

Innovation and Excellence in Laboratory Instruction

Award Application

February 2, 2015

Nominated by Bruce Stiftel, PhD

Chair of the School of City and Regional Planning, College of Architecture

Michael Dobbins, FAICP, FAIA

Professor of the Practice

School of City and Regional Planning

College of Architecture

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Description

A core requirement for Masters Students in the School of City and Regional Planning is to complete a studio project, a city lab if you will, that allows students to test in real world situations what they've been learning in the classroom. Professor Dobbins, whose experience ranges across public sector positions, including the City of Atlanta's Commissioner of Planning, Development, and Neighborhood Conservation from 1996 to 2002, has become a standout instructor for the studio course.

Goals

The studio's goals combine students learning technical skills with providing service to Atlanta's and the State's communities. The goals encompass these objectives:

- Aligning the School's technical resources with community needs for the purpose of developing planning initiatives that can move forward to community, government, and private sector action; plans typically include transportation, environmental, land use, urban design, housing, and community and economic development components
- Engaging students across the city planning, civil engineering, urban design, architecture, and public policy disciplines to assess, analyze, and develop approaches for dealing with community-identified problems
- Engaging and including the wide array of stakeholders with an interest in the problem areas to come to a shared vision for the future
- Identifying obstacles that must be overcome and inducements that can be promulgated to support implementation of the vision over time
- Working both as individuals, expected to perform assigned work tasks, and in team settings, where work tasks are synthesized into team products.
- Taking responsibility for organizing, prioritizing and performing the required tasks, the purpose being to begin the transition from more passive (student) to more active (practitioner) roles.

Audience/Client

As suggested above, the audience is broad and inclusive of all those that have identified and guided the problems to be solved. Over the years, the audience has included neighborhood and business district leaders, public agency representatives, elected officials, and developers. Indeed, some combination of these have acted as clients, contributing funding to one or another of the studios that we have undertaken. These include the City of Atlanta, the Georgia Conservancy, the Georgia Department of Transportation, the Atlanta Downtown Improvement District, the Midtown Alliance, Georgia Stand-Up, and the Ford Foundation.

The most recent of these, in the fall of 2014, focused on Atlanta's portion of the Memorial Drive corridor, was sponsored by Council Member Natalyn Archibong and the City's Planning Office. "Imagine Memorial," as named by the Council Member, has proven most successful, with follow-on steps being undertaken by the City and with one of the students' proposals already slated for construction this year. In addition, students and faculty from the various disciplines not part of the studio make-up participate on occasion, as do outside consultants and representatives of the media.

Learning Outcomes

The studio is a practicum for students in their second year of the Masters program in city and regional planning as well as those seeking dual degrees with architecture, civil and environmental engineering, or public policy. Learning objectives and outcomes typically attained include:

- applying their knowledge and their analytic and conceptualization skills from all the relevant planning disciplines to create a synthesized product
- learning how to collaborate through practice
- searching for and finding the kinds of transdisciplinary syntheses that underlie successful planning and development initiatives
- learning how to listen to and incorporate feedback from a range of stakeholders into ongoing work processes
- considering their work as a model for addressing the larger questions arising in the interplay between transportation, settlement patterns, private and public investment strategies, and community equity that accompany any planning effort
- experiencing the challenges of ambiguity and uncertainty in the unfolding of planning and development collaborative processes and how to come to terms with these realities
- testing their assumptions about teamwork, roles and leadership, perhaps finding where they best fit into processes that require a blend of initiative and support to complete the assigned work
- gaining experience with pulling disparate information and concepts together into effective reporting formats, including text, tables, maps and graphics, in digital and oral presentations and in printed report forms.

Approach

The semester is divided into four interlocking parts. The first part includes assembly of mapping and other data for the study area, relevant previous and current studies, and case studies of comparable work completed elsewhere. The second part involves analysis of the data, incorporating information and guidance from the stakeholder audience. In the third part, students identify and evaluate alternatives for the range of technical issues and priorities that have emerged. And in the fourth part, again guided by stakeholder response, students prepare and present their findings, conclusions, and recommendations in the form of a final report, an executive summary, a PowerPoint presentation, and a website.

