Urban and Regional Planning, M.A.

The M.A. in urban and regional planning is a two-year degree program fully accredited by the Planning Accreditation Board. It is built on the premise that planners must be educated in methods of policy analysis and that there is a common body of knowledge, represented in the core curriculum, that provides a solid foundation for all specializations in the field.

A wide range of educational backgrounds provide good preparation for graduate study in urban and regional planning. Students with undergraduate majors such as animal ecology, architecture, computer science, economics, engineering, English, finance, geography, history, marketing, political science, sociology, and urban studies currently study in the school. With an increasingly diverse student body and a low student-faculty ratio, the School of Urban and Regional Planning is committed to creating an environment that is inclusive and welcoming of all students. Approximately 45 full-time students and a few part-time students are enrolled, and about 25 percent are international students.

The common core of courses and the design of the facilities allow students to get to know each other quickly. Students interact closely with faculty members in the classroom, in informal conversation, and while working on research projects. Students and faculty also collaborate in the second year capstone courses, URP:6209 Field Problems in Planning I and URP:6210 Field Problems in Planning II, to prepare plans and reports for communities throughout Iowa. This work is supported by the University’s Iowa Initiative for Sustainable Communities, which was created by the School of Urban and Regional Planning in 2009.

Graduate students working toward a master’s degree in urban and regional planning may elect to pursue one of the combined degree programs offered by the school in collaboration with the College of Engineering, the College of Law, the College of Public Health, the Department of Geographical and Sustainability Sciences, the School of Social Work, and with Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA).

Requirements

The Master of Arts program in urban and regional planning requires 50 s.h. of graduate credit. The 50 s.h. required to complete the degree must be comprised of a minimum of 35 s.h. in the School of Urban and Regional Planning. Students must earn a grade of B-minus or higher in all core and concentration area courses and must maintain an overall graduate g.p.a. of at least 3.00.

The graduate curriculum is based on the philosophy that planners must develop the theoretical and analytic skills that will permit them to analyze social problems and evaluate public policies. Planners also must cultivate professional skills such as report writing, oral presentation, computer use, and team management in order to work effectively in various organizational and political environments.

Work for the master’s degree includes core courses, an area of concentration, electives, and capstone courses. A final examination is required. A thesis is not required, although students may petition to write one. Students are encouraged to complete an approved internship or practicum.

The M.A. with a major in urban and regional planning requires the following work.

Core Curriculum

The core curriculum helps students develop an understanding of the institutions—social, economic, political, administrative, and legal systems—that provide the context for policy analysis and that constrain public choices. It also promotes development of the ability to identify social goals and normative criteria for evaluating public policies, as well as the analytic skills to perform such investigations.

The core requires a total of 23 s.h., including at least 3 s.h. in an advanced economic methods course. The advanced economics methods course usually is taken during the first three semesters. Early core courses are drawn primarily from traditional disciplines, particularly economics and statistics, and include an introduction to land use planning and to theories and practice of planning. As students proceed through the curriculum, increasing emphasis is placed on the development of critical judgment and insight, achieved through the application of theory and methods to realistic planning problems and case studies.

The core curriculum includes the following courses; students may request a waiver of selected core courses on the basis of previous course work.

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<tr>
<th>Code</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All of these:</td>
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<tr>
<td>URP:6200</td>
<td>Analytic Methods I</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>URP:6201</td>
<td>Analytic Methods II</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URP:6202</td>
<td>Land Use Planning: Law and Practice</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URP:6203</td>
<td>History and Theories of Planning</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>URP:6205</td>
<td>Economics for Policy Analysis</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>URP:6208</td>
<td>Program Seminar in Planning Practice</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>URP:6258</td>
<td>Modeling Dynamic Systems</td>
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Advanced Economic Methods

At least one of these:

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<tr>
<th>Code</th>
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<tr>
<td>URP:6233</td>
<td>Financing Local Government</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>URP:6290</td>
<td>Economic Impact Assessment</td>
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Concentration Area

Beginning in the second semester, students choose a concentration area and develop it by applying the concepts and skills developed in the core. Currently, the school’s faculty and course offerings support five concentration areas: transportation planning, housing and community development, economic development, land use and environmental planning, and geographic information systems.

Students complete at least 9 s.h. of courses in their concentration area. Courses offered by other University departments and programs may supplement those offered by the School of Urban and Regional Planning.

Students may combine two concentration areas. Examples of combined areas are environmental and economic development planning, and transportation and community development planning. Students also may design other concentration areas, subject to faculty approval. For example, they may specialize in health services planning...
with appropriate course work in the Department of Health Management and Policy or Occupational and Environmental Health, or in human services planning with courses in the School of Social Work.

**Capstone Courses**

Students complete the following two capstone courses, usually during the third and fourth semesters. Students who complete a practicum are exempt from this requirement.

