

# URBAN AND REGIONAL PLANNING, MURP

**Chair:** Carrie Makarewicz  
**Office:** CU Denver Building 330F  
**Telephone:** 303-315-1008  
**Fax:** 303-315-1050

## 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 and most unique graduate planning programs in the United States, offering a real-world, experientially oriented program that uses the city of Denver, the metro region, and Colorado as a classroom, and engages students with planning professionals and the community.

We believe that successful city-building requires expertise, breadth, interdisciplinary understanding, principles of equity and justice, 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 instruction, community outreach, and research. We encourage all students to follow their passion and develop expertise in the areas that matter most to them. Our self-directed curriculum allows students to understand the breadth of the planning field while gaining the technical expertise demanded by the profession, without being required to choose a concentration.

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 our faculty make teaching a top priority.

Our location in the College of Architecture and Planning along with Landscape Architecture and Historic Preservation facilitates a strong connection to design and other aspects of the natural and built environments, and our location in the heart of downtown Denver presents our students with endless opportunities to learn the complexities of planning for healthy, equitable, and resilient 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 the 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) 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 graduate level transfer credits (see the *Advanced Standing Credit Waiver* tab on our website). Students may also substitute required core courses with another course if they have completed courses that include substantially similar information. 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, but we permit spring admissions. Full-time students typically take approximately 12 semester hours per semester; taking more than 15 per semester is generally not advised. Some students take the 6-credit Planning Project Studio in the summer. The summer studio options include an international option and a studio within a small town in Colorado.

## 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 recommended program year to take them.

Code	Title	Hours
<b>Typically taken in the first year</b>		
URPL 5000	Planning History and Theory	3
URPL 5010	Planning Methods	3
URPL 5030	Planning Technologies	3
URPL 5040	Urban Sustainability	3
URPL 5050	Urban & Regional Development	3
URPL 5060	Planning Workshop	3
URPL 5070	Planning Practice & Engagement	3
<b>Typically taken in the second year</b>		
URPL 5020	Planning Law and Institutions	3
URPL 6000	Planning Project Studio	6
<i>Students choose of ONE of the following 6-credit courses:</i>		
URPL 6900	Planning Capstone	6
or URPL 6920	Planning Thesis A	
& URPL 6925	and Planning Thesis B	
<b>Total Hours</b>		<b>36</b>

## Elective Courses

Beyond the core curriculum, MURP students follow a self-directed educational path in completing 6 elective courses, totaling 18 hours. 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, Civil Engineering, Health and Behavioral Science, and Business. MURP students may take two of their six elective courses entirely outside of the MURP department, such as in Sociology, Public Health, Computer Science, or Anthropology, 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 more unique planning niche, such

as planning for refugees, or a general survey of diverse planning topics and skills.

Students are not required to identify or pursue any type of planning specialization or concentration unless they want to (specializations do not appear on transcripts). Ultimately, this means 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 full-time 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. Students must secure a full-time MURP faculty member to be their advisor for their Independent Study course. 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 project specifics are to be provided by the student in the Independent Study Proposal and approved by the student's Independent Study faculty advisor. 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.) A document with complete Independent Study guidelines, including enrollment process, is available from MURPSpace in Microsoft Teams within the Curriculum and Advising Channel.

## 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. To help students get the most of their internship experience, students can meet with the college's Director of Internship and Professional Development and the Department's Associate Chair to discuss their experiences in relation to the student's career interests, whether their work tasks are what they expected, and how to request feedback or time with their supervisor, among other topics related to having a successful internship.

Internship opportunities from employers in the area will be posted to the Department's Microsoft Teams space, MURPSpace, for current students, and to the university's online career system, Handshake. Students should register on Handshake to find and be notified of available internship and career positions. More information on Handshake is available on the college website under the Career Connections tab. Students are also encouraged to pursue internship opportunities on their own through networking with planning professionals and reaching out directly to planning-related organizations, such as the Colorado Chapter of the American Planning Association. More detailed information on internships is available in the MURP Student Handbook, available on MURPSpace and 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 pertinent to the planning process 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 use the software applications they learn in the Planning Technologies course, including ArcGIS Online and Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign. The integration and use 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 background research through case studies and existing plans; 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 either the Planning Capstone or Planning Thesis. Both challenge students to utilize to the fullest extent the planning knowledge, skills, and values they gained during their MURP program experience. Students must choose which option to undertake based on their career goals, personal interests and aptitudes, and the advice of a faculty advisor.

