

# PAB ACCREDITATION STANDARDS AND CRITERIA

## **Preconditions to Accreditation**

1. Program Graduates
2. Accreditation Status of the Institution
3. Program and Degree Titles
4. Length of Program
5. Primary Focus

## **1. Strategic Planning and Progress**

- A. Strategic Plan
- B. Programmatic Assessment
- C. Accreditation Review
- D. Public Information

## **2. Students**

- A. Student Quality
- B. Student Diversity
- C. Student Advising, Services, and Support
- D. Student Engagement in the Profession

## **3. Faculty**

- A. Faculty Quality
- B. Faculty Diversity
- C. Faculty Size
- D. Engagement with Students
- E. Research, Scholarship and Other Creative Activity
- F. Professional Involvement, Community Outreach, and Civic Engagement
- G. Professional Development

## **4. Curriculum**

- A. Guiding Values
- B. Required Knowledge and Skills of the Profession
- C. Electives
- D. Student Learning Outcomes Assessment
- E. Instructional Delivery and Scheduling
- F. Facilities
- G. Information and Technology

## **5. Governance**

- A. Program Autonomy
- B. Program Leadership
- C. Communications
- D. Faculty and Student Participation
- E. Promotion and Tenure
- F. Grievance Procedures
- G. Online Integrity

### 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: 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 improvement.

A. 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. Programs must document active engagement in plan development by faculty, students, alumni, practitioners and any other key stakeholders the Program deems important to the process. Practitioners and other key stakeholders may include a broad spectrum of professionals who can be resources for the Program during plan development and implementation. The strategic plan shall include the Program’s definition of diversity, equity, inclusion and social justice, and goals and measurable objectives aimed at achieving them. The strategic plan must include the following elements:

- 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 Vision*: The Program or the Department in which it resides shall have a clear and aspirational long-term vision for change resulting from the Program’s work.
- 3) *Program Goals and Measurable Objectives*: The Program’s strategic plan shall identify goals and measurable objectives that advance the Program’s mission and vision. 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. These should include strategic issues for the next 5-7 years and goals. Goals shall reflect the Program’s intent to achieve and maintain diversity, as defined by the Program, in its student body and faculty, and to incorporate into the curriculum the knowledge and skills needed to serve a diverse society.
- 4) *Monitoring and Evaluation*: 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. The Program shall document how it tracks and assesses the results of the interventions and strategies.

B. Programmatic Assessment: 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 survey its graduates and document the percentage of respondents who, 2 to 5 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 awarded each year) relative to the program enrollment and to targets set by the program.
  - 4) *Graduate Employment*: The Program shall document the percentage of all graduates who are employed within one year of graduation in professional planning, planning-related or other positions, and the definitions thereof.
  - 5) *Graduate Certification Exam Pass Rate*: The Program shall document the percentage, based on the number who take the AICP exam, of master's graduates who pass the AICP exam within 3 years of graduation, and/or the percentage of bachelor's graduates who pass the AICP exam within 5 years of graduation. If the Program believes that alternative credentials are meaningful to its goals and objectives, the Program may supplement its AICP data with these metrics.
  - 6) *Strategic Plan*: The Program shall document any other outcomes identified in its strategic plan, the degree to which the goals and measurable objectives articulated in the plan have been met, and any barriers to meeting the goals and measurable objectives, and how the Program proposes to address barriers.
- C. Accreditation Review: The Program shall demonstrate progress since the last accreditation review in meeting accreditation standards assessed as partially-met or unmet at the last review.
- D. Public Information: The Program shall routinely provide reliable information to the public on its performance at least annually. 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 awarded 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, and 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 3 years of graduation, and/or the bachelor's graduates who pass the AICP exam within 5 years of graduation; and
- 5) *Employment*: the employment rate of all 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 - *within the Program itself* - and to advance diversity and a culture of inclusion and equity among the students, particularly with regard to racial and ethnic groups historically underrepresented in the profession.

- A. Student Quality: The Program shall admit students whose educational attainment, previous academic performance, work experience, aptitude, maturity, motivation, life experiences, and/or hardships overcome indicate the potential for success in their studies and in professional practice. Toward that end, the Program shall establish admission standards, when applicable, that reflect the institution's policies and the Program's goals, and the Program, when applicable, 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: Diversity is an inclusive concept which encompasses, but is not limited to, race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, sex, sexual orientation, ability, educational attainment, first-generation status, spiritual beliefs, creed, culture, tribal affiliation, nationality, immigration status, political beliefs, and veteran status. The Program shall develop a holistic strategy that addresses the following elements:
  - 1) *Recruitment*: Consistent with applicable law and institutional policy, the Program shall establish strategic goals that demonstrate an active commitment to attracting a diverse student population. Programs must report how they are arriving at their program's diversity goals and determining what student populations, if any, are underrepresented in their Program. 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 activities and programs intended to assist in achieving student diversity along with specific diversity-related strategic goals that have been met.

- 2) *Climate of inclusiveness*: The Program shall report on actions being taken to promote a culture of inclusiveness within the Program, including but not limited to support of student groups, promotion of community events, curricular elements, and faculty involvement.
- 3) *Student support*: The Program shall report on actions being taken to support and retain students from underrepresented groups, including but not limited to mentorship and internship programs, financial assistance and fellowship programs, professional development programs and career services, and initiatives to support engagement in the profession.

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 (APA), 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 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 - *within the Program itself* - and

to advance diversity and a culture of inclusion among the faculty, particularly with regard to historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups.