For the “Imagine Memorial” work, for example, meetings were structured to begin with an informal information exchange at four stations related to the components of the study. Then PowerPoint presentations were the springboard for breaking back into smaller groups to give more detailed feedback according to the audience’s special interests. The students presented their initial understandings to a stakeholder group of about 70 people in September at the Drew Charter School in East Lake. Then in October, they presented their analyses and alternatives to about 120 stakeholders in the City Hall atrium. Finally in December they made two presentations of their findings. The first was for about 80 stakeholders in the old Council Chambers at City Hall, followed the next week by a presentation focused on about 40 principal property owners, developers, and government agencies involved in public and private development initiatives contemplated or underway. The feedback from each of these public engagement meetings greatly informed and enriched the learning experience for the students as their work progressed.

Evaluation

The evaluation process for the studios is twofold. The instructor determines how well the learning objectives are achieved through the quality and thoroughness of the required deliverables. The client and audience by their immediate feedback and their follow up actions determine the value of the students' work in terms of what was promised and what was delivered.

Especially bearing in mind the one semester timeframe the students have to deliver a usable product addressing complicated problems, the clients for the students' work have been well pleased by their performance. In most cases, as in "Imagine Memorial," the best measure of success is that the work shares new information with often disparate constituencies, and it catalyzes follow-up activities, both great benefits for all concerned. For the instructor's part, using the learning objectives as a guide, progress on each is usually apparent.

Links to a sampling of media coverage include: [www.etc.](#) (to be added)

Adaptability

What distinguishes Professor Dobbins's approach and results is the emphasis on engaging the community, the government, and the private sector to come together with the goal of developing shared visions about futures where all interests can see benefit. The pictures thus painted in many instances, as in "Imagine Memorial," set forth plausible paths toward implementation, where projects, timelines, funding sources, and obstacles can be identified and assessed. For students and stakeholders alike, this inclusive and comprehensive approach has value for structuring other city and community building activities, both in the academy and in the real world.

30 January 2015

Innovation and Excellence in Laboratory Instruction
Award Committee
Center for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning
c/o Esther Jordan, Assistant Director
Campus

Dear colleagues:

Professor of Practice Michael Dobbins has taught community-engaged studio courses annually since 2002. His success in delivering professional team experiences to graduating Master of City and Regional Planning (MCRP) students is matched only by the impact of the work produced on the neighborhoods, cities and counties in which it has taken place. This work is the epitome of experiential learning in the graduate school context and highly worthy of consideration for Georgia Tech's Innovation and Excellence in Laboratory Instruction Award. It is my pleasure to nominate Dobbins for that award.

Dobbins joined the Tech City and Regional Planning faculty as he ended his service as Planning Commissioner of the City of Atlanta. The core of his teaching assignment has consisted of studio courses for second-year MCRP students. These studios are required of every MCRP graduate and are intended to provide opportunity for the students to exercise integrative professional capabilities in a team setting for a real client. We prefer if the client organizations show commitment to the project through contractual obligations, including funding. Not all studio instructors are able to secure such commitments from clients, but Dobbins has consistently partnered with state and local government agencies, and non-governmental organizations who both pay project costs and detail staff to support the student teams. In part because of these commitments, Dobbins' studio reports have formed the basis of policy decisions and design choices by governments and non-profit organizations on numerous occasions.

Studio classes are expected to provide students with settings in which they exercise the data collection, analysis, design and public engagement skills they learned earlier in our curriculum. The real-world context of these projects presents challenges associated with incomplete and dirty data, as well as differing multiple perspectives of stakeholder groups. The stresses of team work and the quick pace of the semester schedule when compared to similar processes in professional practice add to the challenges of teaching such courses. Many instructors resolve these tensions by imposing strong leadership on their student teams. Others leave it largely to the students to make their own mistakes with the result that products are not policy-change ready. Dobbins has the extraordinary ability to balance these stresses and tensions so that students make their own analytic and design decisions, recover from their mistakes effectively and end up with products that meet the test of public- and private-sector decision making. These projects have led to policy and design changes in a dozen Atlanta neighborhoods, rural Georgia and Alabama and in Gujarat, India.

