

2017 PAB Accreditation Standards

Preconditions to Accreditation

All programs applying for accreditation review must meet five preconditions. Programs must demonstrate in their Self-Study Reports that they meet the preconditions of accreditation at each accreditation review. The existence of a campus-based program which meets all preconditions is a prerequisite for an application from a program delivered via distance education. For accreditation purposes, programs are evaluated in the same way regardless of locations or modalities of delivery.

As PAB is desirous of promoting innovation and experimentation in planning education, programs which do not meet the preconditions in a strictly literal sense, but which meet the spirit of these provisions, may petition PAB for special consideration. Such petitions and Self-Study Reports must provide evidence that the Program meets the spirit of the preconditions.

1. Program Graduates: Programs shall have granted the degree for which accreditation is sought to at least 25 students.
2. Accreditation Status of the Institution: The Program's parent institution shall be accredited by an institutional accrediting body recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) or by its successor organization.
3. Program and Degree Titles: Formal titles of programs and degrees shall contain the word "planning."
4. Length of Program: Undergraduate degree programs shall require a minimum of four academic years of full-time study or the equivalent. For students for whom the graduate degree constitutes the first professional degree in planning, a minimum of two academic years of full-time study or the equivalent in planning is required.

Guideline: Residency. A Program, whether undergraduate or graduate, shall normally require students' presence at the accredited program institution for a minimum of two academic years, or its equivalent. The intentions of this guideline are to ensure significant interaction with other students and with faculty, hands on collaborative work, socialization into the norms and aspirations of the profession, and observations by faculty of students' interpersonal and communication skills. Programs departing from campus-centered education by offering distance learning, international exchanges, or innovative delivery systems must demonstrate that the intentions of this guideline are being achieved, and that such programs are under the supervision of fully qualified faculty. Such determination may include, but is not limited to, evidence of faculty of record, and communications between faculty and students.

Guideline: Fast-tracking. Programs that combine undergraduate education with a graduate degree in planning in a total of less than six academic years or the equivalent shall meet the standards of an accredited graduate degree.

Guideline: Dual Degrees. Programs may allow a degree in planning to be earned simultaneously with a degree in another field, in less time than required to earn each degree separately. All standards of an accredited graduate degree in planning must be met and the electives allowed to meet requirements of the other degree must be appropriate as electives for a planning degree.

5. Primary Focus: The degree Program's primary focus shall be that of preparing students to become practitioners in the planning profession.

Accreditation Standards and Criteria

1. Strategic Planning and Progress

The Program or the Department in which it resides shall strive for self-improvement using an intentional process of goal articulation, planning, outcomes assessment, reflection and correction.

- A. Prior Strategic Plan and Accreditation Review: The Program should be engaged in continuous improvement based on ongoing planning activities, and responses to prior accreditation reviews. The Program shall demonstrate progress since the last accreditation review in meeting the goals and objectives articulated in the strategic plan in place at the prior accreditation review, and document progress towards compliance in meeting accreditation standards assessed as partially-met or unmet at the last Site Visit.
- B. Current Strategic Plan: The Program shall have a strategic plan for achieving its goals and objectives – either as a free-standing plan or part of a broader departmental strategic plan – and must be able to demonstrate progress towards goal attainment.

The strategic plan must address: the Program's vision; its definition of mission fulfillment; the elements identified as necessary to carry out the plan (including financial resources); the process by which the strategic plan is developed, refreshed, and disseminated; and a method for evaluating progress and making improvements. Programs must document participation in plan development by faculty, students, alumni, and practitioners. It is suggested that practitioners include a broad spectrum of the profession who can be resources for the Program during plan development and implementation.

- 1) *Mission Statement*: The Program or the Department in which it resides shall have a clear and concise mission statement that expresses its core values and fundamental purpose and role in training professional planners.
 - 2) *Program Goals and Measurable Objectives*: The Program's strategic plan shall identify goals and measurable objectives that advance the Program's mission. The goals shall identify the Program's future aspirations in the context of its mission and that of the University, and shall aim toward excellence beyond that which may already exist. Goals shall reflect the Program's intent to achieve and maintain diversity in its student body and faculty, and to incorporate into the curriculum the knowledge and skills needed to serve a diverse society.
- C. Programmatic Assessment: The Program, or the Department in which it resides, shall have a clearly defined approach, methodology, and indicators for measuring the Program's success in achieving the goals articulated in its strategic plan. Specifically, performance indicators and their results shall be reported at each accreditation review

in the areas listed below, in addition to those that are contained within the Program's strategic plan.

