

# URBAN AND REGIONAL PLANNING, MS

The Department of Planning and Landscape Architecture (DPLA) offers an accredited Master of Science (MS) degree in Urban and Regional Planning. The degree trains students in the knowledge, theories, and skills to be leaders in their communities by making positive change through informed and reflective action. Our department centers the values of sustainability, equity and justice, and works with communities to address many of the complex challenges involving space and place that are critical to the planning profession.

The MS URPL degree is intended to prepare graduates for professional planning careers in government, nonprofit and community organizations, and the private sector, and to work at a variety of scales including rural and urban communities. The program normally requires two academic years of full-time work plus an internship. In addition to the MS program, the department offers a PhD program.

DPLA seeks students with high academic qualifications and the potential to become qualified professional planners. Since there are relatively few undergraduate planning programs in the country, students come into the field from a wide range of disciplines. In recent years, planning students have generally come from the social sciences with geography, economics, political science, and sociology among the most common undergraduate backgrounds. The range, however, runs from the arts to the sciences reflecting the multi-disciplinary character of our field.

DPLA is committed to establishing and maintaining a supportive climate of inclusion, diversity, and collegiality through our actions and policies. We envision a department in which all individuals are engaged in a vibrant learning community, where ideas, experiences, and perspectives are supported, nurtured, and developed to their highest levels. We value diversity, which we define to include race or ethnicity; sex; gender and gender identity or expression; marital status; age; sexual orientation; country of origin; language; disability; socio-economic status; and affiliations that are based on cultural, political, religious, or other identities.

Although DPLA stresses the development of general skills and mental attitudes that are common to all planning endeavors, students are required to specialize in an area of planning that is of interest to the student, such as housing, land use, food systems, environmental planning, regional economic development, transportation, public health, or urban design, among other possibilities.

The objectives of the professional MS degree are to:

1. Prepare students to engage in planning processes that recognize a complex, pluralistic and equitable democratic society. Students develop the capacity to work with diverse publics, across government agencies, and in private and nonprofit sectors. Planning processes include the identification of objectives, design of possible courses of action, and evaluation of alternatives.
2. Convey a set of planning literacies to enable students to perform effectively as planners in public, private or nonprofit sectors. These literacies include knowledge in the following areas:
  - Structure and function of cities and regions
  - History and theory of planning processes and practices
  - Administrative, legal, and political aspects of plan-making
3. Prepare students with the substantive knowledge foundation and tools, methods, and techniques of planning associated with an area of specialization.
  - Public involvement and dispute resolution techniques
  - Research design and data analysis techniques
  - Written, oral, and graphic communication skills
  - Ethics of professional practice
  - Collaborative approaches to problem solving

Details on administrative requirements for the degree are available in the MS URPL Handbook (<https://dpla.wisc.edu/academics/handbooks/>).

The MS program equips students with sufficient understanding of and training in the principal tools, methods, and techniques of planning to enable them to perform effectively as junior staff members from the start of their careers. UW-Madison's program in planning emphasizes concepts, perspectives, and practices that promise to be useful not only upon graduation, but even more so in later years for graduates who reach positions of major influence and responsibility. We train our graduates to be leaders of equitable change through urban and regional planning.

## ADMISSIONS

### ADMISSIONS

Please consult the table below for key information about this degree program's admissions requirements. The program may have more detailed admissions requirements, which can be found below the table or on the program's website.

Graduate admissions is a two-step process between academic programs and the Graduate School. **Applicants must meet the minimum requirements (<https://grad.wisc.edu/apply/requirements/>) of the Graduate School as well as the program(s).** Once you have researched the graduate program(s) you are interested in, apply online (<https://grad.wisc.edu/apply/>).

Requirements	Detail
Fall Deadline	February 1
Spring Deadline	October 15
Summer Deadline	This program does not admit in the summer
GRE (Graduate Record Examinations)	Not required
English Proficiency Test	Every applicant whose native language is not English, or whose undergraduate instruction was not exclusively in English, must provide an English proficiency test score earned within two years of the anticipated term of enrollment. Refer to the Graduate School: Minimum Requirements for Admission policy: <a href="https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1241/">https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1241/</a> ( <a href="https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1241/">https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1241/</a> ).
Other Test(s) (e.g., GMAT, MCAT)	n/a
Letters of Recommendation Required	3

**Applications are accepted on a rolling basis. Applications submitted by the deadlines listed above will be considered for limited Department funding.**

Application for admission to the department consists of the following materials:

- Online application
- PDF of all undergraduate and graduate transcripts
- Statement of purpose
  - Applicants should submit a thoughtful, reflective one- or two-page statement discussing reasons for going into planning; applicants with an interest in a particular concentration should discuss this; applicants with planning or planning-related experience should include this.
- Three references from people familiar with the applicant's academic and/or professional work.