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<tr>
<th>Code</th>
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<tr>
<td>URP:6209</td>
<td>Field Problems in Planning I</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>URP:6210</td>
<td>Field Problems in Planning II</td>
<td>3</td>
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**Internship**

Students are encouraged to complete an internship in a planning agency or related organization. To earn 2 s.h. of credit for the internship, students must submit a brief paper summarizing and evaluating their experience. Internships usually are paid staff positions and are completed during the summer between the first and second years or during the academic year.

**Practicum**

An extended internship, consisting of at least five months of full-time employment in a planning-related organization, may qualify as a practicum. A practicum generally takes place during summer after the first year and into the fall semester of the second year. It carries 5 s.h. of credit and substitutes for the internship and the capstone courses.

**Thesis**

A thesis is not required, although students may petition to write one. Students may register for up to 6 s.h. of thesis credit. In addition, they may take up to 8 s.h. of readings to develop a thesis topic and prepare a literature review.

**Final Exam**

A final examination is required for all students. An oral and written exam constitutes the final exam for students who do not write a thesis.

**Combined Programs**

The School of Urban and Regional Planning participates in several combined degree programs, in which students work toward an M.A. in urban and regional planning at the same time they work toward another degree. Combined degree programs enable students to earn both degrees in less time than it would take to earn the two degrees separately (see “Two Master’s Degrees” under Master’s Degrees in the Manual of Rules and Regulations of the Graduate College). The following combined degree programs are available.

- B.S.E. in civil engineering/M.A.; see Bachelor of Science in Engineering and B.S.E. in Civil Engineering (College of Engineering) in the Catalog.
- B.A. or B.S. in environmental policy and planning; see Environmental Policy and Planning (College of Liberal Arts and Sciences) in the Catalog.
- J.D./M.A.; see Juris Doctor (College of Law) in the Catalog.
- M.A. in educational policy and leadership studies (higher education and student affairs subprogram)/M.A. in urban and regional planning; see M.A. in Educational Policy and Leadership Studies (College of Education), higher education and student affairs subprogram, in the Catalog.
- M.S. in occupational and environmental health/M.A.; see M.S. in Occupational and Environmental Health (College of Public Health) in the Catalog.
- M.S.W./M.A.; see Master of Social Work (College of Liberal Arts and Sciences) in the Catalog.

Requirements for each combined degree program can vary. The minimum requirements for the urban and regional planning part of any combined degree include completion of at least 35 s.h. in School of Urban and Regional Planning courses (prefix URP), the core and capstone courses, 9 s.h. of a concentration, and the master’s degree final examination. In the case of two master’s degrees, all programs require at least 60 s.h. of credit.

Students who wish to enter a combined degree program must apply to each of the two degree programs separately; they must be admitted to both programs before they may be admitted to the combined program. Contact the admissions coordinator at the School of Urban and Regional Planning for more information about combined degree programs.

**Admission**

Admission to the School of Urban and Regional Planning is open to students from any undergraduate major or concentration area.

Applicants must meet the admission requirements of the Graduate College; see the Manual of Rules and Regulations of the Graduate College.

Admission is based on Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General Test scores (verbal, quantitative, and analytical writing), letters of recommendation, previous academic performance, and a written statement of purpose. Law School Admission Test (LSAT) and Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) scores also are accepted.

Applicants should submit an application form, GRE General Test scores, Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores for students whose first language is not English, recommendation letters, statement of purpose, and transcripts.

For fall admission, applications should be submitted to arrive early in the year (preferably by January 15), although applications are accepted until July 15 (April 15 for international students). Applications for spring admission should be received by October 1 and no later than December 1. Fall admission is strongly preferred. Students applying for financial aid should submit their materials by January 15.

**Financial Support**

Students in the School of Urban and Regional Planning receive financial support from the program primarily from teaching or research assistantships and from contract or grant-funded assistantships. Assistantships typically require 10 hours of work per week under the direction of a faculty member and are accompanied by a tuition scholarship.

Students initiate applications for financial support, and awards are made on the basis of merit, experience, and interests. Assistantships may be renewed for a total of up to four semesters.
Students applying for financial support are encouraged to submit application materials and requests for support by January 15. Students who apply after that date are considered only as remaining funds permit. Financial support usually is not available for students beginning the program in the spring semester.

Career Advancement

Today’s planners find themselves in demand for such diverse jobs as sustainability coordinator and planner, environmental analyst with a natural resources agency, land use planner, transportation planner, community development planner, community organizer, economic development planner, recycling coordinator, planning director, neighborhood planner, state legislative analyst, planning consultant, and nonprofit project manager or director.

Recent graduates have taken positions with city, metropolitan, and regional planning agencies, state and federal government, nonprofit organizations, and private consulting firms. They work in all geographic regions of the United States and in countries around the world.