

Virginia Commonwealth University  
L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs  
Urban and Regional Studies and Planning program Diversity and Inclusion Plan  
Fall, 2020

This Diversity and Inclusion Plan for the Urban and Regional Studies and Planning (URSP) program has been developed in consideration of VCU's goal of increasing inclusive excellence (IE), the Wilder School's commitment to diversity and social equity, and the Planning Accreditation Board's amendments to the accreditation standards enacted in March 2017 requiring increased attention and detail on issues of diversity and social justice. This plan for the URSP program is similarly structured to, and consistent with the Strategic Plan for our Master of Urban and Regional Planning (MURP) degree, completed in fall 2020 for inclusion in the MURP program re-accreditation Self Study Report.

To emphasize that the goals of inclusive excellence permeate all aspects of our work, this Diversity and Inclusion plan engages the same four goals adopted in the MURP Strategic Plan, and each objective in this Diversity and Inclusion plan corresponds directly to an objective in the MURP Strategic Plan. Additional detail is provided in the MURP Strategic Plan document with regards to Indicators, Data Sources, and Benchmarks related to each Objective.

Our overall goal is to ensure that our program is diverse and inclusive in all aspects. While we have always been committed to diversity and inclusion, recent events and changes in the geo-political and public health environments have necessitated more intentional actions towards this goal. A diverse environment implies adequate representation of people and cultures in our region that comprise and influence our work as planners and planning educators. Inclusion implies empowering all members of our community to contribute and valuing their perspectives.

**Goal 1: Prepare students to connect knowledge, skills, and values to reflective action that informs their work in planning and related fields.**

Objective 1.1. Encourage students to evaluate questions and approaches using principles of diversity, inclusion, social justice, and sustainability to guide planning in a democratic society. [Corresponds to Objective 1.7 of the MURP Strategic Plan]

Action Items from MURP Strategic Plan:

- In public-facing work, including studio courses, community-engaged or other field-based courses and the professional plan, require students to identify the range of stakeholders, their role in the governance or impact of the issue and the power they have to implement or advocate for or against the plan. Build in reflective exercises that help students think critically about how these stakeholders might effectively be engaged in the process.
- Build in reflective assignments to URSP 610 (first semester) and URSP 762 (final semester) that require students to reflect on their professional identity with respect to the principles in objective 1.7 (first semester, URSP 610) then discuss how that may have evolved over time and influenced their Professional Plans (last semester, URSP 762).

Objective 1.2. Ensure that courses and pedagogy reflect that diversity and inclusion are critical values in planning. [*Corresponds to Objective 1.8 of the MURP Strategic Plan*]

Action Items from MURP Strategic Plan:

- Build discussions of values and professional identity into subject matter courses through the addition of guest lecturers, reflective exercises and class discussions to help students understand the range of planning work in which they can use their knowledge.
- Identify and/or develop resources for instructors to integrate readings, exercises, and assignments into courses that require students to learn, use and reflect on these values

## **Goal 2. Recruit and retain excellent students.**

Objective 2.1. Increase the diversity of our student body, particularly to reflect the diversity of the region in which the majority of our graduates practice – Virginia and nearby states. [*Corresponds to Objective 2.9 of the MURP Strategic Plan*]

Action Items from MURP Strategic Plan:

- Develop new voluntary survey questions for the MURP student entry exam given that gather data on elements of student diversity not tracked with official VCU data (e.g., gender and sexual orientation, first-generation status, immigrant status, etc.). Use this information to better inform student recruitment and retention strategies.
- Pursue mutually beneficial working relationships with targeted HBCU's in Virginia, particularly Virginia State University, Norfolk State University, and Hampton University. These should not be unilateral recruitment arrangements, but rather collaborations aimed at pursuing shared teaching, research, and service goals, with the added benefit of exposing students from those schools to the planning field and our MURP program.
- Pursue student recruitment opportunities at universities in the region that have a high Hispanic / Latino student population, and undergraduate programs that might be logical feeders to our MURP program (e.g., George Mason University and other institutions in Northern Virginia).
- Build relationships and host guest lectures or other events with VCU student organizations representing Black, Hispanic / Latino, and other underrepresented minority backgrounds.
- Highlight and disseminate faculty research and practice that is relevant to the diversity of communities in our region and the challenges facing diverse communities.

**Goal 3. Produce research and service that advances planning knowledge, practice, and the public good through scholarship, civic engagement and professional work.**

Objective 3.1. Encourage diversity and inclusion-related activities by URSP program faculty, including scholarship, civic engagement, and professional work. [*Corresponds to Objective 3.8 of the MURP Strategic Plan*]

Action Items from MURP Strategic Plan:

- Maintain multi-year data of faculty diversity-related activities and contributions
- Make diversity and inclusion a permanent agenda item at every annual faculty retreat, to discuss areas of opportunity or strategic focus for the program
- Explore opportunities for institutionalizing diversity goals in Wilder School faculty annual review process

Objective 3.2. Lead national and regional conversations on diversity and inclusion as it relates to planning and planning related issues. [*Corresponds to Objective 3.9 of the MURP Strategic Plan*]

Action Items from MURP Strategic Plan:

- Establish program-level efforts to invite speakers or convene panels annually to elevate regional conversations around issues of diversity and inclusion.
- Support faculty members' participation at national events that further this objective.

**Goal 4: Promote diversity and inclusion broadly as a primary feature and strength of the URSP program.**

Objective 4.1: Understand and cultivate an inclusive climate for students and faculty. [*Corresponds to Objective 4.1 of the MURP Strategic Plan*]

Action Items from MURP Strategic Plan:

- Work with the VCU Office of Multicultural Affairs to locate discussion/workshop options about a specific aspect of diversity and inclusion, e.g. race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and culture.
- Support programming or student groups devoted to social justice and diversity issues.
- Create short reports on these conversations that become part of our website presence.

Objective 4.2. Recruit and retain diverse faculty members, including core faculty and adjuncts. [*Corresponds to Objective 4.2 of the MURP Strategic Plan*]

Action Items from MURP Strategic Plan:

- Reach out to relevant professional groups, such as POCIG, GPEIG, FWIG, etc., to ensure that advertisements for full-time faculty positions reach a diverse pool of applicants.

- Review applicant records for full-time faculty searches to ensure that a diverse selection of candidates are included in initial application pool and among shortlisted candidates.
- Work with community partners and alumni network to identify and actively recruit candidates for open adjunct positions who would contribute diversity to the faculty.

Objective 4.3. Foster faculty service contributions that advance diversity and inclusion goals. [Corresponds to Objective 4.3 of the MURP Strategic Plan]

Action Items from MURP Strategic Plan:

- Actively seek opportunities for faculty to engage in service projects related to diversity and inclusion
- Build relationships with organizations that support diversity and inclusion goals
- Provide training and mentoring for faculty in service techniques and strategies that enhance diversity and inclusion goals

Objective 4.4. Encourage and recognize faculty members' current and sustained efforts towards diversity and social justice as a key ingredient of excellence. [Corresponds to Objective 4.4 of the MURP Strategic Plan]

Action Items from MURP Strategic Plan:

- Encourage identification of diversity, inclusion, and social justice efforts by faculty members in their annual reports.
- Once every three years (coinciding with new Program Chair elections), organize faculty-wide conversations on diversity, inclusion, and social justice to revisit and change or adjust goals and objectives as appropriate.
- Share examples of the program's past social justice efforts, drawn from prior annual reports, with URSP faculty.
- Establish an award or other method of program-level recognition of particularly impactful social justice efforts by URSP faculty.