

Michigan State University

Urban and Regional Planning Program Strategic Plan 2024-2029

Urban and Regional Planning investigates the connection between our physical spaces, communities and the individual. Through the combination of data, environmental research, creative design and community outreach, planners have the potential to positively impact the way we exist with our environment. As our society grapples with issues of the environment, social justice, culture, economic development and sustainability, Planners are at the forefront of developing creative and inclusive solutions to the ongoing demands of the economic, social and environmental development of our communities at varying scales (from the local to the regional/national). The Urban & Regional Planning Program was established in 1946 and offers a Bachelor of Urban and Regional Planning and a Master of Urban and Regional Planning.

On April 7, 2023, Michigan State University's National Charrette Institute (NCI) facilitated a workshop for 20 people to create a strategic plan for the MSU Urban and Regional Planning program. The stakeholders for this workshop were current undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and alumni/board members. The workshop was located at TechSmith Conference Center in East Lansing, MI. Goals of the workshop were:

1. Envision a strategic plan for the URP Program.
2. Discuss goals and action planning elements.
3. Communicate about next roles and steps.

Program Vision Creating vibrant cities and communities through leadership, economic creativity, social responsibility, and environmentally sustainable planning, research and policy.

Program Values

- Quality: We hold ourselves to the highest standards to achieve lasting influence.
- Inclusiveness: We foster a culture in which all individuals are valued, respected and engaged so that diverse voices can enrich our work.
- Engagement: We link with campus and external communities to leverage our strengths and collectively realize our shared goals.
- Integrity and Ethics: We are honest, transparent and courageous in our discovery and dissemination of knowledge.
- Creativity: We imagine innovative approaches to understand and improve the world.
- Advocacy and Empowerment: We equip individuals and communities with the knowledge to make informed and just decisions.

Undergraduate Program (BSURP) Mission

The **mission** of the Urban & Regional Planning Program is to *prepare students to become practitioners in the planning profession*. This is addressed through three broad themes:

Teaching: To provide future practitioners the knowledge, practical skills, and values to enable them to become effective planners, and to improve the quality of urban places and regions;

Research: To conduct and disseminate research on the “theory and practice” of urban society to plan for more equitable and sustainable communities; and

Outreach: To address community problems by linking knowledge and practice and facilitating mutual learning between community and university.

Graduate Program (MURP) Mission

The **mission** of the Urban & Regional Planning Program is to *prepare students to become leaders, innovative thinkers and policy makers in the planning profession*. This is addressed through three broad themes:

Teaching: To provide future leaders the knowledge, skills, and values to enable them to become effective planners and policy makers, and have a lasting influence in improving the quality of urban places and regions;

Research: To conduct and disseminate innovative research on emerging dimensions that improve the world and influence decision-making to plan for more equitable and sustainable communities; and

Outreach: To address community problems by linking knowledge and practice and lead individuals and communities to make informed and just decisions.

The following goals and objectives are for the URP program. When applicable to a particular degree, this is color coded for quick reference.

Goal 1. Attract and retain a talented, diverse and inclusive student and faculty population by fostering a supportive environment to thrive.

Objectives	Program	Actions	Timeframe	Measures/Evaluation
1.1 Create an environment of inclusion and respect for students from marginalized groups.	Program	<p>A. Establish a URP Program student diversity and inclusion taskforce.</p> <p>B. Emphasize diversity and inclusion as a core Program value by intentionally and critically incorporating it into our curriculum.</p> <p>C. Invite speakers to represent different perspectives on planning</p>	<p>A. 2024</p> <p>B. 2024 and review every 3-5 years</p> <p>C. Annually</p>	<p>A. Once a semester meeting of the diversity, equity and inclusion committee (URP members of SPDC DEI committee)</p> <p>B. Updated curricular options.</p> <p>C. The program will invite at least one planner of color (practitioner or researcher) to give a talk in the department.</p>
1.2 Recruit and retain faculty from marginalized groups.	Program	<p>A. Conduct an analysis of diversity gaps within the faculty.</p> <p>B. Better mentorship of junior faculty for promotion and tenure.</p> <p>C. Include junior faculty in established research and grant activities.</p>	<p>A. Annually beginning in 2024</p> <p>B. Annually</p> <p>C. 2024 and update</p>	<p>A. Report outlining reasons why job candidates from marginalized backgrounds have been hesitant to come to MSU and attempt to address those that are within the program's control (e.g. course offerings, type of research conducted, etc.)</p> <p>B. Create a mentorship guide for all faculty members mentoring junior faculty to help guide them in their efforts to support junior</p>