Planning Capstone is a six-credit, project-oriented, one-semester course that results in a substantial deliverable for a client. 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 opt to complete a Capstone project as 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.

If students do not identify their own Planning Capstone client and project topic, they may select from a list of Capstone client projects that have been pre-arranged and approved by the MURP faculty member who serves as the Capstone coordinator. During the semester before the Planning Capstone, students will be required to: (a) identify their Capstone client and project topic and (b) determine if they will be working independently or as part of a small group, and (c) attend a mandatory Capstone Orientation to receive instruction and guidance on project planning and management. At the start of the Capstone semester, student(s) will prepare a detailed project prospectus (work plan, schedule, methodology, and deliverables) so that it is complete and approved by the second week of the 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. They will also periodically meet 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 (<https://architectureandplanning.ucdenver.edu/architecture/our-work/urban-and-regional-planning-work/1/>).

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, working in close consultation with a primary faculty advisor from the research faculty, and two other committee members (see below).

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 further development of theory or frameworks, and an investigation of an existing body of knowledge. The thesis document 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.

A three- person thesis committee guides the thesis, including a Thesis Advisor who must be a full- time member of the MURP faculty with a Ph.D., a second faculty member with a professional degree or Ph.D., and a third member who may be a professional from outside the university who has relevant experience, pending the student's interest and topic. Students interested in pursuing the thesis option must complete and submit the Planning Thesis Proposal before enrolling in Thesis A 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 A 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 Planning Thesis A) semester, students refine their research question and study design, work on their literature review, and ideally, 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 so that their research protocol is approved before the start of Thesis B.

During the Planning Thesis B (URPL 6925 Planning Thesis B) semester, students conduct their research and write their 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, MURP Thesis Handbook, and MURP Thesis Format Guide.

## 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** - Planners must be visionary in their work, politically engaged, and articulate proponents for positive change.
- **Diversity** - Planning should reflect, draw from, and be responsive to the diversity of the population it serves.
- **Collaboration** - Planners must understand and value the principles and perspectives of allied disciplines that participate in planning and city building.
- **Engagement** - Students should learn planning by interacting directly with professionals and the public to solve real- world planning challenges.
- **Evidence-based approaches** - Planning research and practice should be rooted in critical thinking, appropriate methods, and rigorous analysis for developing evidence-based solutions.
- **Service** - Our program should serve as a resource for planning professionals and the public by offering ideas, solutions, research, advocacy, and inspiration.
- **Social Justice and Equity** - 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 and spatial planning and design throughout our curriculum and connect them to policy, research, and the social sciences. We work with the College's other programs, including Architecture, Urban Design, Landscape Architecture, and Historic Preservation to explore and develop applied solutions to urban social, economic, and environmental issues. We also work with Civil Engineering and Geography on other physical aspects of the built environment, including infrastructure and the natural environment.

## INTERNATIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

We provide students the opportunity to study planning from an international perspective. By offering lecture courses that incorporate or 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.

## SELF-DIRECTED ELECTIVE CURRICULUM

We empower students with the opportunity to craft a planning education suited to their career goals and personal interests, rather than requiring students declare a specialization. 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 to strategically position 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, as well as professional experience. 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. Two of the six electives may be taken entirely outside of the MURP department, as long as the courses are relevant to the student's interests in planning.

Course	Title	Hours
<b>Year 1</b>		
<b>Fall</b>		
URPL 5000	Planning History and Theory	3
URPL 5010	Planning Methods	3
URPL 5030	Planning Technologies	3

URPL 5070	Planning Practice & Engagement	3
<b>Hours</b>		<b>12</b>
<b>Spring</b>		
URPL 5040	Urban Sustainability	3
URPL 5050	Urban & Regional Development <sup>3</sup>	3
URPL 5060	Planning Workshop	3
URPL Elective <sup>2</sup>		3
URPL Elective		3
<b>Hours</b>		<b>15</b>
<b>Year 2</b>		
<b>Fall</b>		
URPL 5020	Planning Law and Institutions	3
URPL 6000	Planning Project Studio <sup>1</sup>	6
URPL Elective		3
URPL Elective		3
<b>Hours</b>		<b>15</b>
<b>Spring</b>		
URPL 6900	Planning Capstone	6
or URPL 6920 <i>and</i> URPL 6925	or Planning Thesis A <i>and</i> Planning Thesis B	
URPL Elective		3
URPL Elective		3
<b>Hours</b>		<b>12</b>
<b>Total Hours</b>		<b>54</b>

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Could also be taken in the fall semester.