- 1) *Graduate Satisfaction*: The Program shall document the percentage of graduates who, two to five years after graduation, report being satisfied or highly satisfied with how the Program prepared them for their current employment.
 - 2) *Graduate Service to Community and Profession*: The Program shall provide evidence of graduates' contributions to meeting community needs and to providing service to the planning profession. Evidence for these shall be obtained between 2 and 5 years after graduation.
 - 3) *Student Retention and Graduation Rates*: The Program shall report student retention and graduation rates (including number of degrees produced each year) relative to the program enrollment and to targets set by the program.
 - 4) *Graduate Employment*: The Program shall document the percentage of fulltime graduates who are employed within one year of graduation in professional planning, planning-related or other positions, and the definitions thereof.
 - 5) *Graduate Certification*: The Program shall document the percentage, based on the number who take it, of master's graduates who pass the AICP exam within 5 years of graduation, and/or the percentage of bachelor's graduates who pass the AICP exam within 7 years of graduation. If the program believes that alternative credentials are meaningful to its goals and objectives, the program may supplement its AICP data.
 - 6) *Strategic Plan*: The Program shall document any other outcomes identified in its strategic plan.
- D. Student Learning Outcomes Assessment: The Program, or the Department in which it resides, shall have a clearly defined approach, methodology, and indicators for measuring student learning outcomes for the expected knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies, and habits of mind that students are expected to acquire. Evidence should clearly identify the learning outcomes sought and achieved for students at either cohort or year level over the accreditation review period.
- E. Strategic Issues for the Next 5-7 Years: The Program shall identify the critical steps consistent with its mission needed to advance its goals and progress during the next accreditation period.
- F. Public Information: The Program shall routinely provide reliable information to the public on its performance. Such information shall appear in easily accessible locations including program websites. In addition to the following information, programs are encouraged to showcase student achievement, however it may be determined.
- 1) *Student Achievement*: student achievement as determined by the program;
 - 2) *Cost*: the cost (tuition and fees) for a full-time student for one academic year;

- 3) *Retention and Graduation*: student retention and graduation rates, including the number of degrees produced each year, the percentage of first-year students who return in the 2nd year for graduate students, and/or the percentage of students enrolled one year after declaring their major for undergraduate students, the percentage of master's students graduating within 4 years, and/or the percentage of bachelor's students graduating within 6 years;
- 4) *AICP Pass Rate*: the percentage, based on the number who take it, of master's graduates who pass the AICP exam within 5 years of graduation, and/or the bachelor's graduates who pass the AICP exam within 7 years of graduation; and
- 5) *Employment*: the employment rate of fulltime graduates in professional planning, planning-related or other positions within 1 year of graduation.

2. Students

The Program shall attract a sufficient number of well-qualified students from diverse backgrounds and shall adequately prepare, support, and advise these students to pursue and contribute successfully to the field of urban and regional planning. Accordingly, the Program shall demonstrate that its students upon graduation possess the knowledge, skills, and values that will enable them to secure professional employment, to perform effectively as planners, and to participate meaningfully in the planning profession. Among the foremost responsibilities of the Program are to reject discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, and other classes protected by law - *within the Program itself* - and to advance diversity and a culture of inclusion among the planning profession's future practitioners in the Program, particularly with regard to historically underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities.

- A. Student Quality: The Program shall admit students whose educational attainment, previous academic performance, work experience, aptitude, maturity, and motivation indicate potential for success in their studies and in professional practice. Toward that end, the Program shall establish admission standards that reflect the institution's policies and the Program's goals, and the Program shall apply those standards fairly and consistently. The Program shall document its admission standards and the extent to which its current students meet or exceed those standards.
- B. Student Diversity: Consistent with applicable law and institutional policy, the Program shall establish strategic goals that demonstrate an active commitment to attracting and retaining a diverse student population, and are informed by the characteristics of the populations that the Program's graduates generally serve. The Program shall collect and analyze data on student demographics to inform and enhance its efforts to identify effective and appropriate methodologies for achieving diversity in its student body. Furthermore, the Program shall establish assessment mechanisms for each of its strategic goals that are focused on achieving diversity. Because diversity is not a static concept, and because all planning programs should seek to improve the diversity of the

graduates entering the profession, the Program shall provide evidence of continuous improvement in achieving its diversity-related strategic goals.