				<p>faculty especially those from marginalized backgrounds</p> <p>C. Encourage all senior researchers applying for grant funding to consider recruiting at least one junior faculty member to the research team</p>
1.3 Supporting international, under-represented and non-traditional graduate students.	MURP	<p>A. Provide university resource list to international students.</p> <p>B. Establish welcome social events in the first month for international students who have recently arrived on campus.</p> <p>C. Target AAGA/CSSDEI small grant funds for supporting under-represented graduate students</p>	<p>A. Annually</p> <p>B. Annually</p> <p>C. Annually</p>	<p>A. Develop list, measure distribution numbers and use numbers.</p> <p>B. Document event and number of participants, exit survey on effectiveness perceived value of event after one month of event</p> <p>C. Amount of grants applied for/received</p>
	MURP	<p>A. Craft a recruitment strategy that targets in-state professional planners or local government officials without a MURP degree</p> <p>B. Have presence in order to promote the program at local, state and national planning conferences and events</p>	<p>A. 2026 onwards</p> <p>B. 2025</p>	<p>Encourage fast track students from the BSURP and BLA degrees</p> <p>B. Collect contact information of interested professionals and remain in contact with them through interested professional listserv that will advertise talks and other events hosted by the department and alumni</p>

				C. Sponsor at least one local, one state, and one national planning conference or event every year
1.4 Increase active recruitment of students from marginalized groups.	MURP	<p>A. Identify talented undergraduates from marginalized groups through recommendations from academic advisors, affinity groups, and other programs on campus (e.g., CAMP, CLS, etc.) and invite them to learn about and apply to our programs</p> <p>B. Create a robust recruitment strategy through social media and our website</p> <p>C. Promote the program, along with student and faculty success stories via a robust web/social media presence (all faculty will write one social media post about their career trajectory, teaching, and/or research per semester)</p> <p>D. Promote the program and the profession by showcasing alumni success stories via a robust web/social media presence .</p>	<p>A. Annually</p> <p>B. Annually</p> <p>C. Every Semester</p> <p>D. Every Semester</p>	<p>A. Have annual alumni of color event where we invite new and interested students</p> <p>B. Track visits to our page and how many result in signing up for the interest listserv or submitting a request for more information</p> <p>C. Track engagement of posts showcasing student and faculty success stories in order to see what type of content resonates more with our target audience</p> <p>D. Track engagement of posts showcasing alumni success stories in order to see what type of content resonates more with our target audience</p>

	BSURP	<p>A. Have a presence at welcome events for diverse groups of student populations on campus (undergraduates) and have handouts, swag, and other marketing materials to distribute.</p> <p>B. Create student-driven K-12 partnerships to educate young people about urban planning profession. (Example: Planners Day in School, Design Planning for Kids, Boys and Girls Summer Program).</p> <p>C. Identify talented undergraduates from marginalized groups through recommendations from academic advisors, affinity groups, and other programs on campus (e.g., CAMP, CLS, etc.) and invite them to learn about and apply to our programs.</p>	<p>A. Annually</p> <p>B. 2025</p> <p>C. 2026</p>	<p>A. Collect contact information of interested students and remain in contact with them through interested student listserv that will advertise talks and other events hosted by the department</p> <p>B. Faculty will participate in one student-driven k-12 education event per year</p> <p>C. Ask students where/how they became familiar with our program in admissions application and create a report of most effective strategies to reach students from marginalized groups.</p>
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Goal 2. Faculty should promote relevant and timely research to advance planning for more equitable and sustainable communities.

Objective	Program	Action	Timeframe	Measures/Evaluation
2.1 Advance, disseminate the faculty research profile to promote national and international reputation.	Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Showcase core research themes that leverage assets B. Mechanisms to increase national and international reputation C. Continue using electives and 400/800 courses to directly link current research to teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. 2024 B. When possible C. Annually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Annual review data on research to showcase achievements and URP expertise; circulate to faculty and students B. Submit materials for program ranking (e.g. Planetizen) C. Support junior faculty with professional development funds. Incorporate into curriculum review
2.2 Define specific research themes that leverage external funding.	Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Identify emerging fields and faculty expertise B. Identify and build relationships with funding agencies C. Involve more outreach faculty on grants, look for cross-unit and cross-university collaboration on research and grants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. 2024 and every 2-3 years B. 2024 and ongoing C. 2024 and ongoing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Increased/rotate electives courses and faculty in areas of faculty expertise B. Instances of involvement with collaboration on applied research, grants and contracts. C. Report collaborative engagements
2.3 Foster faculty-student partnered research.	MURP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Continue to source and secure funding for student hourly payroll and assistantships (MURP) B. Promote MURP research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Annually B. 2024 and annually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Number of students supported in research roles; Instances of students to presenting research at state/national conferences and research fairs B. Students are offered the opportunity to engage in research and field work; use of MSU funding for research technology and field research. Number of research assistantships funded

2.4 Encourage student to do research.	BSURP	A. Promote BSURP student research B. Apply for grant funds to support students on hourly payroll to work on funded research projects	A. 2025 and annually B. Ongoing	A. Faculty coordination of research skills as part of curriculum development; provide opportunities for funded research (e.g. PURI funding) B. Grants including student research funding
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Goal 3. Graduate highly capable, job-ready planning practitioners and researchers

