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## Blended Teaching: Land Use Planning Education in Wisconsin and Lessons Learned

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## Blended Teaching: Land Use Planning Education in Wisconsin and Lessons Learned

### Abstract

This article focuses on a new university/Extension approach for land use planning education that blends coursework with community engagement. The College of Natural Resources at University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point and Cooperative Extension established the Center for Land Use Education (CLUE) in 2000. CLUE's model for land use education focuses on a team-based approach that integrates university and outreach education. Regional zoning board and plan commission workshops are opportunities for teaching university students about the realities of implementing land use tools while educating Extension clientele about how to make informed decisions for their communities.

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### Introduction

Cooperative Extension in Wisconsin is known for its extensive networks with communities and its excellent state, regional, and local programs. Recognizing this excellence, the State Legislature in late 1999 passed comprehensive planning legislation that included a role for Extension. Specifically, Extension was charged with offering planning programs to educate local policymakers about community planning and the state's new planning grants program.

The comprehensive planning law, better known as "Smart Growth," while not mandating that all local governments must have a comprehensive plan in place by 2010, comes very close. Many local governments--towns, villages, cities, and counties--are responding by hiring planners or planning firms that can prepare their comprehensive plan. Thus, this new law also has created a temporary, if not permanent, need for community planners in both the public and private sectors.

This article focuses on a new University/Extension approach for land use planning education that blends classroom learning and teaching with community engagement. This model focuses on a team-based approach that integrates university and outreach education. Regional zoning board and plan commission workshops provide opportunities for teaching both traditional Extension clientele and university students about the realities of implementing land use tools and making informed community decisions.

### The Center for Land Use Education

In 2000, responding to the comprehensive planning law, The University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point, in its College of Natural Resources (CNR), acted by establishing the Center for Land Use Education (CLUE) with Cooperative Extension with two Extension positions. CLUE provides a focal point for statewide education related to land use planning and management.

### The Center's Blended Teaching Mission

CLUE aims to provide, under the CNR umbrella, undergraduate, graduate, and outreach public education related to:

- Land use planning methodologies,
- Plan implementation tools,
- Plan and ordinance administration,
- Project impact analysis,
- Regional impacts/trends analysis, and
- Public involvement in policy development.

To accomplish this broad educational agenda, CLUE started by reinvigorating its land use planning curriculum and staff. CNR agreed to hire two faculty (Haines and Bowles) and place them under the CLUE umbrella. Faculty would teach within the university environment as well as educate local policymakers in land use planning. Both faculty positions have split appointments of 30% university and 70% Extension. These two faculty teach a total of four land use planning classes per year to upper-division students. Dresen and Markham, the other two Extension staff within CLUE, do not have university or college teaching responsibilities, but they regularly lecture and participate in the classroom.

### **Meshing University and Outreach Education**

CLUE provides opportunities for continuing education for land use plan and law administrators, planning commissioners, zoning boards, elected officials, state and local agencies and related private sector consultants. Since last fall, CLUE, in cooperation with the UW-Extension Local Government Center and the Wisconsin Attorney General's Office, has conducted eight workshops for zoning boards across the state. A record number of 1,250 board members attended. CLUE produced a new Zoning Board Handbook for members to use as a reference when they make their decisions. The Zoning Board Handbook includes such topics as:

- Role and authority of the zoning board,
- Conduct of meetings and legal requirements for decisions,
- Conflicts of interest,
- Variances, appeals, and conditional uses, and
- Relationship to other governmental bodies.

A survey was used to assess not only the quality of the workshops, but also how they could be modified in the future. Results indicated participants want the following topics in future workshops:

- Nonconforming structures, lots and uses
- Shoreland/wetland zoning
- Property rights, and
- General zoning.

In conjunction with these workshops, two students opted to take an independent study (3 credits) to work with CLUE staff to create, conduct, and analyze the workshop survey. The students were required to read materials on zoning and boards of adjustments and appeals, and then prepare a four-page "fact sheet" to demonstrate their knowledge of the concepts they were studying. They were required to synthesize information and deliver it in a format useful for public consumption. They both attended at least one workshop. Both students were required to prepare a two-page report about their experience at the workshop. Haines (30/70 Ext.) and Markham (100% Ext.) spent on average 5 hours per week with these students discussing zoning boards or evaluating their work.

While the students' experiences were valuable, much time and effort was required to review and evaluate their work. Thus, while blending classroom learning and teaching with community engagement is possible and results in meaningful learning experiences for both sets of clientele, additional time requirements are required by the faculty and staff involved.

In light of this experience, CLUE staff will continue to provide students with opportunities to participate and learn. However, independent studies will not exceed one credit and will be centered on the workshop experience with supplemental readings. A written assignment, such as a memorandum to a zoning administrator that explains and recommends (or not) the workshops, will be required as well. CLUE continues to provide zoning board workshops and in early 2002 offered plan commission education.

### **Conclusion**

This recent experiment in collaborative teaching was useful for CLUE staff, but it also offers guidance for other Extension-affiliated centers and staff. This model has three key ingredients:

- Faculty with split appointments (university and Extension),
- A team-based approach that encourages all staff to teach in the classroom, and
- Workshop topics that mesh with university curriculum.

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