



2024 Urban Studies and Planning  
**Strategic Plan**

# Vision and Mission

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## Vision

Planning is a field of study, a professional practice, and a theoretical orientation. We put the conditions of and the lived experience in places at the center of our inquiries and practice. We are committed to understanding places and the people who live in them in their full complexity.

We adopt a multidimensional and interdisciplinary approach that does not shy away from the deep and existential challenges that society faces today at the local, regional, national, and global scales: climate change, persistent racial and class inequity, and skepticism surrounding the legitimacy of professional knowledge and institutions.

Planning practitioners and scholars are critical and integrative thinkers who can synthesize complex and often contradictory types of information, analyze trade-offs, and grapple with multiple histories and diverse contexts.

Research, creative practice, and education of both future professionals and the broader public are inextricably linked. Housed at a land grant university, our commitment to engaging diverse communities through research collaborations and education is a top priority.

Engagement and partnerships with those working in other disciplines – architecture, historic preservation, real estate development, public health, criminology, environmental science, information and data science, engineering, and the social sciences – are critical to fully understanding the world around us and maximizing our impact as planners.

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## Mission

The University of Maryland (UMD) Urban Studies and Planning (URSP) program promotes and fosters a more just and sustainable world by producing rigorous policy-relevant and community-engaged research; educating the next generation of planning professionals who work in diverse settings and organizations; and engaging the broader public in discussion and debate about the future of cities and communities.

# Action Plan



## GOAL 1 - RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

**Expand enrollment by recruiting, enrolling, and retaining a highly talented and diverse student body from across the U.S. and other countries.**

**Rationale:** We currently attract a highly talented and diverse student body primarily from Maryland, the District of Columbia, and Virginia. We aspire to build on our regional success to attract students from other regions of the U.S. and from other nations. A diverse student body enriches the educational experience for all students and faculty in our program. Our recruitment strategy revolves around efforts to strengthen the URSP community, reach out to prospective students from diverse backgrounds, and expand the number of funding opportunities for incoming students. To the extent feasible, recruitment activities should be coordinated with the School’s new recruitment coordinator.

### 2024 Targets:

- Expand the number of graduate MCP applications (including dual degrees) to 120-150 per year.
- Increase the number of graduate financial assistantship awards to 20 per year.
- Increase the number of international applicants.
- Increase underrepresented students within our applicant pool and identify targeted recruitment strategies to more closely reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the Washington, D.C., and Baltimore metropolitan areas.

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**OBJECTIVE 1.1:** Expand our outreach efforts to recruit students from diverse racial, ethnic, and economic groups from diverse geographic locations, working in concert with the School’s new recruitment coordinator.

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### Action Steps:

1. Use the School’s undergraduate courses as recruitment opportunities to attract a talented and diverse student body.
2. Monitor the number of incoming graduate students who enrolled in the School’s undergraduate classes.

3. Mail letters to the advising offices of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) and engage in discussions about recruitment strategies.
4. Explore the option of providing a one-course buyout to faculty to tour HBCUs and HSIs and give recruitment talks.
5. Explore funding sources for a graduate assistantship targeted to incoming students from underrepresented racial, ethnic, or economic groups.
6. Develop a strategy for targeted recruitment and retention of international students.

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**OBJECTIVE 1.2:** Build the URSP student, faculty, and alumni community through Student Planning Association (SPA) meetings and activities, social media interaction, and extra-curricular learning events with faculty members, in conjunction with expanded daytime course offerings where feasible.

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**Action Steps:**

1. Survey URSP students to determine how many would be willing and able to enroll in courses offered during the daytime
2. Consider the impacts and advantages, and test expansion of the number of courses offered during the day.
3. Provide departmental funding to support SPA in its efforts to build the culture of community, reach out to alumni and prospective employers, and organize events.
4. Work with SPA to organize monthly brown-bag presentations on faculty research or an area of expertise.
5. Work with SPA to develop an alumni outreach plan.

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**OBJECTIVE 1.3:** Increase the level of financial support provided to graduate students.

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**Action Steps:**

1. Task a graduate assistant with obtaining data from our peer institutions on the percentage of students who receive graduate assistantship positions or scholarships.
2. Rename the GA-Intern program the “Jim Cohen Internship Program” (JCIP) to honor the former Director and expand the number of second-year students funded by the JCIP.
3. Work with the NCSG Program Manager to develop a URSP external research funding strategy.
4. Identify UMD sources of funding for graduate assistantships and apply for support from these sources.