The success of international students enrolled in the program depends heavily on a good working knowledge of English. Prospective applicants who do not feel comfortable using the English language are strongly urged to consider further language study before applying for admission.

All applicants are required to have an introductory-level course in statistics. This requirement may be met by taking an introductory course, for no graduate credit, during the student's first semester of study.

## FUNDING

### FUNDING GRADUATE SCHOOL RESOURCES

[The Bursar's Office provides information about tuition and fees associated with being a graduate student.](#) [Resources to help you afford graduate study might include assistantships, fellowships, traineeships, and financial aid.](#) [Further funding information is available from the Graduate School.](#) Be sure to check with your program for individual policies and restrictions related to funding.

## REQUIREMENTS

### MINIMUM GRADUATE SCHOOL REQUIREMENTS

Review the Graduate School minimum degree requirements (<https://guide.wisc.edu/graduate/#requirements>) and policies (<https://guide.wisc.edu/graduate/#policies>), in addition to the program requirements listed below.

### MAJOR REQUIREMENTS

#### MODE OF INSTRUCTION

Face to Face	Evening/Weekend	Online	Hybrid	Accelerated
Yes	No	No	No	No

#### Mode of Instruction Definitions

**Accelerated:** Accelerated programs are offered at a fast pace that condenses the time to completion. Students typically take enough credits aimed at completing the program in a year or two.

**Evening/Weekend:** Courses meet on the UW–Madison campus only in evenings and/or on weekends to accommodate typical business schedules. Students have the advantages of face-to-face courses with the flexibility to keep work and other life commitments.

**Face-to-Face:** Courses typically meet during weekdays on the UW–Madison Campus.

**Hybrid:** These programs combine face-to-face and online learning formats. Contact the program for more specific information.

**Online:** These programs are offered 100% online. Some programs may require an on-campus orientation or residency experience, but the courses will be facilitated in an online format.

## CURRICULAR REQUIREMENTS

Requirement Detail	
Minimum Credit Requirement	46 credits
Minimum Residence Credit Requirement	24 credits
Minimum Graduate Coursework Requirement	23 credits must be graduate-level coursework. Refer to the Graduate School: Minimum Graduate Coursework (50%) Requirement policy: <a href="https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1244">https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1244</a> ( <a href="https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1244/">https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1244/</a> ).
Overall Graduate GPA Requirement	3.00 GPA required. Refer to the Graduate School: Grade Point Average (GPA) Requirement policy: <a href="https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1203">https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1203</a> ( <a href="https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1203/">https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1203/</a> ).
Other Grade Requirements	In addition to Graduate School requirements, the Department of Urban and Regional Planning requires that all core courses and all courses in a student's area of specialization (other than research credits) be taken on a graded (i.e., not satisfactory/unsatisfactory) basis.

In all core courses and all courses in a student's area of specialization, a minimum grade of BC is considered satisfactory. Grades of C or below in core and specialization courses may not be counted toward degree requirements, but are still counted in the cumulative GPA. If a student receives a grade of C or below in a department required core course, the student must retake the course and achieve a satisfactory grade.

In elective courses, a grade of C or above is considered satisfactory.

Any course in which a student receives a grade of D or F may not be used to satisfy any department graduation requirements. However, these courses will still be counted in the cumulative GPA.

Assessments and Examinations	Students must complete either a thesis or a professional project. See details in the handbook.
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Language Requirements No language requirements.