- C. Student Advising, Services, and Support: The Program shall provide students with competent academic advising, progress appraisal, and career guidance, as well as access within the institution to any personal counseling that students might need. Furthermore, the Program or its institution shall provide students with career services that assist students in securing suitable internships and jobs. The Program shall also support its students by providing them with financial aid opportunities that are sufficient in number and amount to achieve the Program's strategic goals for a well-qualified and diverse student body. The Program shall publish its criteria for the allocation of such financial aid.
- D. Student Engagement in the Profession: The Program shall provide opportunities for student engagement in the profession, including but not limited to participation in a planning student organization affiliated with the Program, in the local chapter of the American Planning Association, in professional mentoring programs, in other professional societies and activities, and in work, internships, community-based planning activities, or project experiences that develop their skills as planners. The Program shall also promote socialization into the planning profession by encouraging students to attend APA's planning conferences and other events in which students might interact with professional planners from a variety of backgrounds.

3. Faculty

The Program shall employ a sufficient number of qualified, productive, and engaged faculty members to permit the achievement of program goals and objectives. Among the foremost responsibilities of the Program are to reject discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, and other classes protected by law - *within the Program itself* - and to advance diversity and a culture of inclusion among the faculty who shape the future of the planning profession, particularly with regard to historically underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities.

- A. Faculty Quality: The fulltime and adjunct faculty of the program shall have educational and professional backgrounds, a relevant mix of credentials (i.e., accredited degrees in planning, significant experience in planning, PhDs in planning, degrees and experience in related fields, and AICP membership), be qualified to serve the Program's mission and capable of executing the Program's goals and objectives, particularly as they pertain to teaching, research, and service.
- B. Faculty Diversity: Consistent with applicable law and institutional policy, the Program shall establish strategic goals that demonstrate an active commitment to attracting and retaining a diverse faculty and are informed by the characteristics of the populations

that the Program's graduates generally serve. The Program shall collect and analyze data on faculty demographics in order to inform and enhance its efforts to identify effective and appropriate methodologies for achieving diversity among its faculty. Furthermore, the Program shall establish assessment mechanisms for each of its strategic goals that are focused on achieving diversity. Because diversity is not a static concept, and because all faculty representation within each planning program should seek to contribute to the diversity of the learning environment and improve the diversity of graduates entering the profession, the Program shall provide evidence of continuous improvement in achieving its diversity-related strategic goals.

- C. Faculty Size: The faculty shall be of a sufficient size to accomplish the Program's mission and goals, administer the Program, and teach the curriculum. The Program shall have a faculty of such size that the full-time faculty are able to teach required courses and direct all areas of specialization. The Program shall have no greater than a 15/1 ratio of undergraduate student FTE to instructional faculty FTE, and a 10/1 ratio of graduate student FTE to instructional faculty FTE.
- D. Engagement with Students: The faculty shall be engaged with students beyond the classroom as mentors, advisors, and/or committee members or committee chairs on thesis, reports and dissertations. Faculty shall provide career advice and assist in job placement in ways that coordinate appropriately with the efforts of staff and academic professionals.
- E. Research, Scholarship, and Other Creative Activity: Faculty teaching and administrative assignments provide for engagement in research, scholarship, and/or outreach reflective of the stage of their careers, the mission of the Program, and expectations of the University. Faculty creative activities will undergo peer review appropriate to the scholarly or practice orientation of the work, including, but not limited to, appropriate journals or other publication outlets, conferences, or other venues allowing dissemination of the work.
- F. Professional Involvement and Community Outreach: Faculty demonstrate involvement in the profession through participation in national organizations and/or participation in local, state, regional, and national professional conferences, workshops and other sponsored activities including activities of professional planning organizations. They shall demonstrate community outreach through continuous engagement in activities leading to the advancement of the profession, the University, and progress toward meeting the needs of the broader society.
- G. Professional Development: Faculty shall be provided opportunities to continue to develop themselves professionally. Work assignments and other development opportunities shall be such that skills in teaching, research, leadership, professional practice and other creative activities are sufficiently maintained and developed. Adequate resources shall be available to support faculty professional development,

including training with respect to institution policies, student needs, and the use of appropriate instructional technology.

