

URBAN AND REGIONAL PLANNING, MURP

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Overview

The Master of Urban and Regional Planning (MURP) at the University of Colorado Denver, the only accredited graduate planning degree in the state of Colorado, has evolved to become one of the strongest, most unique graduate planning programs in the United States, offering a real-world, experientially oriented program that uses Colorado as a classroom and engages students with planning professionals and the community.

We believe that successful city-building requires expertise, breadth, interdisciplinary understanding, and creativity. Our program looks beyond traditional professional silos and instead centers on issues at the forefront of planning practice. Our three program Pillars—Healthy Communities, Equitable Urbanism, and Regional Sustainability—form the basis of our research, instruction, and community outreach. We encourage all students to follow their passion and develop expertise in the areas that matter most to them. Our unique, self-directed curriculum allows students to understand the breadth of the planning field while gaining the technical expertise demanded by the profession.

Our program faculty includes some of the most respected researchers and educators in the planning field, as well as top local planning practitioners, all of whom bring a wealth of experience to the classroom. All of our faculty make teaching a top priority.

Our presence in a College of Architecture and Planning ensures that our approach to planning education has a strong connection to design, and our location in the heart of downtown Denver presents our students with endless opportunities to learn what it takes to create amazing cities.

Curriculum

The total number of credit hours required to earn the Master of Urban and Regional Planning (MURP) degree is 54. Required core courses, including two studio-format courses and a final capstone or thesis project, comprise 36 of these credits. Students complete an additional 18 credits of elective courses of their choice, including one course that is an advanced skills/methods elective.

Across those 54 credits, students must also meet final course grade minimums and cumulative grade point average requirements (see the *GPA Requirements and Grading Policy* tab on the Curriculum section of our website) in order to earn the MURP degree. The required 54 credits may be reduced in some cases for students who meet the requirements for advanced standing or who have transfer credits (see the *Advanced Standing Credit Waiver* tab on our website). Full details of program requirements can be found in the MURP Student Handbook, posted under the Curriculum section of the program web page.

New students typically begin the program of study in the fall semester. Full-time students typically take approximately 12 semester hours per semester; taking more than 15 per semester is generally ill-advised.

Core Courses

The MURP Program curriculum includes 10 required "core" courses totaling 36 semester hours. These courses provide students with a comprehensive survey of the planning field and the foundational knowledge, skills, and values important to the profession. The core courses have been carefully designed to fully comply with the Planning Accreditation Board's required educational outcomes. The list below shows the core courses and the program year in which the course is suggested to be taken.

Code	Title	Hours
URPL 5000	Planning History and Theory	3
URPL 5010	Planning Methods	3
URPL 5020	Planning Law and Institutions	3
URPL 5030	Planning Practice and Technology	3
URPL 5040	Urban Sustainability	3
URPL 5050	Urban Development	3
URPL 5060	Planning Workshop	6
URPL 6000	Planning Project Studio	6
<i>Students choose of ONE of the following 6-credit courses:</i>		
URPL 6900 or URPL 6920 & URPL 6925	Planning Capstone Planning Thesis A and Planning Thesis B	6
Total Hours		36

Elective Courses

Beyond the core curriculum, MURP students follow a self-directed educational path. Students may choose any combination from our broad offering of elective courses. In addition, numerous other electives applicable for MURP credit are available through our allied programs within the college (Architecture, Urban Design, Historic Preservation, and Landscape Architecture) and through cross-listed courses offered by other CU Denver programs, such as Public Affairs, Geography, and Business. MURP students may take two of their six elective courses entirely outside of the MURP department, as long as the courses are relevant to the student's interests in planning.

Potential Specializations

Through our self-directed elective curriculum, students have the ability to craft a MURP degree suited to their career goals and personal interests. Students may choose any combination of elective courses, whether oriented towards a traditional planning field such as "Transportation Planning," a customized emphasis on a unique planning niche, or a general survey of diverse planning topics (i.e. no specialization at all). Students are not required to identify or pursue any type of planning specialization unless they want to (specializations do not appear on transcripts). Ultimately, students may choose whichever combination of elective courses they desire.

The most helpful resource for assisting students in choosing their self-directed path through the MURP program is the planning faculty, all of whom are happy to provide advice about which electives to take or any topic relating to the MURP program or careers in planning. For more information, see the Advising section of the website.

Independent Study

Independent Study is a student self-directed learning experience with faculty oversight, guidance, and evaluation. Independent Study offers

students an important opportunity to engage in research or creative activity in an area of inquiry not offered through regular courses, or in greater depth than offered in regular courses. An Independent Study course should not duplicate courses that are traditionally offered at the university; rather, it is intended to be a truly independent exploration of a topic or a project of a special nature.