## REQUIRED COURSES

Code	Title	Credits
<b>Planning Core</b>		
URB R PL/ SOC WORK 721	Methods of Planning Analysis	3
URB R PL 742	Planning Orientation Seminar	1
URB R PL 781	Planning Thought and Practice	3
URB R PL 833	Planning and the Legal System	3
URB R PL 791	Visual Communication for Planners	3
URB R PL 912	Planning Workshop	4
<b>Structure and Functions of Cities and Regions</b>		
Select one of the following to satisfy the Structure and Functions of Cities and Regions requirement:		3
URB R PL 512	Gentrification and Urban Restructuring	
URB R PL 550	Transportation and the Built Environment	
URB R PL 601	Site Planning	
URB R PL 611	Urban Design: Theory and Practice	
URB R PL 731	Introduction to Regional Planning	
URB R PL/ECON/ PUB AFFR 734	Regional Economic Problem Analysis	
URB R PL 751	Introduction to Financial Planning	
URB R PL 761	Central City Planning: Issues and Approaches	
URB R PL 841	Urban Functions, Spatial Organization and Environmental Form	
URB R PL 844	Housing and Public Policy	
<b>Geospatial Methods</b>		
Select one of the following to satisfy the Geospatial Methods requirement:		2
LAND ARC 311	Introduction to Design Frameworks and Spatial Technologies	
LAND ARC 511	Geodesign Methods and Applications	
LAND ARC/ ENVIR ST/ SOIL SCI 695	Applications of Geographic Information Systems in Natural Resources	
GEOG/ CIV ENGR/ ENVIR ST 377	An Introduction to Geographic Information Systems	
GEOG 378	Introduction to Geocomputing	
GEOG/ENVIR ST/ LAND ARC/ URB R PL 532	Applications of Geographic Information Systems in Planning	
GEOG 578	GIS Applications	
GEOG 579	GIS and Spatial Analysis	
<b>Planning Concentration</b>		12
<b>Electives</b> <sup>1</sup>		12

## Professional Practice Internship

**Total Credits** 46

<sup>1</sup> Students may enroll in up to 2 credits of URB R PL 999 Independent Work concurrent with work on their final professional project.

## Urban and Regional Planning and Public Affairs or International Public Affairs (MS in URPL/MPA or MIPA)

The Department of Planning and Landscape Architecture and the La Follette School of Public Affairs offer a double degree Master of Science in Urban and Regional Planning and either a Master of Public Affairs or Master of International Public Affairs.

Students completing the double degree must follow the double degree plan.

- The Department of Planning and Landscape Architecture requires 46 credits for the Master of Science in Urban and Regional Planning.
- The La Follette School requires 42 credits for the Master of Public Affairs/Master of International Public Affairs.

Per UW-Madison Graduate School policy, an overlap of 25% of credits is permitted (11 credits can count toward both degrees). Students can graduate with both degrees by completing 77 credits in three years.

Graduate coordinators for both programs have sample curricular plans that they will share with prospective or current students to assist with successful completion of all degree requirements.

## POLICIES

### GRADUATE SCHOOL POLICIES

The Graduate School's Academic Policies and Procedures (<https://grad.wisc.edu/acadpolicy/>) serve as the official document of record for Graduate School academic and administrative policies and procedures and are updated continuously. Note some policies redirect to entries in the official UW-Madison Policy Library (<https://policy.wisc.edu/>). Programs may set more stringent policies than the Graduate School. Policies set by the academic degree program can be found below.

### MAJOR-SPECIFIC POLICIES

#### PRIOR COURSEWORK

##### Graduate Credits Earned at Other Institutions

A maximum of 22 credits are allowed from Planning Accreditation Board-accredited coursework taken at other institutions may transfer. In all other fields, 25% of credits completed up to a maximum of 11 transfer credits are allowed. Special conditions for applying prior coursework may be found in the Graduate Program Handbook (link in Contact Information).

##### Undergraduate Credits Earned at Other Institutions or UW-Madison

Any course taken as part of an undergraduate degree (whether required or optional) may not be applied.

##### Credits Earned as a Professional Student at UW-Madison (Law, Medicine, Pharmacy, and Veterinary careers)

Refer to the Graduate School: Transfer Credits for Prior Coursework (<https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1216/>) policy.

## Credits Earned as a University Special Student at UW-Madison

The MS Urban and Regional Planning Program Committee will not transfer more than 12 credits of prior coursework taken as a UW-Madison University Special student. The Committee does not necessarily guarantee that all credits (up to 12) taken as a Special student will transfer. All accepted courses must have a grade of B or better. The decision as to what prior coursework may be applied will be made by the Committee on the recommendation of the student's advisor, and must be based on information indicating that the courses for which credit is given fit logically into the student's overall program.

## PROBATION

Refer to the Graduate School: Probation (<https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1217/>) policy.

## ADVISOR / COMMITTEE

Student should meet regularly with the advisor to plan academic career. The advisor is required to approve and sign the plan of study form, which is then submitted to the graduate coordinator prior to the student being allowed to graduate. Refer to the Graduate School: Advisor (<https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1232/>) policy.

## CREDITS PER TERM ALLOWED

15 credits

## TIME LIMITS

The master's program takes two full years of study.

Other time limits for the program refer to the Graduate School: Time Limits (<https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1221/>) policy.