5. Develop a database of externally funded graduate assistantship fellowships and encourage students to apply for funding from these sources.
6. Work with the School's Associate Dean for Development to identify URSP alumni and other supporters of the School's activities who may be willing to provide funding to support graduate assistantship fellowships.



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## GOAL 2 - CURRICULUM

**Review and revise the MCP curriculum to more accurately reflect the strengths of the current faculty and the needs of current and future students.**

**Rationale:** The planning profession is a dynamic and interdisciplinary field that has evolved beyond its traditional home in local government planning offices. Planning education should reflect these changes and prepare future professionals and planning scholars to work in a variety of settings and contexts. The objectives and action steps below are designed to outline the steps necessary to update the MCP curriculum to reflect the evolving nature of planning scholarship and the profession, drawing upon diverse faculty strengths.

### 2024 Targets:

- Implement a revised curriculum that reflects the changing nature of the planning profession and the current strengths of the URSP faculty.
- At least 90 percent of alumni state that the URSP program adequately prepares them for their current position.

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**OBJECTIVE 2.1:** Ensure that students have access to foundational knowledge in planning (core curriculum).

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### Action Steps:

1. Review the core curricula offered by peer institutions and programs.
2. Prepare new program learning objectives that reflect the program's vision for the future of planning education.
3. Review the core curriculum for consistency with new program learning objectives, eliminating unnecessary redundancies.
4. Prepare and adopt recommendations for short-, medium-, and long-term changes to the core curriculum.

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**OBJECTIVE 2.2:** Ensure that students have opportunities to gain expertise in an area of specialization (specialization and elective courses / dual degrees).

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**Action Steps:**

1. Review current areas of specialization and dual degree offerings considering URSP faculty expertise.
2. Review areas of specialization and dual degrees offered at peer institutions and programs.
3. Survey students, alumni, and prospective employers about specialization needs.
4. Identify current course offerings in URSP, within the School, and across campus that are appropriate for specialization and dual degree courses.
5. Develop a menu of options or a recommended sequence of courses for each area of specialization, potentially including one- to two-unit module courses taught by local planning professionals that provide specialized technical knowledge.
6. Finalize new dual degree programs with the iSchool and Public Health.

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**OBJECTIVE 2.3:** Ensure that all incoming students are prepared to succeed in the URSP program (preparation/URSP Bootcamp).

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**Action Steps:**

1. Survey faculty on minimum levels of proficiency required for particular classes.
2. Review prerequisites and baseline preparation activities at peer institutions.
3. Explore revising the format of the URSP Bootcamp, incorporating technical training modules and assessment tests.
4. Explore opportunities for ESL courses before or during the first fall semester for students with low TOEFL scores.

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**OBJECTIVE 2.4:** Ensure that URSP students have access to quality advising and mentoring (advising/mentoring).

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**Action Steps:**

1. Review current advising loads across URSP core faculty and develop a strategy for a more equitable distribution of advising loads.
2. Explore strategies for involving adjunct and research faculty in URSP student mentoring and advising, as appropriate.
3. Work with SPA to develop a student mentoring program with URSP alumni.
4. Identify advising/mentoring strategies appropriate to different types of advising/mentoring needs (e.g., career development, capstone projects, and graduate school success).



## GOAL 3 - ADMINISTRATION

**Establish a sustainable program governance structure that builds upon the URSP Plan of Organization.**

**Rationale:** The current Director of the URSP program oversees two academic programs, the URSP program and the URPD Ph.D. program. The URSP program employs one program administrator who also serves as the program administrator for the URPD program and the School's career services administrator. This management structure limits the time the Director can devote to leading strategic initiatives for the URSP program. Previously, the URSP program employed a Director of Graduate Studies to provide oversight of the program's day-to-day administrative tasks and assist the Director with outreach to prospective students and employers. This position was terminated when the duties of the Director of Graduate Studies were added to the Director's responsibilities.

In addition, the program recently adopted a Plan of Organization that is designed to implement a new program governance structure, giving faculty more voice in the program's day-to-day operations. Goal 3 outlines several objectives and action steps designed to implement a sustainable governance structure for the URSP program.

### 2024 Targets:

- Establish a more sustainable and inclusive program governance structure by 2020.

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**OBJECTIVE 3.1:** Hire a new URSP Program Director.

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#### Action Steps:

1. Identify priorities for the next URSP Program Director.
2. Work with the Dean to conduct a search for the next Director.
3. By fall of 2020, appoint the next URSP Program Director.

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**OBJECTIVE 3.2:** Expand administrative support for the program.

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#### Action Steps:

1. Work with the Dean to identify resources to hire a full-time URSP program administrator or relieve the current program administrator's duties that are not related to URSP.