Dobbins' students' work has regularly featured in the published media (including the *AJC*, *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, *Creative Loafing*, *Saporta Report*, and *WABE*) and are the basis of testimony before elected policy bodies. On three occasions these projects earned statewide awards from the Georgia Planning Association, and in 2012, Dobbins' students' *Action Plan for the Fort Macpherson Community* received the American Institute of Certified Planners' national Outstanding Student Project Award, only the second time in our school's history that this prestigious national award was brought home to Georgia Tech.

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paper made from 100 percent post-consumer waste

Dobbins' consistently earns among the highest student evaluation numbers among our faculty; hands down he receives the highest CIOS scores of any studio instructor. Graduates regularly name him among the most influential instructors in our School. Alumni continually seek him out for advice. A dozen alumni made it their priority to be present when Dobbins' was inducted as a Fellow of the American Institute of Certified Planners in Los Angeles in 2012. The impact of Dobbins' studio instruction on his students is evidenced in the five letters that accompany this nomination.

Experiential learning has great potential, often unrealized. Professor of Practice Mike Dobbins is a master of project selection, client relations, planning vision and student mentoring who not only consistently achieves the promise of experiential learning, but whose students leave Georgia Tech ready to overcome the most demanding professional challenges. He is highly deserving of the recognition of an Innovation and Excellence in Laboratory Instruction Award.

Sincerely,

Bruce Stiftel, FAICP
Professor and Chair

January 31, 2015

Laboratory Instruction Awards Committee

Dear Committee Members,

This is a letter of support for the Innovation and Excellence Laboratory Instruction application by Michael Dobbins, a highly effective Professor of the Practice in the College of Architecture. Although “laboratories” in the CoA are referred to as “studios” they are very similar to engineering labs in their small-group structure, creative problem-solving, and hands-on engagement with real problems and – in Professor Dobbins’ case - real community members. Professor Dobbins’ studios, sometimes called CityLabs, have excelled in engaging students in collaborative learning both across disciplines and across town-gown borders. Meeting for 12 hours per week, Professor Dobbins’ CityLabs deeply immerse city planning, architecture, civil engineering, and public policy students in an iterative feedback loop with local stakeholders: listening, brainstorming, designing, presenting, listening, reflecting, re-designing, re-presenting, etc. This has resulted in a decade’s worth of deep learning on the students’ part and deeply appreciated reports on the community’s part. Atlanta City Council Member Natalyn Archibong is currently championing implementation of Professor Dobbins’ Fall 2014 CityLab called “Imagine Memorial” with its recommendations for revitalization along Memorial Drive.

I first got to know Professor Dobbins 15 years ago when I was recruited to Tech as Director of the Architecture Program and he was the Commissioner of Planning and Community Development for the City of Atlanta under Mayor Shirley Franklin. Among his many initiatives, the impact of his re-writing of the city’s zoning codes can be seen in the award-winning, walkable, mixed-use character of Tech Square. He is also nationally known for his advocacy of community participation in city planning, documented in his acclaimed 2009 book, *Urban Design and People*. When he left city government, I was delighted to hire him to teach a more full load – including the time-intensive studios where he shares his own hands-on knowledge for impactful change. A naturally generous teacher with wide-ranging knowledge and experience, he has an unparalleled ability to straddle diverse worlds: architecture and planning, academia and practice, democratic ideals and political realities. Students emerge from his CityLabs with a profound and ambitious understanding of their ability to lead collaborative change. I give him my strongest recommendation for this award.