## GRIEVANCES AND APPEALS

These resources may be helpful in addressing your concerns:

- Bias or Hate Reporting (<https://doso.students.wisc.edu/bias-or-hate-reporting/>)
- Graduate Assistantship Policies and Procedures (<https://hr.wisc.edu/policies/gapp/#grievance-procedure>)
- Hostile and Intimidating Behavior Policies and Procedures (<https://hr.wisc.edu/hib/>)
  - Office of the Provost for Faculty and Staff Affairs (<https://facstaff.provost.wisc.edu/>)
- Employee Assistance (<http://www.eao.wisc.edu/>) (for personal counseling and workplace consultation around communication and conflict involving graduate assistants and other employees, post-doctoral students, faculty and staff)
- Employee Disability Resource Office (<https://employeeedisabilities.wisc.edu/>) (for qualified employees or applicants with disabilities to have equal employment opportunities)
- Graduate School (<https://grad.wisc.edu/>) (for informal advice at any level of review and for official appeals of program/departmental or school/college grievance decisions)
- Office of Compliance (<https://compliance.wisc.edu/>) (for class harassment and discrimination, including sexual harassment and sexual violence)
- Office Student Assistance and Support (OSAS) (<https://osas.wisc.edu/>) (for all students to seek grievance assistance and support)

- Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards (<https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/>) (for conflicts involving students)
- Ombuds Office for Faculty and Staff (<http://www.ombuds.wisc.edu/>) (for employed graduate students and post-docs, as well as faculty and staff)
- Title IX (<https://compliance.wisc.edu/titleix/>) (for concerns about discrimination)

## L&S POLICY FOR GRADUATE STUDENT ACADEMIC APPEALS

Graduate students have the right to appeal an academic decision related to an L&S graduate program if the student believes that the decision is inconsistent with published policy.

Academic decisions that may be appealed include:

- Dismissal from the graduate program
- Failure to pass a qualifying or preliminary examination
- Failure to achieve satisfactory academic progress
- Academic disciplinary action related to failure to meet professional conduct standards

Issues such as the following cannot be appealed using this process:

- A faculty member declining to serve as a graduate student's advisor.
- Decisions regarding the student's disciplinary knowledge, evaluation of the quality of work, or similar judgements. These are the domain of the department faculty.
- Course grades. These can be appealed instead using the L&S Policy for Grade Appeal (<https://kb.wisc.edu/lis/22258/>).
- Incidents of bias or hate, hostile and intimidating behavior (<https://hr.wisc.edu/hib/>), or discrimination (Title IX (<https://compliance.wisc.edu/titleix/>), Office of Compliance (<https://compliance.wisc.edu/eo-complaint/formal-investigations/>)). Direct these to the linked campus offices appropriate for the incident(s).

## Appeal Process for Graduate Students

A graduate student wishing to appeal an academic decision must follow the process in the order listed below. Note time limits within each step.

1. The student should first seek informal resolution, if possible, by discussing the concern with their academic advisor, the department's Director of Graduate Studies, and/or the department chair.
2. If the program has an appeal policy listed in their graduate program handbook, the student should follow the policy as written, including adhering to any indicated deadlines. In the absence of a specific departmental process, the chair or designee will be the reviewer and decision maker, and the student should submit a written appeal to the chair within 15 business days of the academic decision. The chair or designee will notify the student in writing of their decision.
3. If the departmental process upholds the original decision, the graduate student may next initiate an appeal to L&S. To do so, the student must submit a written appeal to the L&S Assistant Dean for Graduate Student Academic Affairs within 15 business days of notification of the department's decision.
  - a. To the fullest extent possible, the written appeal should include, in a single document: a clear and concise statement of the academic decision being appealed, any relevant background on what led to the decision, the specific policies involved, the relief sought, any relevant documentation related to the departmental appeal, and

the names and titles of any individuals contributing to or involved in the decision.

- b. The Assistant Dean will work with the Academic Associate Dean of the appropriate division to consider the appeal. They may seek additional information and/or meetings related to the case.
  - c. The Assistant Dean and Academic Associate Dean will provide a written decision within 20 business days.
4. If L&S upholds the original decision, the graduate student may appeal to the Graduate School. More information can be found on their website: Grievances and Appeals (<https://grad.wisc.edu/documents/grievances-and-appeals/>) (see: Graduate School Appeal Process).

