a presentation at the national American Planning Association Conference in April in Minneapolis on the importance of universities serving the planning needs of communities. The focus of this presentation was on describing the many community planning projects produced by the Urban Studies graduate studio (see separate article in this issue).

Finally, Professor Lavery-Rafter has continued his involvement in community service by serving on the Policy Committee of Transit for Livable Communities, Inc. in St. Paul and serving on the Housing Committee of Linden Hills Neighborhood Council in Minneapolis. Also, he is an active member of the International Division of the American Planning Association.

Dr. Miriam Porter has spent the 2008-2009 academic year teaching at KNUST in Ghana as part of the faculty exchange program. We look forward to reporting on her adventures, both in the classroom and exploring the west African nation, when she returns!

Dr. Beth Wielde was promoted to Associate Professor and granted tenure, which takes effect at the start of the 2009-2010 academic year. She is finishing the second of two historic resources surveys/historic restoration pattern books for the City of Mankato, the first focused

Graduate Studio Course Provides Service to Minnesota Communities

By David Lavery-Rafter

The URSI Studio is supervised by Professor Perry Wood and myself and provides an opportunity for URSI graduate students to engage in service learning (or SL) with Minnesota cities, counties, and nonprofit organizations. In the Studio, the students apply their knowledge and skills to real-world community problems as identified by community clients. The Studio is offered every term and involves breaking up the full class into 3 or 4 person teams with each team selecting a project from among the list of opportunities that have been proposed by Minnesota cities, counties, and nonprofit organizations.

During the 2008-2009 academic year, the Studio consisted of 13 students who were divided up into teams who implemented three projects:

1. City of Waterville, MN Downtown Revitalization Plan. In this project, the students conducted a Visual Preference Survey and a Nominal Group Technique to involve the community and identify strategies for linking the downtown with the regional bike trail system. Based on this analysis, the elected officials and business community plan to improve signage, streetscape, and other amenities in the downtown area.

2. The Arts as a Tool for Promoting Economic Development, Twin Rivers Center for the Arts, Mankato, MN. This project involved the students in a study of the economic impact generated by participants in the annual Mankato Area River Crossings Art Fair. The findings of the survey were used to document a visitor profile of attendees, their spending practices, and overall satisfaction. This information will be used in future revisions of the art fair.

3. Strategies for Creating a Bicycle-Friendly Campus at Minnesota State University, Mankato. In this project, the students used local travel data and a survey of a sample of Minnesota State Mankato students to determine the extent of bicycle use on campus and the level of satisfaction with bike facilities. The outcome is a formal written report and PowerPoint presentation.

We wish to recognize the following graduate students for their hard work on the Spring, 2008, and Fall, 2009 projects:

- Waterville, MN Downtown Revitalization: Kyle Knutson, Tom Olson, Todd Waterman, Sam Woods
- RiverCrossings Art Fair: Alan Robbins-Fenger, Tom Terrio, Toua Vang
- Minnesota State Mankato Bicycle Study: Basit Hamza, Tim Ibsch, Zach Nelson, Kayla Rossiter, Ryan Steiff, Shayla Syverson

Continued on page 8
on the Washington Park district, the second on the Staley Park district. Students assisted Beth in field data collection, which was coded and analyzed to create a community profile focused on empirically establishing the architectural traditions of the neighborhoods, and a survey of resources that retain a strong historic integrity.

In addition to these studies, she continues her work on examining popular culture’s depiction of government employees, and has had a chapter accepted for the book The Revolution Is Being Televised, expected to be published in February of 2010. She recently presented this work at the Midwest Political Science Association conference in Chicago. In September she presented research about kick-starting downtown revitalization in communities (what to prepare for your consultant) at the Minnesota chapter of the American Planning Association meeting in Duluth, MN.

Dr. Perry Wood has been working with Waseca County on its Zoning Ordinance and Unified Development Code. He has helped the Planning Commission and the Council Board with the revisions, focusing effort on shoreline development standards, planned unit developments, transfer of development rights, and the urban expansion zone. Even as he transitions into phased retirement, Perry is assisting with the broader regional challenge of transportation. He was recently contacted to work on the Mankato Area Transportation and Planning Study. He will be coordinating the public data collection and serving on the Technical Advisory Committee. He is currently recruiting student assistance with this project, giving the next generation of planners a chance to work with a client.

URSI Alumni Profile of Kandis Hanson, City Manager of Mound

Kandis Hanson has taken a roundabout career path, moving from hair stylist to real estate, to city manager of Mound, MN, and in charge of a city with a $180 million redevelopment project underway.

