

# Defining Your Discipline to Facilitate Curriculum Renewal in Undergraduate Programs

## Urban and Regional Planning Pilot Project (URP-PP)

### Background

The Australian federal government, employers, and accrediting bodies are all calling for more clearly defined 'program outcomes' or 'exit standards' for tertiary programs. The aim of defining these exit standards is to improve:

- Graduate employability skills;
- The quality of tertiary programs;
- The international transferability of graduates and qualifications; and
- The marketability of Australia as a provider of high quality tertiary education.

Tertiary institutions are therefore facing increasing pressures to more clearly define what graduates should know and be able to do.

Currently, the Planning Institute of Australia embodies its vision for its graduates in the PIA Accreditation Policy document.

**The Defining Your Discipline (DYD)** project is an Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) funded project that originated from the need to address exit standards in engineering programs at Australian universities. During 2010-2012, the project defined graduate capabilities for environmental engineers. The success of the Defining Your Discipline project elicited wide interest and resulted in requests from other disciplines to define graduate capabilities for their disciplines. The PIA Board of Directors has agreed to participate in a pilot project to define a draft set of graduate capabilities for planners. The DYD URP-PP will be used to demonstrate how the DYD process can be used to define the tasks that a graduate should have a capacity to do.

Depending on the success of the pilot project, and the ability of the PIA to obtain funding, a national DYD URP project could be rolled out in 2013-2014. It is anticipated that the set of defined Graduate Capabilities for the discipline obtained through an Australian-wide DYD process could be adopted by the profession as a companion resource to the PIA Accreditation Policy document. Planning schools would then use the guide to support the review and revitalisation of their curriculum, and to prepare for accreditation reviews by PIA.

### The pilot project strategy

It is envisaged that the URP-PP will be undertaken by the DYD Project Team during the second half of 2012. The DYD Stakeholder Consultation Process will be used to invite, value, and integrate the views of the sometimes disparate groups of stakeholders, while keeping a 'future-proofing' mindset that focuses on the knowledge and skills graduates will need in 5 to 10 years rather than current requirements.

The DYD Process is designed to capture the views of all relevant stakeholders such as practitioners, recent graduates, academics, and others associated with the profession, such as the PIA. The DYD Stakeholder Consultation Process ensures that the input from each stakeholder is equally valued so that the opinions or biases of individuals or groups do not impact on the final outcome. For example, the individual nature of the data gathering process ensures that dominant personalities, the professional standing of individuals, or the results of group thinking do not influence the raw data.

The pilot program will consist of up to five stakeholder consultation workshops, two in Toowoomba (recent graduates and

practitioners) and three in Brisbane (recent graduate, practitioners and academics).

A two hour DYD Stakeholder Consultation Workshop is structured as follows:

Section 1: (0.25 hours)

Introduction to the DYD URP Pilot Project.

Section 2: (1.0 hours)

Each workshop participant is asked to write down the *tasks* that they expect a graduate with up to three years' industry experience to be able to execute whilst maintaining a 'future-proofing' mindset. The tasks are then clustered and ordered and, where appropriate, the participants write new task statements to cover any gaps. The participants review, discuss and comment on the draft Graduate Capability Framework.

Section 3: (0.25 hours)

The participants review, discuss and comment on the process and outcomes.

Post workshop action:

Phase 1:

The data from the workshops is analysed for consistency and difference, before being synthesised by the Project Team and integrated into the relevant draft Capability Framework. This work is to be overseen by a 'URP Reference Group' to be appointed by the PIA. The draft Graduate Capability Framework will then be forwarded to the relevant stakeholders for comment.

Phase 2:

The Project Team will prepare a report containing their findings and recommendations.

## Pilot Project deliverables

- A Pilot Program Report for the Planning Institute of Australia
- A Draft Discipline Graduate Capabilities Guide

## Project management

The project is jointly managed by the DYD Project Leaders with logistical co-ordination and administrative support being provided by the Project Manager. The Project Team is guided by a Project Reference Group, Discipline Reference Groups, and by formal external evaluations. The Final DYD Project Report will be submitted to the Office of Learning and Teaching in November 2012.

## Project team

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