4. Curriculum and Instruction

Planners integrate knowledge, skills and values to anticipate the future and improve the quality of decision-making affecting people and places. They understand the dynamics of cities, suburbs, regions, and the theory and practice of planning. They attend to the diversity of individual and community values. They develop and implement ethical plans, policies and processes. The minimum curriculum criteria below reflect these educational goals. Programs are expected to be innovative and to experiment in developing curricular approaches that achieve the objectives of this standard.

The curriculum should demonstrate consistency and coherence in meeting the Program's mission, goals, and objectives. While an accredited degree program must meet basic minimal performance criteria, PAB recognizes that programs may have different profiles with varying emphases. The Program being reviewed must demonstrate how its curricular content matches the profile emphasized in its overall mission. For example, a program emphasizing urban design would meet a different test than one emphasizing small town and rural planning.

The curriculum must include instruction to prepare students to practice planning in communities with diverse populations and to develop skills necessary to create equitable and inclusive planning processes. Consistent with the Program's mission and strategic plan, course content and co-curricular activities should seek to broaden understanding of historical and contemporary factors across the full range of practice settings in which program graduates work, including national, demographic and political variation, and to promote awareness and respect for differing beliefs, values and expectations of populations served by the profession.

The Program shall provide a curriculum and offer instruction to best assure achievement of the knowledge, skills, and values that qualify graduates of accredited degree programs to enter professional planning practice. While programs may adopt such established and familiar learning activities as courses and internships, PAB is also receptive to program innovations that prove effective in meeting the criteria.

An accredited degree program must ensure that each graduate demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for competent professional planning in diverse occupational and institutional settings. The criteria below provide a framework for judging the scope and quality of minimum educational outcomes.

- A. Required Knowledge, Skills and Values of the Profession: The Program shall offer a curriculum that teaches students the essential knowledge, skills, and values central to

the planning profession. These required components will be taught in such a manner that it is possible to demonstrate that every graduate has studied them. Ordinarily, this means that they are included in courses required of all students, although other approaches are possible. Specifically:

- 1) *General Planning Knowledge*: The comprehension, representation, and use of ideas and information in the planning field, including appropriate perspectives from history, social science, and design and other allied fields.
 - a) Purpose and Meaning of Planning: why planning is undertaken by communities, cities, regions, and nations, and the impact planning is expected to have.
 - b) Planning Theory: behaviors and structures available to bring about sound planning outcomes.
 - c) Planning Law: legal and institutional contexts within which planning occurs.
 - d) Human Settlements and History of Planning: growth and development of places over time and across space.
 - e) The Future: 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.
 - f) Global Dimensions of Planning: interactions, flows of people and materials, cultures, and differing approaches to planning across world regions.
- 2) *Planning Skills*: The use and application of knowledge to perform specific tasks required in the practice of planning.
 - a) Research: tools for assembling and analyzing ideas and information from prior practice and scholarship, and from primary and secondary sources.
 - b) Written, Oral and Graphic Communication: ability to prepare clear, accurate and compelling text, graphics and maps for use in documents and presentations.
 - c) Quantitative and Qualitative Methods: data collection, analysis and modeling tools for forecasting, policy analysis, and design of projects and plans.
 - d) Plan Creation and Implementation: integrative tools useful for sound plan formulation, adoption, and implementation and enforcement.
 - e) Planning Process Methods: tools for stakeholder involvement, community engagement, and working with diverse communities.
 - f) Leadership: tools for attention, formation, strategic decision-making, team building, and organizational/community motivation.
- 3) *Values and Ethics*: Values inform ethical and normative principles used to guide planning in a democratic society. The Program shall incorporate values and ethics into required courses of the curriculum, including:
 - a) Professional Ethics and Responsibility: key issues of planning ethics and related questions of the ethics of public decision-making, research, and client

representation (including the provisions of the AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, and APA's Ethical Principles in Planning).

- b) **Equity, Diversity and Social Justice:** key issues in equity, diversity, and social justice that emphasize planners' role in expanding choice and opportunity for all persons, plan for the needs of the disadvantaged, reduce inequities through critical examination of past and current systems and disparities, and promote racial and economic integration.
- c) **Governance and Participation:** the roles of officials, stakeholders, and community members in planned change.
- d) **Sustainability and Environmental Quality:** environmental, economic, and social/political factors that contribute to sustainable communities, and the creation of sustainable futures.
- e) **Growth and Development:** economic, infrastructure, social, and cultural factors in urban and regional growth and change.
- f) **Health and Built Environment:** planning's implications on individual and community health in the places where people live, work, play and learn.