Sincerely,



Ellen Dunham-Jones
Professor in Architecture and Urban Design
Coordinator, MS in Urban Design

January 31, 2015

Dear Members of the Laboratory Instruction Awards Committee:

I am writing to support Professor Michael Dobbins for the competition of *the Innovations and Excellence in Laboratory Instruction Award*. Professor Dobbins has been running *Applied Planning Studio* since he joined the School of City and Regional Planning. The studios are a core requirement for the Masters students of the School. They continuously investigate planning issues through engaging local communities and stakeholders in the Atlanta metro area, in which the studio for Atlanta is seen as *an Urban Laboratory*, a stimulating learning environment that creates significant impact to many Georgia Tech students through collaboration in problems solving for prompting urban design and planning issues.

Mike brings his experience as a planning and development administrator to bear in teaching the requirements and realities for successful practice. His studios weave together transportation, land use, urban design, the environment, and economic and community development, all supported by application of the full range of digital analysis and representational tools. The outcome of the semester-long endeavor enables formal public adoption and that can guide public action priorities. He encourages students to participate in shaping the approach to the studio problem, and mentors students in their transition from passive learners to active participants in what will soon become their work world.

Recent examples include a community plan around Fort McPherson, which won awards from both the Georgia Planning Association and the American Institute of Certified Planners for best student project. His students' work on a corridor plan for turning Northside Drive into a grand transit boulevard similarly won the Georgia Planning Association's best student award. His most recent studio, the "Imagine Memorial" corridor plan, undertaken at the behest of Atlanta City Council Member Natalyn Archibong and the City's Planning Office, is staged for City adoption in a format that qualifies it for an Atlanta Regional Commission Livable Cities Initiative grant to continue the work the students have begun.

As his colleague who also teaches urban design in the School, I am thrilled by learning what he has achieved by developing such as novel teaching model, the studio as *an Urban Laboratory*, and have no hesitation to recommend him to the award for his contribution to urban design and planning pedagogy in Georgia Tech.

Best regards

Perry



Perry P. J. Yang, Ph.D.

Associate Professor
School of City and Regional Planning + School of Architecture, College of Architecture
Georgia Institute of Technology

January 23rd, 2015

GT Faculty Honors Committee

CETL Innovation Laboratory Instruction Award

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my pleasure, as a student, to recommend Dr. Michael Dobbins for the 2015 Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (CETL) 'Innovation and Excellence in Laboratory Instruction Award'. Dr. Dobbins deserves the award for his teaching of the Fall 2014 Master in City and Regional Planning Studio.

Last summer, I had the choice to pick one in four compulsory studio class for my last year in graduate school. From the beginning my choice was not driven by the topic but rather by knowing that Dr. Dobbins would be teaching it. He had found us a real-world project sponsored by local political figures, re-imagining the Memorial Drive corridor – a chance for us planning students to physically change the face of Atlanta. From day 1, Dr. Dobbins continually had us interacting with the project stakeholders (Council Members, Department of Transportation, Neighborhood Associations, Non-Profit Organizations etc.) which really made me and my classmates feel like we were more than simple students, we were all colleagues working on an exciting planning project.

His decades of experience in planning across the United States really helped us to understand all the intricacies of planning from dealing with political power struggle between stakeholders to developing a professional quality comprehensive plan. His teaching was a successful mix of letting the students decide on the direction of the project while providing support and recommendations. Following the numerous discussions with stakeholders or among students, he always made a point of highlighting the key learning to be drawn from a situation.

It is with pride that I look back at all that I have accomplished and learnt in Dr. Dobbins's studio last semester. I had the chance to present with my classmates our end product at the City Hall in front of dozens of influential elected officials, medias, citizens and business owners. Dr. Dobbins is restless and to this day stays committed to our work and pushes to have it implemented in the coming years. We had a recent success of getting one of our transportation improvement recommendation being taken over and being implemented by the PATH Foundation later this year.

These numerous hours I spent working under Dr. Dobbins supervision where the best of my academic career. I now feel more confident at my work as a transit system planner and feel like I can take on any project assigned to me thanks to the knowledge and expertise gained in Dr. Dobbins' planning laboratory. I can also pride myself with having contributed in physically changing the face of Atlanta with one my transportation design on the way to be implemented.

