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November 17, 2023

Provost Johnson and Dr. Herring, Associate VP for Academic Affairs,

The College of the Environment Dean, Teena Gabrielson, asked that I provide information on the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) that accredits the Urban Planning and Sustainable Development (UPSD) bachelor's degree. This letter describes the PAB; its value to students, the university, and the state; its standards and the review process; and consequences of a lapse in accreditation.

The PAB accredits 78 master's and 16 bachelor's programs at 82 North American universities. Of the 16 bachelor's programs, only 4 are in the western U.S.: Cal Poly Pomona and San Luis Obispo, Eastern Washington University and Western Washington University. The UPSD program is in its third accreditation cycle; accreditation was first granted in 2016 (4 years), and again in 2020 (5 years).

PAB's mission is to "promote excellence among planning programs and ensure high quality education for future urban planners." PAB standards are developed with the American Planning Association (APA), APA's American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP). PAB is a member of the [Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors](#) (ASPA); the same body that evaluates the quality of the ABET's accreditation standards. PAB is also recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and undergoes periodic review under CHEA Recognition Policy.

Accreditation shows prospective and current students that the program meets nationally endorsed standards for the profession, continuously reviews and improves its quality, and is accountable for achieving what it sets out to do. Accreditation is a "stamp of approval" from the profession ensuring that graduates are well prepared for professional practice with the necessary skills, knowledge, and values to effectively serve in the workplace and with the public. Public agencies and private planning consulting firms in Washington look for graduates from accredited programs providing a distinct advantage in competitive hirings for our urban planning graduates. Accreditation also makes students eligible for candidacy in the American Institute of Certified Planners immediately upon graduation, which is important for job placement and professional advancement.

Students from accredited programs are eligible for scholarships from the APA, the Washington Chapter of the APA, and the NW Section of the APA. They also have access to other benefits, such as free student membership in the APA, discounted registration rates at conferences, travel stipends, and more. Since receiving accreditation in 2016, UPSD students have received planning scholarships, paid internships and research positions, and planning studio projects have earned awards from the WA APA.

Accreditation enhances a university's reputation and visibility by providing external validation of a program's quality and rigor, fostering student and stakeholder confidence, supporting professional recognition, and promoting continuous improvement. Students come to WWU for the nationally accredited urban planning degree.

WWU's urban planning program is meeting a critical need in the state, which has a shortage of professionally trained planners from accredited programs. The state legislature, recognizing the need, allocated \$200,000 in the 2023 budget for workforce training **only to the three accredited planning programs** in the state: WWU, EWU and UW (master's program), "exclusively for planning student studios to assist cities and counties with planning projects. Assistance shall focus on students and supporting faculty to facilitate on-site learning with cities and counties."

The PAB accreditation review is a rigorous process and is regularly updated to reflect progress in practice and pedagogy. The 2022 [accreditation standards](#) assesses programs in 5 areas: 1) strategic plan and mission, 2) student characteristics and support (e.g., quality, diversity, advising, services, professional engagement), 3) faculty attributes (e.g., quality, diversity, size, student and professional engagement, research), 4) curricular alignment with standards (e.g., required knowledge and skills, electives, student learning outcomes, facilities, technology), and 5) program governance (e.g., autonomy, college and university support, leadership, faculty and student participation, promotion and tenure).

The accreditation process consists of four parts: a self-study report, a site visit, a site visit report, and accreditation decision. The Urban Planning and Sustainable Development program is accredited through December 2025. The next self-study report is due September 2024; the external review team is visiting January 29-31, 2025. After the review, PAB outlines items to be addressed in the next review; items from the 2020 review are here: <https://www.planningaccreditationboard.org/western-washington-university/>. Accreditation renewal confirms a program's alignment with standards, outlines areas for improvement, and highlights needed resources (e.g., additional faculty, better facilities).

A lapse in accreditation would reduce enrollments, eliminate student access to valuable resources, make graduates less competitive in the job market, limit engagement with the profession, diminish the program's stature, and remove it from the pool of programs that the state relies on to respond to its critical planning needs. WWU would also not receive future state allocations to accredited planning programs.

If you need more information, I would be happy to talk further about the value and process of planning accreditation for the Urban Planning and Sustainable Development bachelor's degree at WWU.

Sincerely,



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C.C.

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