

October 20, 2006

## **How the Metro-Urban Studies Program Expresses the Mission of the College**

### **Introduction**

The Metro-Urban Studies Program is an interdisciplinary major that combines coursework in Sociology, Political Science, Economics, History and Fine Arts. The purpose of the Metro-Urban Studies Program is to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of urban community life. This report summarizes how the Metro-Urban Studies Program expresses the Liberal Arts tradition, the values of Faith and Values of the Christian church, Intentional Diversity and Urban Citizenship.

### **Metro-Urban Studies Expression of the Liberal Arts Tradition**

A key component of the Liberal Arts tradition is to integrate knowledge and practical experience to provide a broad education. The Metro-Urban Studies Program, as an interdisciplinary major, achieves this through courses in the social sciences, humanities and fine arts. This means that students learn about the city conceived as a community of citizens, a political arena, a place shaped by economic growth (and decline), by unique historical circumstances and aesthetics. Moreover, cities have been associated with the birth of “civilization” – the city is a place where human creative expression is experienced most freely. Cities are places that express the cultural vitality of humanity and the Metro-Urban Studies Program exposes students to this urban creative energy through experiential learning and bringing the city into the classroom.

The Metro-Urban Studies Program is very closely tied with community partners such as Higher Education Consortium of Urban Affairs (HECUA), where students spend the semester learning about urban poverty, or city arts, or the city as an environment. Intellectual depth is served by having the core major based in Sociology where students learn about urban planning and city design and participate in one or more internships that help them to explore their vocational aspirations.

### **Faith and Values of the Christian Church**

A key value of the Christian Church is *caritas*, or compassion for fellow human beings. The Metro-Urban Studies Program provides students with experiences and skills that help them express compassion in urban settings. Our courses teach students about the various dimensions of social problems like homelessness, lack of affordable housing, social stratification, and ethnic conflict. We try to show our students how to pro-actively address these problems through community-building, conflict resolution, and participating in the political process in order to make structural changes that address the causes of social problems.

*Caritas* also involves being responsible stewards of our environment and our cities. The Metro-Urban Studies Program emphasizes public stewardship whether that means

protecting the environment, respecting the wishes and needs of local residents, or becoming engaged citizens. Our students attend city and neighborhood meetings, visit local Community Development Corporations and Neighborhood Revitalization Projects in order to become familiar with and comfortable engaging in local politics.

Our faculty members have also participated in projects that directly emphasize public service and vocation. For example, for four years, Garry Hesser has taken students on a Washington DC immersion trip that is a Lilly-funded experience which emphasizes vocation, community building, public service and the motivation associated with faith-based community development.

In terms of preparing students for their vocations, we are confident that our students receive excellent training for careers that emphasize urban issues. Our relationship with our alumni is close, as many of our alumni return to guest lecture, lead tours, or provide internships and/or professional contacts for our students. From our discussions with our alumni, we know that the Metro-Urban Studies program profoundly impacts our students by teaching them to view problems in multi-faceted ways, and by teaching them critical thinking and research skills which they may use in their careers. Moreover, our students (as interns) and alumni work and volunteer in organizations that shape the very look of Minneapolis, Saint Paul and their surrounding suburbs; they work for non-profits that provide affordable housing, and train citizens in community organizing. The professional training our program provides is balanced with and mediated by intentional and overt discussions about values, ethics, and the impact of one's actions on the communities.

### **Intentional Diversity**

Racial, ethnic, religious, and social class issues are central to the Metro-Urban Studies Program. We explore themes of diversity in the city and the interaction of diverse social groups. For example, walking tours in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood have provided opportunities for students to learn the similarities and differences between Muslim and Christian communities. In Metro-Urban Studies coursework, students learn about the causes and consequences of urban segregation (by race and by class), how the city is a gendered space, how the city provides a niche for diverse urban subcultures and economically and culturally vital ethnic enclaves. Our students frequently engage with diverse groups of people when they take part in community service projects. Moreover, our students are diverse on the axes of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic class, and learning styles. Finally, within the College, our faculty have served on the Diversity Committee and the Diversity Collaborative to promote Augsburg College's access to diversity in the neighborhood, city and metropolitan area.

### **College in an Urban-Metropolitan Context**

We believe that the Metro-Urban Studies Program most purely expresses this component of Augsburg College's mission. From all of the previous paragraphs in this statement, one can see that the emphasis of this academic program is the City. The Metro-Urban Studies Program is on the leading edge of what it means to have a classroom in the city.

Experiential learning is an essential component to the major. All majors and minors are required to complete one internship, while most of our students complete two by the time they graduate.

The classes that are core to the major highlight different types of experiential learning that allows them to interface with neighborhoods, neighborhood organizations, local government bodies, and relations with community members. For example, we frequently take students on walking tours, have guest speakers from the local community in our classrooms, and we ask students to conduct field research in the city and community service projects as part of their coursework. Also, Augsburg College's Metro-Urban Studies Program played an integral role in the founding of HECUA and our faculty value having a close relationship with that organization because it provides such valuable hands-on urban experiences for our students. Finally, our faculty serve the Augsburg community by orienting students and other faculty/staff to Augsburg's metropolitan learning opportunities, and we provide leadership in shaping the Augsburg Experience graduation requirement for Engaging Minneapolis.

In conclusion, the Metro-Urban Studies Program clearly expresses the spirit of Augsburg College's mission to nurture future leaders in service to the world by providing high quality educational opportunities, which are based in the liberal arts and shaped by the faith and values of the Christian church, by the context of a vital metropolitan setting, and by an intentionally diverse campus community.

### **Metro-Urban Studies Program**

Garry Hesser , Sociology, (Chair),

Nancy Fischer, Sociology (Author of Mission Summary)

### **Other Affiliated Faculty**

Kristin Anderson, Fine Arts

Andy Aoki, Political Science

Jean Boeh, Economics

Lars Christiansen, Sociology

Keith Gilsdorf, Economics

Stella Hoffrenning, Economics

Michael Lansing, History

Joe Underhill-Cady, Political Science