For his invaluable experience put into the planning studio, for his commitment make our work last after we are gone, for being a generous and supportive professor as well as for showing that Georgia Tech excellence can be found somewhere else other than the engineering departments, I hope that Dr. Michael Dobbins gets recognition from CETL by winning the 'Innovation and Excellence in Laboratory Instruction Award'.

Corentin Auguin

Masters in City and Regional Planning, 2015

Georgia Institute of Technology

Dear Laboratory Instruction Awards Committee:

This letter is to recommend Michael Dobbins for the Laboratory Instruction Award. Michael Dobbins' talent is to organize complex, ambitious projects that may not seem possible at first, but are so complete in the end that their implementation seems inevitable. The plan that Dobbins' team built not only displayed technical mastery, but also won broad community support. In fact, the City of Atlanta is now contemplating applying for federal funding to complete this plan.

Some personal background: I was a participant in Professor Dobbins' lab, and am in the Masters of City and Regional Planning program. I expect to graduate in 2015, and am currently employed as the commuter transportation coordinator for The Coca-Cola Company. I am also a student representative for the Southeastern United States in the American Planning Association, a professional body in which Professor Dobbins is a fellow in. In all aspects of my life, I work on multifaceted projects where the demands are great, and the results exceed client expectations.

Michael Dobbins shows talent in two ways. First, he is an effective leader of cross-functional teams, which makes the end product very worthwhile. While the studio itself was housed in the School of City and Regional Planning, the students had divergent talents and spoke different operational languages. Students were talented separately in engineering, GIS, urban design, real estate development, policy, and public relations, among others. For instance, Prof. Dobbins and I collaborated on writing the final report as a grant application to the Atlanta Regional Commission. Prof. Dobbins was instrumental in making sure each of these teams made their work come together, creating a workable end product.

The second way Prof. Dobbins shows talent is his political acumen. One of the best-connected figures in the city, Prof. Dobbins' leveraged his connections effectively to ensure his students had adequate resources at all times. More importantly, he knew who to contact to make the studio project implemented. As of today, an aspect of our studio project is being implemented just one month after the studio concluded. The final report is being seriously considered by the City of Atlanta for sponsorship for federal funding to implement.

Dobbins aided learning by engaging them in cross-functional teams, and by advocating for their plan's implementation. Prof. Dobbins truly helps his students move planning out of the class room, and into the City. For his ability to make teams work together across functions, and for his studio's impact on the city, I highly recommend him for this prize.

-- Thomas J. Hamed

Dear Esteemed Laboratory Instruction Awards Committee:

It is my great pleasure to support the nomination of Dr. Dobbins for the Center for Enhancement and Learning's Innovation in Laboratory Instruction Award.

I am a Tech graduate that took Dr. Dobbins' course CP 6052, a planning studio, in the fall of 2014. This course is the most unique one in city planning program, and could be the most useful I've ever taken in my education career. In that course, we conducted a revitalization program along the Memorial Drive corridor, and that program was one of the most accomplished one I had done since I started planning life.

Dr. Dobbins is an authentic mentor who knows how to get his students involved. The students that took the course were divided into several groups to take responsibility of different topics. Dr. Dobbins encouraged us to become experts in our own topics and share new findings. Instead of directly telling us what should be done, he completely supported each student's independent thoughts and correspondingly came up with strategies to sharpen the ideas.

What benefited me most was his insightful understanding of planning. To explain how special he was, the mechanism of planning in China needs to be explained. As a Chinese student, I approached a number of planning programs in my country. Per my understanding derived from Chinese planning practices, planning decisions were made purely by governments, regardless the real demands of citizens due to limitation of funding and time. However, Dr. Dobbins treated planning as a process of communication and moderation. He organized a bunch of public meetings, enabling us to get in touch with communities and government, which made this program a real one. I was once asked by Dr. Dobbins about the differences of detailed planning processes between China and United States. And that inspired me to give a second thought about the essence of planning. Additionally, he often took his working experiences to explain how this course, or even all the other courses taken in school could be applied in future working careers.

