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# ACSP Distinguished Educator, 2002: David R. Godschalk

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Scott A. Bollens<sup>1</sup> [GQ: 1] okay

*This essay is the seventeenth in a series on the recipients of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning Distinguished Educator Award, ACSP's highest honor. The essays appear in the order the honorees received the award.*

A profoundly influential professor across both planning scholarship and practice, David Godschalk exhibited rigor in examining and teaching planning practice, constant ambition to move from academic abstraction to real-life application, and a warmth and depth of character that came out in a smile that meant so much to his students. He was a scholar-practitioner of the highest order, always asking in his scholarly deliberations, “are these findings useful to planning practitioners?” and “is what we are recommending feasible and doable?” Dave’s applied scholarship was laser-focused on growth policy issues and challenges at the forefront of planning practice. He focused on methodologically rigorous research using social science knowledge to advance the state of planning practice.

Dave’s background and creative roots were with planning practice, with his early experiences as planning consultant (1959–1961) and as the Planning Director for Gainesville, Florida (1964–1965) forming the foundation upon which he committed his pragmatic and rigorous scholarship. He was frequently ahead of his time in the planning challenges he addressed. With his passing in 2018, he leaves an enduring legacy of practice-centered scholarship to his many students and collaborators.

Godschalk was “perhaps the most highly respected and best-known face of DCRP for four decades” (Kaiser and Rosenberg 2013, 151). He taught as professor from 1972 to 2004 in the Department of City and Regional Planning (DCRP), University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill (UNC). He was also a lecturer from 1969 to 1971 and taught several classes after his formal retirement.

DCRP at UNC has been for decades one of the strongest programs in the country, emphasizing the integration of social science and urban planning. Dave was part of the departmental bloodline that goes back to the department’s beginning. Jack Parker, the founding faculty member of DCRP, first met Godschalk when giving a talk on new town planning at Dartmouth College in 1952. Parker encouraged Dave to consider planning as a profession. Godschalk enrolled in DCRP as a master’s student ten years later and completed his PhD there in 1971. During his time as a doctoral student, extraordinarily, Godschalk was appointed as editor of the *Journal of*

*the American Institute of Planners* (now the *Journal of the American Planning Association*) from 1968 to 1971. Dave served as Department Chair from 1978 to 1983, a critical time of “first generation” faculty retirements, and successfully managed the transition to the department’s “second generation” through this recruitment of social science-based scholars who would make significant contributions in the years ahead (Kaiser and Rosenberg 2013).

Godschalk’s research areas included land use planning, growth management, site planning, sustainability, coastal hazard mitigation, public participation, and negotiation and dispute resolution. He authored or co-authored twelve highly impactful books. Godschalk stressed the importance of the *process* of planning as the key determinant of planning outcomes and success. He recognized that planners brought a set of professional tools of analysis and synthesis to the process of plan-making, but also had the responsibility to engage a wide range of stakeholders. For him, planners and the public both had key roles in the *coproduction* of high-quality designs and plans, and planners had a key role in facilitating and mediating dialogue to reach consensus across the diversity of interests at stake.

Collaborative planning is notable in Dave’s early works such as *Planning in America: Learning from Turbulence* (Godschalk 1974) and his work on growth management (see the seminal Godschalk et al. 1979) which positioned planning as managing a continuous process of development, needing adaptive flexibility, rather than as an end-state view. For Dave, planners have essential roles in community visioning and agenda setting, providing bridges between top-down government and bottom-up grassroots inputs (Godschalk 2014). He also recognized that planning itself must evolve and adapt to complex changing conditions, and new disciplinary influences (Kaiser and Godschalk 1995).

Godschalk emphasized a pragmatic approach to research on comprehensive plans and planning process. His autobiography, *Searching for the Sweet Spot* (Godschalk 2017), acknowledged a certain impatience with excessive theorizing

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and argued for more classes on urban design, planning process, and implementation. He emphasized analytic and communicative skills by which planners can formulate high-quality comprehensive plans that will produce successful community outcomes. His integration of planning analysis, community visioning, and livable land use design is highlighted in his contributions to the fourth and fifth editions of the classic “bible of land use planning”—*Urban Land Use Planning* (Berke, Godschalk, and Kaiser 2006; Kaiser, Godschalk and Chapin 1995). He put forth concepts of sustainability before planners knew the word, in his pioneering article on carrying capacity (Godschalk and Parker 1975, see also Schneider, Godschalk and Axler 1978). He employed a sustainability prism to elucidate the tensions that exist between the primary values of equity, economy, ecology, and livability (Godschalk 2004). Later, Godschalk wrote a nuts-and-bolts guide exhibiting how developers, designers, and planners can work together to produce sustainable development projects (Godschalk and Malizia 2017).

In a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-funded study, Godschalk perceived early on the importance of computerized information systems, not only for public sector entities managing developable land supply relative to demand but also for real estate investors and builders who use the information to identify buildable sites (Bollens and Godschalk 1987; Godschalk et al. 1987).

Formulating comprehensive plans is insufficient, Godschalk asserted, without the means for evaluating their quality and effectiveness in improving land use design (Berke and Godschalk 2009). Accordingly, he strived to improve methods of plan evaluation. He co-chaired an APA task force that developed a scoring protocol of sustainability indicators by which planners could appraise plan quality, co-authoring an important Planning Advisory Service Report (Godschalk and Rouse 2015). He was recognized for these efforts with the 2015 APA President’s Award for distinguished contributions in advancing the planning profession.

Yet another track of Godschalk’s impact was in developing proactive planning to reduce hazard and disaster losses. In *Catastrophic Coastal Storms* (Godschalk, Brower and Beatley 1989), Dave and his co-authors advocate for a merger of hazard mitigation and development management. A National Science Foundation study in the mid-1990s produced an influential book connecting urban planning and disaster mitigation (Godschalk et al. 1999), which was selected as one of the American Planning Association’s *100 Essential Books of Planning* ([planning.org/library/great-books](http://planning.org/library/great-books)). Godschalk recognized that planning has a critical role to play in urban adaptability and resilience, arguing that effectively responding to, and recovering from, disaster events must include more than technical approaches and encompass the building up of robust social and institutional networks (Godschalk 2003).

Dave matched scholarly prowess with extraordinary teaching and mentoring. He cared deeply about his students

because they were tomorrow’s practitioners. With his Navy experience (twenty years in the U.S. Naval Reserve, including active duty during the 1961–1962 Berlin crisis), combined with his renowned academic accomplishments, Dave at first could be a bit intimidating to entering master’s students. After a few weeks, however, students realized how warm and generous Dave was in teaching planning skills with direct practice applications.

Dave was a master educator and practitioner, and students knew they were in the presence of excellence. He emphasized always the practical application of planning techniques and stressed the importance of clarity in written and oral communication, telling students never to miss a chance at public presentations of their work. When students received a smile from Godschalk after a presentation, they knew they earned it. There are numerous mentees of Dave’s, including this author, active throughout the planning academic and professional worlds who remain inspired daily by Dave’s legacy of sustained dedication to finding the sweet spot where scholarship improves practice.

### Author’s Note

Further information on Godschalk’s many contributions to planning education and practice is available in a special memorial section of the *Journal of the American Planning Association* 85, 1 (2019): 7–23.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests [GO: 2] okay

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