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Local issues explored in urban studies program

By Roger Showley

STAFF WRITER

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The students in the urban studies and planning program at the University of California San Diego logged some 10,000 hours together in research, 100 hours each in internships and 60 hours in the classroom over 20 weeks as they explored a wide range of topics this spring, mostly keyed to San Diego issues.

Professor Keith Pezzoli and his teaching assistants said their students' work deserves wide attention from the professional economics community and real estate industry.

"It's too bad the program only has 60 students," said teaching assistant Matt Childers.

Alan Nevin, the chief economist at the California Building Industry Association who teaches courses at UCSD, had nothing but praise for the student work he has seen, which he called "particularly outrageous – in a good sense."

"They typically can finish every sentence for you," he said.

Some of the findings from the senior theses – available on campus with information on the program online at www.usp.ucsd.edu – touch on current local housing issues.

Iris Chou looked into the value of post-purchase workshops for first-time buyers that help them deal with financial problems once they become homeowners.

"There is considerable difference in payment patterns between those who attended a class and those who did not," wrote Chou, 20, from Temple City in Los Angeles County, who plans to study in Singapore before graduating and eventually enter law school. "Those who take precautions are better equipped when adversity arrives."

Adam Gardner, 21, a San Jose resident planning to attend New York University's law school in the fall, focused on eminent domain and its impact on private property owners. He analyzed the U.S. Supreme Court's 2005 Kelo decision upholding condemnation that prompted many states and voters to reign in confiscation of private property for economic development.

"One of the primary findings of this report has been that ideologies that portray eminent domain as a 'black and white' issue are oversimplifications," Gardner wrote. "The legitimacy of eminent domain hinges on legal terms and technicalities that create quite a gray area."

Alexis Steiner, 21, a San Mateo native who began college as a physics major and then switched to urban studies, looked at the role of architects in furthering the New Urbanism principles of walkability and mixed-use development. She focused on the Uptown District in Hillcrest, where shopping and housing replaced an old Sears store in 1990.

"Architects need to not only focus on how buildings must look and be oriented to create New Urbanist communities," she said, "but also they must work with planners and policy makers to help create more bridges over the barriers that they face."

Indian tribal influence: Roberto Gonzalez Jr., 22, from Whittier used the current battle over a proposed casino on the six-acre Jamul Indian Village to show how the 18 local tribes' economic development is bringing them more power in regional decision-making bodies.

"These intergovernmental relationships will become increasingly important to tribes," he said, "because their economic growth will make them prominent agents in San Diego's future."

The search for a new regional airport: Reiko Pahl, 38, who moved here from Germany in 1996, concluded that part of the reason the San Diego County Regional Airport Authority failed to win voter support last fall for a new facility at Miramar Marine Corps Air Station was its failure to build bridges to other agencies. "Many politicians and local institutions perceived the airport authority as arrogant and deaf to the people," he said.


Maglev transportation to a desert airport: Jason Dupont, 21, from St. Louis, said it's just as well that, following the defeat of Miramar, attention waned on building in the Imperial Valley desert because of the high cost of using magnetic levitation trains for ground access. "It will help lawmakers and planners from falling into a \$23 billion 'megaproject' hole that could doom the city's economy for years to come," he said.

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