I was also surprised by his dedication to this course. Almost every time I came to the studio, I could see the notes, diagrams, or any related stuffs on the whiteboard done by Dr. Dobbins, serving as tips for our upcoming tasks. He was available around the studio all the time.

I learnt a lot from Dr. Dobbins. He was not only teaching classes, but also providing guidance for other aspects of academics and lives. To be honest, he was the most admired people I've ever met in my life. I believe Dr. Dobbins deserves the CETL in Laboratory Instruction award due to his greatness of instruction and dedication to education.

Sincerely,

Qian Jiang
Masters Candidate 2015
School of City and Regional Planning
School of Civil Engineering
Georgia Institute of Technology

Feb 1st, 2015

Esteemed Laboratory Instruction Awards Committee:

I am Guanying Li, a recent graduate from the MCRP and MSCE program at Georgia Tech, now working as an assistant transportation planner at HNTB. I offer my enthusiastic support for the nomination of Prof. Michael Dobbins for CETL's Innovation and Excellence in Laboratory Instruction Award. His series of Atlanta-contemporary-issue-focused studios, City Labs, for students like myself, was a process of observing and analyzing how people utilize the infrastructures and resources in the city. His studios provided the opportunity for students to listen and interact with the people who manage, develop, shape, and compose the city - elected officials, real estate developers, government employees, civil engineers, urban designers, non-profit organization advocates, local journalists, and community members. Most importantly, he lit a path for his students to realize that cities can function better through collaboration between citizens, and that planners' fundamental responsibility is to initiate and facilitate this collaboration.

I worked for Prof. Dobbins as a research assistant on Northside Drive as a Multimodal Developmental Corridor Studio, and later as a teaching assistant and studio member on Westside Community - Falcon Stadium - Multi Modal Passenger Terminal Connectivity Studio. Both studios went beyond the world of academia into the real world. By Fall 2012, Northside Drive witnessed a lot of bottom-up development, but its potential was still largely neglected. Prof. Dobbins gained sponsorship from Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) and the City of Atlanta (the City) for students to study how to alleviate the traffic congestion, regulate future development, and to explore the possibility of transformation into a mixed-use transit boulevard. The studio's data analysis results and multiple incremental alternatives called attention to this neglect. By the final presentation GDOT and the City were prompted to immediately restripe and improve signage for the corridor. Last month GDOT has begun to pick more low-hanging fruits on Northside Dr. using solutions that originated from our studio.

We cannot claim the achievement by ourselves, as we discussed the issues with around 200 stakeholders in the corridor through Prof. Dobbins' coordination. He invited stakeholders to the classrooms to share their viewpoints with us and encouraged us to meet with the various interest groups throughout the corridor. Sometimes he helped to set up the meeting, while other times let us to reach out to train our social skills. He came to most meetings with us and guided us to understand, investigate, and develop the stakeholders' ideas in after-meeting discussions and to represent the result through simple texts and graphics. He organized three open presentations through the studio to provide the stakeholders with a platform to critique our work, and also give us an opportunity for receiving first-hand feedback. Each meeting had 50 to 90 attendants and it was one of the most direct ways to learn from the public. Prof. Dobbins explained the planning process as a collaboration between the public and the planners involving constant input and output, and he helped us produce an outcome based on information exchange and collective thinking. Connecting us to the public and establishing a collaboration, Prof. Dobbins led us to find the solutions from the people.