Students who undertake Independent Study are expected to be self-motivated and largely self-directed. MURP students wishing to undertake an Independent Study must have a grade point average of 3.0 or greater in the MURP program. Students can apply a maximum of one three-credit Independent Study course towards their MURP degree. (However, under special circumstances, and with departmental approval, students may be able to take two Independent Study courses.)

Students must secure a faculty advisor for their Independent Study course. The faculty member's expertise and availability should be appropriate for the topic of study and the student's learning objectives. Faculty members reserve the right to decline to be an Independent Study advisor. Only full-time Department of Urban and Regional Planning faculty members may officially serve as a MURP Independent Study advisor. Adjunct faculty members and faculty in other departments may serve as co-advisors, but the instructor of record (i.e., grader) must be a full-time MURP faculty member. Students are encouraged to consult with other faculty and/or professionals as part of their Independent Study, but the faculty Independent Study advisor is responsible for evaluating the project and providing the majority of advising.

A MURP Independent Study project should have a focus within the field of Urban and Regional Planning, although it may be of an interdisciplinary nature. The Independent Study deliverables should be sufficient to evaluate the student's level of learning and mastery of the chosen topic. Independent Study will be graded with a letter grade and is subject to MURP, CAP, and CU Denver grading and academic policies. The project specifics are to be provided by the student in the Independent Study Proposal and approved by the student's Independent Study faculty advisor. A document with complete Independent study guidelines, including enrollment process, is available upon request from the Chair or Associate Chair.

Students should expect to devote a minimum of nine hours per week during the fall or spring semester, and 18 hours per week during the summer semester, for a three-credit Independent Study course. Students are expected to meet periodically with their Independent Study faculty advisor throughout the semester, and the student and advisor should agree on project milestones and a meeting schedule.

To begin an Independent Study, students are responsible for developing a study proposal, approaching and gaining approval from the faculty member with whom they would like to work, completing the enrollment form and getting it signed and submitted, and registering for the Independent Study course. Specifically, the process includes the following steps:

- Prior to the semester in which the Independent Study is to be completed, the student drafts an Independent Study Proposal.
- Prior to the start of the semester, the student approaches and gains approval from a full-time MURP faculty member to be their Independent Study course advisor (note guidelines above).
- The student works with their faculty advisor to refine the Independent Study Proposal. The proposal must be completed and approved by the faculty advisor no later than the end of the first week of the semester.

- The student completes and signs the Special Processing Form, has it signed by their Independent Study faculty advisor, and turns it in to their academic advisor no later than the end of the second week of the semester (the add/drop deadline).
- Student registers for the Independent Study course (URPL 6810) no later than the add/drop deadline.

Internships

Internships are an important way the MURP program helps students learn experientially. The difference between an internship and a part-time job is that an internship is specifically intended to be a learning experience. While getting academic credit for an internship is not required, it is highly recommended. Students earn three elective credits for enrolling in URPL 6805 Planning Internship but, more importantly, the coursework enables students to maximize the personal and professional development their internship affords. Internship opportunities will be posted for MURP student to review as they are received from employers in the area. Students are also encouraged to pursue internship opportunities on their own through networking with planning professionals and reaching out directly to planning-related organizations. More detailed information on internships is available in the MURP Student Handbook. Students should register on Handshake, the online career system used by the university, to find and be notified available internship and career positions. More information on Handshake is available on the college website.

Planning Workshop/Project Studio

URPL 5060 Planning Workshop and URPL 6000 Planning Project Studio are the two studio core courses. These courses are a key part of the hands-on, real-world focus of the MURP program.

Planning Workshop is the introductory studio for MURP students. It provides students an opportunity to address actual planning problems, issues, and processes; apply previously acquired knowledge and skills; and develop new knowledge and practical skills in an applied context.

Students will develop basic competence in accessing existing information, generating new information, and performing planning analysis and synthesis. Students will also learn to enhance their graphic, written, and oral communication capabilities. Through the Planning Workshop experience, students will develop an understanding of the relationship between planning theory and practice, as well as gain the ability to formulate compelling planning arguments in applied settings.

Students will also receive introductory instruction in Geographic Information Systems (ESRI ArcGIS) and Trimble SketchUp, which complement the introductory instruction in Adobe Creative Cloud (Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign) students receive in the Planning Practice and Technology course. The integration and use of all of these common planning technology applications is a critical component of the Planning Workshop experience.