Kandis came to URSI as a result of receiving a grant for a master’s degree in “further women and minorities in government” from HUD. The program paid for two years of courses, travel and conferences, and books and fees. It also provided an hourly stipend that compensated her for her internships at Mankato, Eagan, and Rice County, where she gained experience in two levels of government. After graduating URSI with her Master’s degree, she served as the city administrator for the City of Eyota, MN, a community of 1,400 people, then became the city administrator of Kasson (4,500), both communities just outside of Rochester.

Hanson’s duties focus primarily on responding to the city council’s directives and overseeing city department heads and staff. As city manager, Hanson has a higher level of discretion over personnel matters than a city administrator. She is a big proponent of the city manager form of government.

As quoted in ICMA Public Management Magazine (January/February 2006), Hanson in the past put in 50 to 60 hours a week on the job, but has scaled this back in recent years. Her hours involve evening meetings to attend city council and other city meetings and considerable civic involvement.

Hanson has been using creative techniques to increase local revenues. ICMA Magazine cites her use of eBay to sell old police cars and fire trucks, and how her city has successfully received a larger sale price for them than under the past practice of competitive bidding. In fact, one of the vehicles was sent to New York for use in a movie!

Aside from the large successes like the downtown redevelopment project (which she credits her strong team for), Hanson says the small successes are just as rewarding, such as helping a citizen with an issue. Other rewards are the development of interpersonal relationships with constituents and neighboring agencies. In fact, her partnerships with others, both private and public, have netted big changes in Mound.

Mound’s redevelopment was created in the early 1990’s and is known as Mound Visions. Central to the project was the re-dredging of a 1920’s channel to Lake Minnetonka, restoring a water front access to what will be the new, pedestrian-oriented downtown. The dredge and the development of the lost Lake Greenway and Pier took place 1999-2008 and was the product of an ISTEA (federal transportation) grant amounting to $1.5 M.

Fundamental to the development of the new downtown was the relocation of Hennepin County Road 15 as it passed through Mound. Its relocation to the north enabled the assembly of a greater land mass to the south, which will be the location of the city’s new main street.

Key to all that has been done and what will be done coming up was the city’s partnership with the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD). A $1.5 M grant from the MCWD enabled storm water upgrades that far exceed the norms, making Mound a demonstration site for innovative storm water management. Partnerships of this type have leveraged Mound about $7 M in grants in the last 10 years.

Now, as is the same most places, Mound is in a holding pattern as it relates to redevelopment. The attraction of a restaurant/bar at the mouth of the channel will act as the east anchor to a new waterfront main street. The night life that is so renowned on Lake Minnetonka will be the catalyst for the remainder of the new main street and the other districts that are to follow. It’s just a matter of time. In the meantime, Mound is continuing with its annual infrastructure upgrades that are also considered integral to the rebirth of the city.

A far cry from the life of a hair stylist, this city manager’s job does have its similarities, combining creativity with public service. To hear Hanson, a farm girl, tell it, she’s grateful to URSI for the opportunity that found her, not the other way around, and stretched her beyond her wildest expectations.
SURSI 2008-2009
Mark Andrews, SURSI President

As the 2008-2009 academic year comes to a close, we look back at all of the good times we had here at Minnesota State. Like every other year, this year flew by. It just seems like yesterday was September, and as the days begin to get warmer, we are finding ourselves spending more time outside, and less time in the classroom. Thank you summer!

Overall, we had a successful year with the SURSI club. We had more members than previous years, and were more actively involved in group activities, such as our pumpkin carving night, movie nights, pot luck nights, bowling and Holidazzle. Who says urban students can't have fun?

The SURSI Department looked great at Holidazzle with various pumpkins displayed from the pumpkin carving night. And of course, you can't carve a pumpkin without baking the delicious seeds, and enjoyed them while watching a scary movie. Fall Semester concluded with the Target Holidazzle Parade. Free and open to the public, the Holidazzle Parade celebrates the joy and wonder of the holiday season. Each parade featured brightly lit floats, marching bands, celebrity grand marshals and 250 costumed characters from popular children's stories.

I am hoping that next year, SURSI will continue to grow, with new and continued SURSI students, as well as students from other departments who are interested in urban studies, and just having a good time with us. I hope to continue these fun activities, as well as being more involved with community activities, such as the Adopt a Highway Program, which I would like to do for the next academic year. It is a 2 year commitment, which will give us a chance to display our group name on highway signs, as well as being involved in community initiatives to keep our area visually appealing and keeping all the little critters happy.

Thank you SURSI for making this a successful and fun year. I hope to see you [and new members] next year. Enjoy your summer and remember, think green!