B. **Areas of Specialization and Electives:** The Program shall have sufficient depth in its curriculum and faculty in the specialization areas and electives it offers to assure a credible and high quality offering.

- 1) ***Specializations:*** When a program includes specialization fields, it is assumed that they are built on top of the general planning foundation and that courses in the areas of specialization add significantly to the basic planning knowledge, skills and values. Programs must demonstrate that there are enough courses in the areas of specialization that students get the depth and range of materials to give them a level of expertise.
- 2) ***Electives:*** The curriculum shall contain opportunities for students to explore other areas such as exposure to other professions, other specializations, and emerging trends and issues.

C. **Instructional Delivery and Scheduling:** Courses shall be taught by qualified faculty, and appropriate instructors shall be assigned for required, specialized and elective courses. In general, most required courses will be taught by fulltime planning faculty. Courses shall be offered in formats and times to assure appropriate student access to them and timely completion of program requirements.

D. **Facilities:** Students, faculty and staff shall have access to sufficient physical resources and facilities to achieve the Program's mission and objectives. The facilities shall be appropriate for the level and nature of required classrooms, studio workspace, and offices.

E. **Information and Technology:** Students, faculty and staff shall have access to sufficient information systems and technology, and technical support, technical equipment and

training thereon to achieve the Program's mission and objectives. Information and technology include, but are not limited to, maintained computer hardware, software and access, library resources and collections.

5. Governance

The Program shall make administrative decisions through a governance process that exhibits a high degree of transparency, inclusiveness, and autonomy. The Program shall be located within an identifiable and distinct academic unit, such as a department or school of planning, and the Program's faculty shall be clearly identifiable as such. The Program shall involve faculty and students, as appropriate, in administrative decisions that affect them and shall demonstrate that those decisions serve to implement the Program's strategic plan.

- A. Program Autonomy: In accordance with customary university procedures, the planning program will normally be headed by its own administrator, who will report directly to a dean or an equivalent academic official faculty. The Program shall have responsibility for the design of its curriculum and shall have an independent voice in the appointment, promotion, tenure, and evaluation of its faculty, and the admission and evaluation of its students. The planning faculty and students shall be involved in the development of the Program's Self-Study Report and shall be made aware of the content of all submissions by the Program to PAB as well as reports and decisions by PAB concerning the Program.
- B. Program Leadership: The administrator of the degree Program shall be a planner whose leadership and management skills, combined with education and experience in planning, enables the Program to achieve its goals and objectives. The administrator shall be a tenured faculty member with an academic rank of associate professor or higher.
- C. Communication: The Program shall use a variety of media to provide effective two-way communication with current and prospective students, faculty, alumni, employers, professional associations, practitioners, and other stakeholders about the Program's goals and objectives and about its progress toward achieving those aims. The administrator of the Program shall be regularly accessible to these stakeholders, providing them with suitable opportunities for interaction.
- D. Faculty and Student Participation: The Program shall provide fulltime and adjunct faculty, individual students, student organizations, and other interested parties with opportunities to participate fully and meaningfully in administrative decisions that affect them. When interested parties raise substantive issues, the Program shall demonstrate that it has responded appropriately to those issues, and communicated the outcomes in such a fashion that the interested parties understand how the decisions were made.

- E. Promotion and Tenure: The Program shall publish policies and procedures for making decisions about the promotion and tenure of faculty, and shall provide junior faculty with the support that they need to advance professionally within the Program. The Program shall provide mentorship opportunities for all junior faculty, including women, racial and ethnic minorities, and members of other under-represented groups.
- F. Grievance Procedures: The Program shall publish policies and procedures for resolving student and faculty grievances, and shall appropriately disseminate such policies and procedures to students and faculty. The Program shall maintain records to document the number and kinds of grievances it has received and the manner in which it has resolved those grievances.
- G. Online Integrity: The Program shall have in place effective procedures through which to ensure that the student who registers in an online course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit. The Program makes clear in writing that these processes protect student privacy and notifies students at the time of registration or enrollment of any projected additional costs associated with the verification procedures.