Planning Project Studio is the MURP program's advanced studio course and is offered in the fall and summer semesters. This studio requires students to work together as a "planning consultant team" to complete a single planning project or study from beginning to end for a real-world client. It is expected that students enrolled in Planning Project Studio will have already gained the fundamental planning knowledge, skills, and values from their experience in Planning Workshop and other MURP courses. Consequently, the emphasis in Planning Project Studio is on putting everything together into a complete real-world planning project. The project locations and clients vary. In the fall semester, projects are

commonly located in Denver; travel-based summer studios are offered in international locations and in communities across Colorado.

The studio will emulate the typical planning consultant/client experience, including: refining the project scope and schedule with the client; establishing guiding principles and expected outcomes; conducting case studies and existing plans background research; gathering and analyzing existing conditions data; formulating alternative plan concepts; assessing alternative concepts through specific criteria; identifying and refining the preferred alternative; and preparing and presenting the final plan deliverables to the client. Emphasis is also placed on professionalism, project management, team-building and collaboration, client management, public involvement, and other aspects of the real-world planning consultant realm.

Planning Capstone/Planning Thesis

The culminating component of the MURP curriculum is the Planning Capstone/Planning Thesis requirement, which challenges students to utilize to the fullest extent the planning knowledge, skills, and values gained during their MURP program experience. Students must choose which option to undertake—Planning Capstone or Planning Thesis—based on their career goals, personal interests and aptitudes, and the advice of their faculty advisor.

Planning Capstone is a six-credit, project-oriented, one-semester course that results in a substantial deliverable upon completion. The Capstone option is best suited for students who wish to pursue a career as a professional planner after graduation. Most students undertake an individual capstone project, but some may complete a project with a team of two or three students. On a team project, each student must be individually responsible for a clearly defined component of the project as each student will be graded independently for his or her work.

Students may identify their own Planning Capstone client and project topic or they may select from a list of Capstone clients/projects that have been pre-arranged and approved by the MURP faculty. During the semester before enrolling in Planning Capstone, students will be required to: (a) identify their Capstone client and project topic, (b) determine if they will be working independently or as part of a small group, and (c) begin preparing a detailed project prospectus (work plan, schedule, methodology, and deliverables). Also during the semester before Capstone, students must attend a mandatory Capstone Orientation to receive instruction and guidance on project planning and management. Students must have a completed and approved project prospectus by the second week of their Capstone semester.

During the Planning Capstone semester, students complete their project work while maintaining regular contact with their Capstone faculty advisor and client to ensure sufficient progress and work quality, as well as periodically meeting with other Capstone students to discuss common issues and challenges, share experiences, and receive continued instruction and guidance from the Capstone faculty on project management and methodologies. The Planning Capstone semester concludes with the submission of all deliverables to the client and faculty advisor, a formal presentation to the client, and a poster presentation of the project to the MURP community.

For more information about the Planning Capstone option, please visit the Capstone webpage on the college website.

Planning Thesis comprises a pair of three-credit courses (A and B) taken over two semesters that together constitute a six-credit effort. The thesis option is most appropriate for outstanding MURP students

who are considering pursuing a Ph.D. or a research-oriented career after graduation.

While the thesis should address an aspect of urban and regional planning, it may be qualitative or quantitative in design, and directed toward the discovery of new facts, the development of theory or frameworks, or an investigation of an existing body of knowledge. The thesis document usually includes an abstract, a literature review that delineates the problem of interest or a gap in existing knowledge, a statement of research objectives, an explanation of the research design and methods, a report of the results of the research, and a discussion of the findings and their implications for planning.

The thesis is undertaken with the guidance and approval of a three-person thesis committee, including a Thesis Advisor who must be a full-time member of the MURP faculty who holds a professional degree or Ph.D. Students interested in pursuing the thesis option must complete and submit the Planning Thesis Proposal to their intended Thesis Advisor. Students must have their project approved by their Thesis Advisor prior to the course drop deadline in the Planning Thesis A semester. If the proposal is not approved, or the student's prior academic performance is not deemed adequate for participation in the thesis option, the student would enroll in Planning Capstone instead. Once the Thesis Advisor approves the proposal, the student must enroll in the Planning Thesis course using a Special Processing Form that is signed by their Thesis Advisor and submitted to Roxy New.

During the Planning Thesis A (URPL 6920) semester, students identify their research question and study design, work on their literature review, and begin their research. If human subjects research is involved (e.g. interviews, surveys, focus groups, or the like), students should work with their Thesis Advisor to submit their application to the Colorado Multiple Institutions Review Board during Thesis A.

During the Planning Thesis B (URPL 6925) semester, students complete their research and write the bulk of the thesis. Throughout, thesis students will meet regularly with their committee members to ensure sufficient progress and work quality. To graduate, the completed thesis must be successfully defended in an Oral Examination before the Thesis Committee, formatted according to department guidelines, and submitted to the online thesis repository ProQuest by the official deadline.