## OTHER

The MS in Urban and Regional Planning Program Committee will help students look for funding for their graduate study, though the program cannot guarantee funding. Resources to help you afford graduate study might include assistantships, fellowships, traineeships, and financial aid. Further funding information is available from the Graduate School and from the MS in Urban and Regional Planning Program Committee. Be sure to check with your program for individual policies and restrictions related to funding.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GRADUATE SCHOOL RESOURCES

Take advantage of the Graduate School's professional development resources (<https://grad.wisc.edu/pd/>) to build skills, thrive academically, and launch your career.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

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1. (General Planning Knowledge) Comprehension, representation, and use of ideas and information in the planning field, including appropriate perspectives from history, social science, and the design professions.
2. (Purpose and Meaning of Planning) Appreciation of why planning is undertaken by communities, cities, regions, and nations, and the impact planning is expected to have.
3. (Planning Theory) Appreciation of the behaviors and structures available to bring about sound planning outcomes.
4. (Planning Law) Appreciation of the legal and institutional contexts within which planning occurs.
5. (Human Settlements and History of Planning) Understanding of the growth and development of places over time and across space.
6. (The Future) Understanding of the relationships between past, present, and future in planning domains, as well as the potential for methods of design, analysis, and intervention to influence the future.
7. (Global Dimensions of Planning) Appreciation of interactions, flows of people and materials, cultures, and differing approaches to planning across world regions.
8. (Planning Skills) Use and application of knowledge to perform specific tasks required in the practice of planning.

9. (Research) Tools for assembling and analyzing ideas and information from prior practice and scholarship, and from primary and secondary sources.
10. (Written, Oral, and Graphic Communication) Ability to prepare clear, accurate and compelling text, graphics and maps for use in documents and presentations.
11. (Quantitative and Qualitative Methods) Data collection, analysis and modeling tools for forecasting, policy analysis, and design of projects and plans.
12. (Plan Creation and Implementation) Integrative tools useful for sound plan formulation, adoption, and implementation and enforcement.
13. (Planning Process Methods) Tools for stakeholder involvement, community engagement, and working with diverse communities.
14. (Leadership) Tools for attention, formation, strategic decision-making, team building, and organizational/community motivation.
15. (Values and Ethics) Values inform ethical and normative principles used to guide planning in a democratic society. The program shall appropriately incorporate issues of diversity and social justice into all required courses of the curriculum, including:
16. (Professional Ethics and Responsibility) Appreciation of key issues of planning ethics and related questions of the ethics of public decision-making, research, and client representation (including principles of the AICP Code of Ethics and other related principles, as appropriate).
17. (Governance and Participation) Appreciation of the roles of officials, stakeholders, and community members in planned change.
18. (Sustainability and Environmental Quality) Appreciation of natural resource and pollution control factors in planning, and understanding of how to create sustainable futures.
19. (Growth and Development) Appreciation of economic, social, and cultural factors in urban and regional growth and change.
20. (Values and Ethics) Values inform ethical and normative principles used to guide planning in a democratic society. The program shall appropriately incorporate issues of diversity and social justice into all required courses of the curriculum, including:
21. (Professional Ethics and Responsibility) Appreciation of key issues of planning ethics and related questions of the ethics of public decision-making, research, and client representation (including principles of the AICP Code of Ethics and other related principles, as appropriate).
22. (Governance and Participation) Appreciation of the roles of officials, stakeholders, and community members in planned change.
23. (Sustainability and Environmental Quality) Appreciation of natural resource and pollution control factors in planning, and understanding of how to create sustainable futures.
24. (Growth and Development) Appreciation of economic, social, and cultural factors in urban and regional growth and change.

## ACCREDITATION

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Planning Accreditation Board (<http://www.planningaccreditationboard.org/>)

Accreditation status: Accredited through December 31, 2027.

## CERTIFICATION/LICENSURE

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American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) (<https://www.planning.org/certification/>)

### PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION/LICENSURE DISCLOSURE (NC-SARA)

The United States Department of Education (via 34 CFR Part 668 (<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-VI/part-668/?toc=1>)) requires institutions that provide distance education to disclose information for programs leading to professional certification or licensure. The expectation is that institutions will determine whether each applicable academic program meets state professional licensure requirements and provide a general disclosure of such on an official university website.

Professional licensure requirements vary from state-to-state and can change year-to-year; they are established in a variety of state statutes, regulations, rules, and policies; and they center on a range of educational requirements, including degree type, specialized accreditation, total credits, specific courses, and examinations.

UW-Madison has taken reasonable efforts to determine whether this program satisfies the educational requirements for certification/licensure in states where prospective and enrolled students are located and is disclosing that information as follows.

Disclaimer: This information is based on the most recent annual review of state agency certification/licensure data and is subject to change. All students are strongly encouraged to consult with the individual/office listed in the Contact Information box on this page and with the applicable state agency for specific information.

#### **The requirements of this program meet certification/licensure requirements in the following states:**

Wisconsin

#### **The requirements of this program do not meet certification/licensure requirements in the following states:**

Not applicable

Updated: 1 June 2025