2. By fall of 2021, hire a new Director of Graduate Studies who would also be tasked with teaching URSP courses, as appropriate.
3. Assign one graduate assistant per year to URSP program administration duties.

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**OBJECTIVE 3.3:** Institutionalize the governance structure proposed in the URSP program's Plan of Organization.

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**Action Steps:**

1. By fall of 2019, appoint URSP faculty members to each standing committee outlined in the Plan of Organization.
2. Discuss each committee's work in regularly scheduled program meetings.



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## GOAL 4 - SHAPING THE CONVERSATION

**Draw upon the lessons learned from engagement in planning and policymaking in the D.C.-Baltimore region to shape national planning and policy conversations and market our program's strengths.**

**Rationale:** URSP is housed at UMD, a nationally renowned research university and the state's flagship campus. URSP's commitment to engaged research embodies the land grant mission of UMD. Our faculty are involved in projects across the Baltimore-D.C. region and the state. Our alumni are active and engaged professionals working across the country and internationally. To solidify our regional identity, and to elevate our program's national reputation, we propose several objectives and action steps to more clearly define our program's niche and market our strengths widely.

### 2024 Targets:

- The majority of incoming students choose the program based on the reputation of the URSP faculty and its alumni's track record of success.
- Develop a sustained culture of engagement with external program audiences and a marketing plan that is inclusive of the strengths of URSP faculty and the program.



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**OBJECTIVE 4.1:** Strengthen our position as a community-engaged program invested in research, planning, and policymaking in the D.C.-Baltimore region.

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**Action Steps:**

1. Convene at least one MD or DC-area APA event per year.
2. Convene the Technical Advisory Committee at least once per year and ensure that the committee is diverse across research and practice, levels of government, and community-based groups in the region.
3. Establish mechanisms for tracking and engaging program alumni and other members of the URSP community.
4. Engage DC/Baltimore-area planning practitioners to teach targeted URSP courses.

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**OBJECTIVE 4.2:** Enhance interdisciplinary work among faculty within the URSP program, the School, allied programs at UMD, and across the region.

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**Action Steps:**

1. Develop strategic alliances with other UMD schools and programs (e.g., Engineering, Public Policy, American Studies, and Geography).
2. Explore cross-listing URSP courses with other units on campus.
3. Sponsor a joint reception at ACSP with regional schools annually.
4. Work with the School's communications team to establish a plan for promoting URSP faculty and student work within the School and University.

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**OBJECTIVE 4.3:** Shape state and national urban policy conversations on planning issues related to our program's core research areas.

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**Action Steps:**

1. Work with the School's communications team to establish a plan to publicize the faculty's research to external audiences.
2. Work with the School's communications team to ensure that existing communications platforms are adequate to promote the work of URSP faculty, including consideration of press releases, website content, newsletters, website, Twitter, and Facebook.
3. Work with School's communications team to ensure that URSP is well-positioned at the University level to field and address media requests for faculty research areas.

4. Consider making the NCSG brown bag lecture series a joint URSP/NCSG event, and market the series through the School and region.
5. Explore making grant funds available for a bi-annual URSP research symposium that faculty members organize around special topics.

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**OBJECTIVE 4.4:** Market our program's strengths to prospective students, faculty, and professionals regionally and nationally.

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**Action Steps:**

1. Produce a one-page summary of our program that is updated annually and used for marketing purposes.
2. Consider rebranding our program through the development of a new URSP logo and new degree name.
3. Enhance the URSP website to publicize student, faculty and alumni activities.
4. Work with the School's communication team to develop a URSP-specific marketing plan that aligns with the School's overall marketing vision and plan.

# Appendix

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## Planning Process for the 2024 Strategic Plan

This strategic plan reflects the vision for the URSP program in the year 2024, one year after the program celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The plan is the result of an ongoing strategic planning process done in compliance with the accreditation standards established by the Planning Accreditation Board. The URSP program's last strategic plan was adopted in 2012.

The strategic planning process was initiated in August 2018 with a URSP faculty retreat. Goals, objectives, and action steps were developed through several faculty meetings. During the fall of 2018, ad-hoc committees were charged with proposing objectives and action steps for each of the goals. The proposed objectives and action steps were reviewed at a URSP faculty retreat in January of 2019, and a draft strategic plan was prepared for review and comment by the Student Planning Association, the URSP Technical Advisory Committee, and URSP alumni. Based on the feedback received from these constituencies, a final draft was prepared for review and approval by the URSP faculty. The plan was officially adopted by the URSP faculty on May 9, 2019.