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Smart growth, preservation goals missed in practice

UCSD urban studies students report results from senior research work

BY LILY LEUNG REPORTER - REAL ESTATE

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FRIDAY, MARCH 11, 2011 AT 6 A.M.

Taught to question authority and the status quo, 93 urban studies and planning students at the University of California San Diego questioned the efficacy of smart-growth planning, historic designation as an economic-improvement tool and many other assumptions as they showed off their senior research projects Thursday at the 21st annual urban expo.

Former San Diego City Manager Jack McGrory called the projects "dynamite," and urged the students to apply their energy and enthusiasm in the work world.

"I don't want people to sit back and say what I say, say yes to me and not challenge me," he said. "I want people to be vocal, enthusiastic, energetic around me. Most managers would tell you the same thing. It's important to be as positive as you can be."

Headed by political science professor Steve Erie, the urban studies program is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year. And the students continue to find much to study in the county under the direction of Keith Pezzoli, who oversees field research.

"San Diego County is an incredible case study for a region to be studied through an urban perspective and urban studies lens," said graduating senior [Ryan Sclar](http://www.seniorsequence.net/index.php/member/profile/223/), who analyzed agricultural distribution networks.

[Raman Deol](#) looked at wasteful water using practices on campus, particularly when students don't have to pay for the amount of water they're using.

"Some didn't know we live in a desert," she said.

The students spent the last six months researching their topics, writing their papers, designing posters to illustrate their findings and producing videos. Some plan to continue their studies in graduate school and pursue careers in city



/ ROGER SHOWLEY /P>

Raman Deol rolls up her poster on water wasting that she prepared for her senior thesis at UCSD's urban studies program.

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planning and related fields. Most obtained internships as part of their graduation requirement, an experienced that offered them practical exposure to the working world they will soon enter.

UCSD Urban Studies and Planning Program: Some examples of student work

Some long-cherished assumptions in city planning came in for critical scrutiny. Here are several examples

Lynor Belen

Age: 21

Hometown: San Diego-Paradise Hills, moving to Rancho Penasquitos and Carmel Valley later

Plans after graduation: Attend law school after gaining more experience; she currently interns at the county's Department of Planning and Land Use.

Topic: Recovered [In]equalities: Empowering Communities to Impact Environmental Change

Area of Concentration

Belen said she became interested in environmental injustice after observing that Barrio Logan is riddled with waste sites in Barrio Logan. She compared conditions with those in Carmel Mountain Ranch.

"Environmental issues are important because often it's low-income minorities who are affected by hazardous pollution," she said. "Environmental justice is not just for affluent Caucasian communities."

She interviewed residents, met with community organization leaders and got their opinions. She found, for example, that many opposes expanding the San Diego Convention Center, because they fear more convention business will lead to displacement of residents and businesses in their neighborhood, which is adjacent to downtown. But Belen said she was not have time to talk to any waste site operators or property owners.

"If I didn't procrastinate, I would," she joked.

Excerpts from her paper:

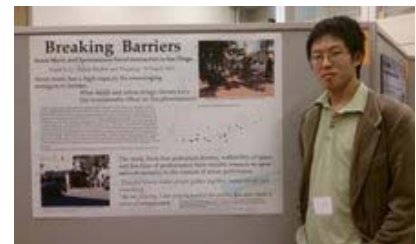
"After conducting this research, further study is needed to understand policy gaps in explaining why zoning regulations in Barrio Logan are not as strict and in place to prevent industry encroachment within residential areas. This type of zoning is clearly not evident in the community of Carmel Mountain Ranch. In addition, how adding more parks and green spaces in Barrio Logan will be fulfilled with many buildings still in existence... As this research has shown, while working alongside other groups, community involvement can mobilize a community in creating their own vision of how they want their neighborhoods to be. Based on the supportive evidence, the community of Barrio Logan is an exemplary model of a community involved in making great strives to fight against many environmental injustices that get presented to their community."

Frank S. Li

Age: 21



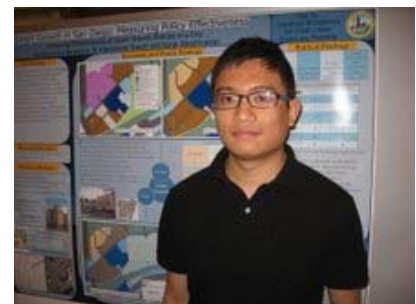
Lynor Belen



Frank Li — Lily Leung



Kathy Tran — Roger Showley



Tien Tu — Roger Showley

Hometown: University City

Plans after graduation: take a year off to develop his portfolio (he's an aspiring music composer.) He eventually wants to go to graduate school for music.

Topic: Musical traditions, street performance and urban design

Li, an urban planning and music double major, studied street musicians and their role in promoting a vibrant urban environment. In other words, there's a connection between community development and urban design. His study concluded that more people gave donations to musicians as the crowds got bigger. Li says that may be an obvious idea but it's one that he hopes to expand; he wants to look at street musicians from a social aspect.

Excerpt from his paper:

"The study argues for a coherent, holistic approach to urban design that maintains an active, back-and-forth relationship with the social development of a community that is perhaps difficult in practice but very rewarding."

Kathy Tran

Age: 20

Hometown: San Diego-Linda Vista

Plans after graduation: graduate school in urban planning

Topic: Economic Effectiveness of Historic Designation in San Diego

Tran looked at four neighborhoods, two designated as historic districts -- Golden Hill and Sherman Heights -- and two that are not -- North Park and South Park. She had worked at the La Jolla Historical Society and wondered if designation makes a difference in the economics of a community.

Her conclusion: The historical designations make no significant difference, possibly because other factors were at work.

"It's more indirect," she said.

But she said historic properties help generate pride of ownership, community cohesion and interest from visitors -- and she's all in favor of saving historic properties and restoring them.

Excerpts from her paper:

"Golden Hill and Sherman Heights, post-historic designation, generally saw decreases in median income, fixed homeownership rates and increases in unemployment, poverty and residential vacancy rates. Altogether, this evidence substantiates the notion that there is not a one-to-one correlation between historic designation and neighborhood economic improvement... While this analysis has shown that historic designation has not greatly impacted Golden Hill and Sherman Heights economically as a revitalization strategy, preservation and designation efforts should still remain important in San Diego and other cities as a partial urban policy solution towards reviving central city neighborhoods and their cultural pasts."

Tien D. Tu

Age: 21

Hometown: Pomona

Plans after graduation: Urban planning career

Topic: Smart Growth in San Diego: Measuring Policy Effectiveness

Tu analyzed Mission City, the transit-oriented housing development linked to the San Diego Trolley north of Mission Valley shopping center, to see if commuting patterns were different for residents who had easy access to public transit.

His conclusion: Residents drive alone nearly as much as those who live in traditional neighborhoods, probably because their jobs are not easily accessible by public transit.

"It's hard to change habits," Tu said.

Excerpts from his paper:

"It is hard to pinpoint how much of a role smart growth policies played... Whatever the primary cause, the land uses in the area convey a decidedly smart-growth land-use pattern, with supporting light rail and high-frequency bus lines in the area. The high freeway access in the area gives a large incentive for personal vehicles, which hinders the implementation of smart growth... More time is needed to see the interactions of the population and smart-growth sites; as the way it stands now, smart growth implementation is ready to serve an unwilling population."

Read all the students' papers, look at their posters and watch their videos [here](#).

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Find this article at:

<http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/2011/mar/11/smart-growth-historic-preservation-goals-missed-pr>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

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