More information about the thesis option can be found in the MURP Student Handbook.

Program Values and Hallmarks

Our vision is to be a national leader in educating skilled, engaged planners and creating vibrant, sustainable communities.

Our Program Values include:

- **Advocacy** - We believe planners must be visionary in their work, politically engaged, and articulate proponents for positive change.
- **Collaboration** - We believe planners must understand and value the principles and perspectives of allied disciplines that participate in planning and city building.
- **Engagement** - We believe students should learn planning by interacting directly with professionals and the public to solve real-world planning challenges.
- **Evidence-based approaches** - We believe that planning research and practice should be rooted in critical thinking, appropriate methods, and rigorous analysis for developing evidence-based solutions.

- **Service** - We believe our program should serve as a resource for planning professionals and the public by offering ideas, solutions, research, advocacy, and inspiration.
- **Social Justice** - We believe planning must strive to create the most just and equitable processes and outcomes for historically marginalized, underrepresented, and disenfranchised individuals and communities.
- **Sustainability** - We believe planning must be based on the principles of economic viability, environmental resiliency, and social equity.

Our Program Hallmarks include:

ENGAGED AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

We give students numerous opportunities throughout our program to gain hands-on experience by participating in real-world projects and interacting with professional planners and community stakeholders. We use Denver’s diverse urban setting and Colorado’s rural and mountain landscapes as a real-world classroom for students to engage with the built, natural, and social environments.

PHYSICAL PLANNING ORIENTATION

We emphasize physical planning and design throughout our curriculum and connect them to policy, research, and the social sciences. We work closely with the College’s Architecture, Urban Design, Landscape Architecture, and Historic Preservation programs to explore and develop applied solutions to urban social, economic, and environmental issues.

INTERNATIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

We provide students the opportunity to study planning from an international perspective. By offering lecture courses that focus on global planning and development issues, studios that involve on-site coursework and engaged learning in other countries, and collaborations with universities and organizations abroad, we help students expand their personal and educational worldview.

INTEGRATED PLANNING TECHNOLOGIES

We integrate into our curriculum key professional technologies in realms such as digital mapping, 3D modeling, data visualization, and spatial analysis. We capitalize on Denver’s entrepreneurial spirit and tech-focused economy to provide students with state-of-the-art resources and numerous opportunities to learn a variety of technologies and applications used as critical tools in the planning process.

SELF-DIRECTED ELECTIVE CURRICULUM

We empower students with the opportunity to craft a planning education suited to their career goals and personal interests. Students may choose any combination of elective courses, whether oriented toward one of our three curriculum pillars, a traditional or customized planning specialization, or a generalist survey of the planning field.

PROFESSIONAL AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

We present students with instruction, guidance, and resources for understanding the many career paths within planning and allied fields, and for strategically positioning themselves to successfully achieve their professional and personal goals. We enable students to be prepared for not only their first planning job, but for a lifelong career.

DIVERSE FACULTY EXPERIENCE

We embody a planning faculty comprised of a mix of clinical professors and lecturers who bring to the classroom years of professional expertise in planning-related fields, and tenure-track professors who bring cutting-edge scholarship and research expertise. All of our faculty make teaching a top priority.

The total number of credit hours required to earn the Master of Urban and Regional Planning (MURP) degree is 54. Required core courses, including two studio-format courses and a final capstone or thesis project, comprise 36 of these credits. Students complete an additional 18 credits of elective courses of their choice, including one course that is an advanced skills/methods elective.

Course	Title	Hours
Year 1		
Fall		
URPL 5000	Planning History and Theory	3
URPL 5010	Planning Methods	3
URPL 5030	Planning Practice and Technology	3
URPL Elective ¹		3
Hours		12
Spring		
URPL 5040	Urban Sustainability	3
URPL 5050	Urban Development	3
URPL 5060	Planning Workshop	6
URPL Elective ²		3
Hours		15
Year 2		
Fall		
URPL 5020	Planning Law and Institutions	3
URPL 6000	Planning Project Studio ¹	6
URPL Elective ³		3
URPL Elective		3
Hours		15
Spring		
URPL 6900 or URPL 6920 <i>and</i> URPL 6925	Planning Capstone or Planning Thesis A <i>and</i> Thesis B	6
URPL Elective		3
URPL Elective		3
Hours		12
Total Hours		54

¹ Elective courses and URPL 6000 Planning Project Studio are also offered in the summer for students who wish to take credits between their first and second year of the program.

² At least one URPL elective must be taken from the Advanced Skills/Methods URPL course list. Please consult the MURP Student Handbook for this list of courses.

³ MURP students may take two of their six elective courses entirely outside of the MURP department, as long as the courses are relevant to the student’s interests in planning.