In contrast to focusing on the neglected, Prof. Dobbins laid out Connectivity Studio in the heat of the negotiation around Falcons' new stadium between the Falcons, the City, and the westside communities including the long-impoverished English Ave and Vine City, as well as the booming

new urbanism neighborhood of Castleberry Hill. Placing the studio in a real world case of a short-term monetary conflict, he challenged us to explore ways to connect the lack-of-investment communities with the billion-dollar development and infrastructure both geographically and financially to leverage the resources between the rich and the poor. This deepened our sense of responsibility to social justice and stimulated us to propose more innovative solutions in the long term. Besides inviting guest speakers and initiating focus group meetings, Prof. Dobbins engaged us to discuss and debate topics at community meetings and City Councils' public hearings. He also moved our studio presentations from on campus to the least controversial community space in the study area to promote public participation. The studio's data, maps, and proposals were shared on our studio website as well as on local media such as Saporta Report and have become vehicles for the arguments by the less resourceful. He showed us why we should and how we could connect ourselves to the citizens before we help them to connect with each other.

Prof. Dobbins emphasized collaboration between students as the foundation the studios. He recruited both City Planning and Civil Engineering majors so we could have the capacity to study the issues at both policy level and technical level, and learn to work with people from different disciplines. He set up different working frames according to the studio content. Northside Dr. Studio was set up in groups around different geographic areas with one group focusing on the overarching programs for the entire corridor. Connectivity Studio was set up in groups around various issues such as housing, jobs, transportation, environment, and land use. Prof. Dobbins gave us spaces to work as individuals and in sub-groups and to go to different meetings. He also organized us to meet all together, update progress, exchange meeting notes, and critique each other's work. His emphasis on collaboration enabled us to work together closely throughout the whole studio, solve individual problems while keeping eyes on the large picture, and produce a final product which can deliver messages to the public in a professional way with a unified tone.

Thanks for your consideration of Prof. Dobbins for this award that he richly deserves.

Guanying Li, MCRP & MSCE 2014

January 30, 2015

Ranjani Prabhakar

1074 Peachtree Walk NE, B201

Atlanta, GA 30309

To Laboratory Instruction Awards Committee:

I am writing in support of the Memorial Drive Studio project that I participated in at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Fall 2014. I am currently a second-year graduate student in the dual City Planning and Civil Engineering program, and anticipate my graduation to be December 2015.

This studio taught me more than any other class in the program's curriculum about the reality of the planning profession and the various intersections of thought and analysis required. Professor Michael Dobbins is well known for his years of experience working with key City officials and stakeholders, as well as his demeanor and approach to the class as an equal participant in our studio, which mostly acted like a group of consultants on a high-level project. The concept of this studio as a living laboratory within the confines of the City of Atlanta was one of the best experiences within my graduate career.

The course focused on a specific corridor in Atlanta that required critical analysis and creative thought to catalyze sound development. Students met 12 hours per week and were expected to apply knowledge from various courses and experience gathered within the group to successfully navigate the issues at hand. In addition to the in-laboratory work, students had a pivotal professional role to stakeholders in sharing knowledge, gathering feedback and consistently re-calibrating designs and ideas catered to the people it affected the most: the community. The studio course, to me, was the culmination of my planning degree, as I was able to apply my skills as an engineer, designer, planner and community engager. Professor Dobbins gave us the freedom and facilitation to be as extreme or as simple in our ideas as we saw fit, and stressed the importance of quality control and critical understanding of the subject material in order to present to our colleagues. I really appreciated this method of teaching, as we often thought outside the box and related these ideas to more traditional approaches in a seamless way. One example was envisioning an intersection to incorporate a unique roundabout design implemented in other corridor studies across the world, without any precedent in Atlanta to follow. Such concepts were very well received as enlightened and sophisticated, especially for graduate students. This was a huge accomplishment for our group of students, and validated the merit of Georgia Tech's graduate programs and candidates all the more.

As stated, Professor Dobbins's studio was an unbeatable experience within my graduate career, and I have been applying the skills I learned in studio at my current internship. I enjoyed both the structure of the class and the teaching method applied by Professor Dobbins, and my only regret is graduating without taking another studio from him. It was worth the tuition money, and if anything, I

hope to stay involved with his studio programs in the future to re-engage with the core concepts and the innovation of thought that he inspires.

I hope this letter and the depth behind my words aid in your decision for the award. I cannot think of a professor more deserving, and I know I am not alone in this opinion. Thank you.

Regards,

Ranjani Prabhakar