Healthy Planning (UNSW course code BENV2949)

**In Brief**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Town/Region</strong></th>
<th>Sydney</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>State</strong></td>
<td>NSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context</strong></td>
<td>Tertiary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target Group</strong></td>
<td>Senior undergraduate and postgraduate students, University of NSW (UNSW), particularly built environment, public health and medicine students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organisation(s):</strong></td>
<td>Faculty of the Built Environment, UNSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timing of Project</strong></td>
<td>The course is ongoing and is currently offered once a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weblink</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://www.fbe.unsw.edu.au/">http://www.fbe.unsw.edu.au/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Outcomes</strong></td>
<td>Student learning in healthy planning across three broad areas: 1. Content understandings and knowledge 2. Interdisciplinary ways of working and interacting 3. Development of professional competency in specific ‘healthy planning’ skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This project was funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing

Last updated 24 May 2009
Overview
'Healthy Planning' is a practice-based course initiated, developed and taught by Dr Susan Thompson, Associate Professor, Faculty of the Built Environment, University of NSW. The course’s underlying premise is that an inter-disciplinary approach is the only way to understand and address lifestyle related health problems that are increasingly found in contemporary urban populations. Through interdisciplinary research and fieldwork educational models, the relationships between human health, city form and urban planning are examined. Students are from a range of built environment and health/medical disciplines work in interdisciplinary teams. Field work includes a detailed neighbourhood audit where the students observe and survey selected urban areas to determine the level of support for healthy behaviour. Learning outcomes are focused on interdisciplinary knowledge and potential application for professional practice.

OUTCOMES
The course was developed within the context of the growing evidence of a strong relationship between urban form and the opportunities for healthy behaviour such as walking in pleasant, pollution free and safe environments, and social interaction between people. Working together, cooperatively and with understanding, built environment and health professionals can contribute significantly to achieving and maintaining healthy cities and societal wellbeing. Specific course outcomes are to:

- develop understandings and knowledge about the key health problems facing urban populations today, including understandings about the relationship between urban planning, city form and current health problems in contemporary cities
- develop ways to enhance city dwellers’ opportunities for exercise and social interaction to improve physical and psychological wellbeing
- develop understandings of the issues most likely to dissuade city dwellers from engaging in healthy life styles (eg. high levels of air and water pollution, unsafe environments, car oriented development, unreliable and poorly interconnected public transport, no locally accessible food outlets, inappropriate and/or lack of local open space, an over-abundance of fast food outlets, high levels of personal stress as a result of isolation within a community and separation from families and local communities due to long commuter distances between home and work)
- develop an appreciation of the different ways of working and language that health and built environment practitioners use
- work cooperatively on a healthy planning project, and
- develop and work with a practical healthy planning audit for existing and proposed built environments.

This project was funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing

Last updated 24 May 2009
Successes
The Healthy Planning course is a very successful educational initiative. In formal evaluations, students from all disciplines have commented favourably about their learning experiences; course content and process; the multidisciplinary curriculum and the practical applications of theory (especially the field trip and the neighbourhood audit); the assessment methods and tasks; and the opportunities for interdisciplinary connections and collaboration.

Medical students, for example, have noted the value of learning about the built environment’s influence on population health and wellbeing. In evaluations, one commented, “It is a real eye opener to recognise the contribution of the built/urban environment on health. Especially I was amazed by how this can potentially be manipulated to improve health outcomes for the whole community”.

Students all expressed enthusiasm about the potential that the ‘Health Planning’ course affords them for their future professional lives.
Learnings
Key learnings from the ‘Healthy Planning’ course include:

- an awareness of the environmental issues that dissuade city dwellers from engaging in healthy lifestyles
- an understanding of the notion of ‘supportive environments’ for community health and wellbeing
- an ability to work effectively in interdisciplinary groups and to recognise and work with the different strengths and weaknesses of the health and planning perspectives in achieving healthy cities
- familiarity with and an ability to use a comprehensive healthy neighbourhood audit in different scenarios
- an awareness of the latest research on healthy cities
- a research project to investigate different issues in achieving healthy environments
- an understanding of the basics of the NSW health system (for built environment students) and the NSW planning system (for health students)
- a personal awareness about one’s healthy behaviour and the ways in which this is affected, both positively and negatively, by different physical and socio-cultural environments, and
- strategies for enhancing city dwellers’ opportunities for exercise and social interaction to increase physical and psychological wellbeing for all members of a community.

Costs
The course is offered to current fulltime students at the University of NSW, with no extra course fees. Staff time has been invested in developing the course and there are costs in delivering the material each year.

Benefits
- Through interdisciplinary learning, built environment and medical/health students learn from each other and about the interconnections of their respective disciplines (particularly during the neighbourhood audit), develop a clear understanding of the relationship between urban planning, city form and health.
- The need for an interdisciplinary perspective in achieving healthy environments for all is recognised across the disciplines. This provides scope for their knowledge to be applied practicably in future work environments.
Medical undergraduates reported a shift in their understandings and a “new-found respect for the health outcomes of urban planning”, seeing how healthy planning principles are directly related to their work. One medical student put it this way, “I will do this by raising awareness of the importance of the local environment, both to other doctors and to patients”.

Design students saw the possibilities that healthy planning provides. An architecture student said, “The Healthy Planning course has opened a new perspective of designing and approaching my future professional career. I think it will help me to aspire to change or influence people’s lives in a positive way.”

Planning students, many of whom are working part time in the industry, can readily see practical applications for healthy planning approaches. One said, I will “assess development applications with a healthy planning perspective; encourage healthy fresh produce, walkability, bike-ability and public transport.”
REFERENCES


Links
Further information see http://www.fbe.unsw.edu.au/staff/susan.thompson/