- 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: Diversity is an inclusive concept which encompasses, but is not limited to, race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, sex, sexual orientation, ability, educational attainment, first-generation status, spiritual beliefs, creed, culture, tribal affiliation, nationality, immigration status, political beliefs, and veteran status. The Program shall develop a holistic strategy that addresses the following elements:
- 1) *Recruitment*: Consistent with applicable law and institutional policy, the Program shall establish strategic goals that demonstrate an active commitment to attracting a diverse faculty. 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 activities and programs intended to assist in achieving faculty diversity along with specific diversity-related strategic goals that have been met.
  - 2) *Climate of inclusiveness*: The Program shall report on actions being taken to promote a culture of inclusiveness within the Program.
  - 3) *Faculty support*: The Program shall report on actions being taken to support and retain faculty from underrepresented groups. This includes, but is not limited to mentorship programs, support for research and teaching initiatives, and professional development opportunities. The Program should report data on promotion, and initiatives to support engagement in the profession.
- 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 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 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 should 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, Community Outreach, and Civic Engagement: 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, the use of appropriate instructional technology, and topics such as implicit bias. Faculty, especially those from underrepresented groups, should also be provided with opportunities to be mentored throughout their career.

#### **4. Curriculum and Instruction**

Planners are committed to serve the public interest, infusing the values of equity and sustainability into their knowledge and skills as they envision the future and lead in decision-making that affects 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.

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 from local to global in which planners work, including demographic, environmental, institutional and political variation, and to promote awareness of and respect for differing beliefs, values and expectations of populations served by the profession.

The Program shall provide a curriculum and offer instruction to assure achievement of the knowledge, skills, and values that qualify graduates of accredited degree programs to enter diverse planning practice settings. Programs may do so using such established and familiar learning activities as courses and internships, and other 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. Guiding Values: The Program shall address in its strategic plan its commitment to fundamental ethical and normative principles and ensure that these principles are embedded in a range of required courses, specifically:
- 1) *Equity, Diversity, Social Justice, and Inclusion*: key issues of equity, diversity, and social justice, including planners' role in expanding choice and opportunity for all persons; planning for the needs of disadvantaged groups; reducing inequities through critical examination of past and current systems; and promoting racial and economic equity.
  - 2) *Sustainability, Resilience, and Climate Justice*: environmental, economic, and social/political factors that contribute to sustainable communities, reducing impacts of climate change, and creating equitable and climate-adapted futures.
  - 3) *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. Required Knowledge and Skills of the Profession: The Program shall offer a curriculum that teaches students the essential knowledge and skills 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. Programs are encouraged to keep their curriculum in tune with emerging trends in the profession and engaged with contemporary issues. Specifically:

- 1) *General Planning Knowledge in Global Context*: The comprehension, representation, and use of ideas and information in the planning field, in the U.S. (or Canada) and internationally including appropriate perspectives from history, social sciences, design, and other allied fields.
    - a) *Planning History and Theory*: The evolution and current practice of planning in communities, cities, regions, and nations; how planning has advanced and hindered the attainment of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion; expectations about planning outcomes in different local and national contexts; conceptual models about what planning is and how it works; past and present conceptions of the future, including the relationship between planning and the future; the role of planning in responding to the global climate crisis.
    - b) *Planning Law and Institutions*: Behaviors and structures available to bring about sound planning outcomes; mechanisms and practices for ensuring equitable and inclusive decision-making; legal and institutional contexts within which planning occurs in the U.S. and/or internationally.
    - c) *Urban and Regional Development*: Political, economic, social, and environmental explanations of and insights on historical, present, and future development; relationships between the built and natural environments and individual and community health and well-being; planning responses to mitigate climate change, reduce risks, and recover from climate-exacerbated impacts; interactions – flows of people, materials, ideas, and cultures – across world regions.
  - 2) *Skills and Tools for Planning Practice*: The use and application of knowledge to perform tasks required in the practice of planning.
    - a) *Planning Process and Engagement*: Planning process and community and stakeholder engagement; plan creation and implementation; methods of design and intervention to understand and influence the future.
    - b) *Analytical Skills and Tools*: Research and critical analysis skills for preparing and conducting research; quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection, analysis, and forecasting; methods of geo-spatial analysis, mapping and data visualization; data analytics and urban technology.
    - c) *Professional, Communication, and Leadership Skills*: Ability to work in teams and with professionals in allied fields; professional leadership in the planning context; written, oral, and graphic communication.
- C. Electives: Beyond the required courses in the curriculum, Programs shall offer additional courses to provide both greater depth and breadth of material. The curriculum shall contain elective opportunities for students to gain exposure to a range of planning domains, other professions, and emerging trends and issues. Programs have

the option of grouping elective courses together to create areas of specialization that provide students with a concentrated mastery of a specific planning domain.

- 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 and competencies for the expected knowledge, skills, and guiding values that students are expected to acquire. Evidence should connect materials covered in the core curriculum to the learning outcomes sought and achieved for students.
- E. Instructional Delivery and Scheduling: Courses shall be taught by qualified faculty. 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.
- F. Facilities: Students, faculty and staff shall have access to sufficient physical resources and facilities to achieve the Program's mission and objectives. This includes facilities for instruction, student work, and offices.
- G. 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, and 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. The Program shall have control over 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 faculty member whose leadership and management skills, combined with education and experience in planning, enables the Program to achieve its goals and objectives. Typically, this administrator will 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 them. 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 and student organizations with opportunities to participate fully and meaningfully in administrative decisions that affect them.
- E. Promotion and Tenure: The Program shall publish policies and procedures for making decisions about the promotion and tenure of faculty. The Program shall provide support, including mentorship opportunities, for all faculty at the Assistant and Associate Professor (or equivalent) levels. The Program shall demonstrate a commitment to ensuring that women, racial and ethnic minorities, and members of underrepresented groups in academia have access to the mentoring, tools, and other support they need to advance professionally.
- F. Grievance Procedures: In accordance with relevant university guidelines, 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: In accordance with relevant university guidelines, 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.