Objective	Program	Action	Timeframe	Measures/Evaluation
3.1 Align course offerings with PAB curricular requirements and changes in the discipline	Program	A. Conduct ongoing gap analysis to improve curriculum and course offerings B. Solicit feedback from alumni	A. 2024 and every 3-5 years B. Every 5 years	A. Updated curriculum map and curricular offerings B. Updated curricular offerings
3.4 Improve student learning outcomes and instructional practices	Program	A. Revise student learning outcomes assessment B. Implement revised student learning outcomes assessment C. Use results of student learning outcomes assessment to modify instructional practices	A. 2024 B. Annually beginning in 2024 C. Annually	A. Adopted learning outcomes assessment B. Student performance on the learning outcomes assessment C. Student performance on the learning outcomes assessment; Modifications to instructional practices

3.3 Maximize student involvement in applied research	MURP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Enhance applied research into core curriculum B. Promote student involvement in faculty-led research projects C. Promote and support student thesis research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. 2025 B. Annually C. Annually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Student performance on applied research criterion B. Students involved in faculty-led research projects C. Students who complete a thesis
3.2 Maximize student participation in experiential learning	BSURP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Promote and provide financial support for study abroad programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Every 2 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Students engaged in international study abroad programs

Goal 4. Promoting Professional Development through External Partnerships

Objective	Program	Action	Timeframe	Measures/Evaluation
4.1 Foster an inclusive and active URP student organization	Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Articulate the value of URPSA and membership. B. Increase participation in URP activities through URPSA C. Encourage more MURP students to be involved in URPSA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Ongoing B. Ongoing C. Ongoing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Better connected and in-tune faculty and student relationship B. Increased participation in URPSA C. Increase in URPSA sponsored activities
4.2 Develop a formalized mentoring program, in both traditional public	MURP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Establish a career mentorship program with interested alumni and affiliated employers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Ongoing B. Spring 24; ongoing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Students can access a wide range of professional experiences that apply their planning course content B. Job placements assisted by career mentors

and non-profit or private sector.		B. Actively engage URP Alumni Board in mentoring and professional development opportunities for students		
4.3 Develop internship/ job shadowing opportunities.	MURP	A. Coordinate internship announcements and/or job shadowing opportunities URP Alumni Association B. Identify external partners and create “clearinghouse” of career resources	A. Fall 2024 B. Duration of the students in the URP program	A. Students have professional experience prior to graduation B. Students are aware of planning career resources and opportunities
4.4 Ensure students are developing professional practice skills before graduating.	BSURP	A. Develop “must have” list of skills from employers/alumni B. Invite alumni to give guest lectures, keynote addresses, and participate in regular curricular activities C. Encourage students to participate in MAP activities such as student conference, Young Professionals Network and other opportunities	A. Ongoing B. Fall 2025 C. Ongoing	A. Students have a resume prior to practicum B. Students have had exposure to “must have” skills C. Improved quality and professionalism of graduating students

Alignment with College and University Goals

Our strategic plans embody the University's land grant mission and we align with the strategic themes of Student Success, Faculty and Staff Success, Excellence and Global Impact, Stewardship and Sustainability, and Diversity and Inclusion. At the College level, we align with the college mission and goals. In particular: 1) Research collaborations and high faculty scholarship standards and national and international reputation; 2) Development of practical and adaptive skills and experiential and engaged learning; 3) Fostering an inclusive climate and faculty hiring and retention; 4) As a professional school, we excel at external engagement. All our programs have engaged alumni boards, and we engage with communities across the state in our practicum courses and capstone courses in all programs.

Anticipated Challenges

- Recruitment to MURP Program is our biggest and continuing challenge.
- Declining enrollments is a national trend as master's programs across the country are experiencing this for several reasons:
 1. Rise of bachelor's degrees in urban planning that offer decent job prospects.
 2. Accreditation mandated credit hours (typically 42-48 credits) that are higher than most master's programs (30 to 36 credits).
 3. Programs with more appealing names that speak to prospective students such as Community Sustainability, Urban Technology and Sustainable Real Estate Development
 4. Increasing tuition costs coupled with the lack of sufficient funding for graduate students.
- International students have trouble getting jobs due to the extra visa and employment paperwork required of employers.
- Budget cuts and reductions in the public sector will impact municipal jobs. Non-profit sectors are particularly hard-hit and jobs in these sectors will also rely more on volunteer work.
- There are significant challenges related to effective community engagement and budget shortfalls resulting in hiring freezes for internship programs and placements for graduating students in the near term. However, our hope is that these are short term challenges rather than systemic issues.
- The majority of our student funding comes from faculty grants and contracts.
- Our endowments provide much needed support to both students and faculty. Unsure how the market outlook will impact our endowment funds.

Additionally, challenges include:

- Impacts of Fixed Rate Tuition
- Minority Recruitment (Faculty and Students)
- Promotion of student diversity and faculty voice
- Generating resources from grants and endowments to support and develop the Program and its students

Opportunities

- MIPS Online Degree Program
- Attract MSU undergraduates to MURP
- Continue to promote the linked BSURP-MURP Program
- Expand our Mentorship Program