



Department of Planning
and Landscape Architecture
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

MS URPL

Professional Project Guide

**A GUIDE TO THE FINAL
COMPETENCY REQUIREMENT FOR
STUDENTS OF THE MS IN URBAN AND
& REGIONAL PLANNING**



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MS URPL

SECTION

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To obtain an MS URPL degree, a student must be able to demonstrate a high level of competency in the theories, methods, applications, and ethics of planning. Students need to demonstrate competency over the broad field of planning in general, as well as within an area of concentration as defined by the student in consultation with a faculty advisor. Competency Requirement Options: Students may exercise two options in fulfillment of the competency requirement: (a) preparation and defense of a Master's thesis; or (b) preparation and presentation of a major Professional Planning Project.

Step #1: Make sure that your advisor is finalized! Carey serves as all students' primary advisor. However, we hope that you will have chosen a final faculty advisor by the end of your first year in the program. This advisor should be a faculty member whose interests, research and/or professional goals match yours. This will also be the main advisor of your final project committee.

MASTER'S THESIS



Master's Thesis

A Master's thesis is a significant applied or scholarly research effort, resulting in development and defense of a thesis document. General guidelines for a thesis in the MS URPL program include:

- Identify and address an important planning-related question.
- Develop a reasonable conceptual or theoretical framework for examination of the research question based on a comprehensive review of existing literature.
- Apply appropriate research methods and collect information or data appropriate for the research question.
- Identify defensible conclusions for the research question and awareness of research limitations.
- Present and defend thesis.
- File one copy of the approved thesis with the Memorial Library and one copy with the Department.

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A thesis is developed through the collaboration and supervision of a Master's Thesis Committee, chaired by the student's advisor and is governed by rules established by the Graduate School. The Master's Thesis Committee determines when the requirement is met based on an agreed upon research plan and performance standard established with the student. There are no opportunities to appeal decisions made by the MS Thesis Committee beyond the committee itself. A thesis is presented and defended before a committee of three faculty members and is governed by rules established by the Graduate School.

Students may take up to 6 credits of URPL 990 Research and Thesis for purposes of developing a thesis. The thesis option may be of special interest to students wanting to pursue a Ph.D. or wanting to further develop their research skills.



Professional Project

PROFESSIONAL PROJECT



Professional Project

The MS URPL Degree is primarily intended to be a professional degree. Most students ultimately pursue careers as practicing planners in a variety of situations. Students not selecting the Master's Thesis Option must undertake a Professional Project and develop a Professional Project Report under the supervision of their advisor. This report is presented and defended before a faculty examination committee composed of the student's advisor and one additional faculty member. The additional faculty member will be determined with input from the student, the advisor, and the Faculty Director or the MS UPPL program. The purpose of the Professional Project Option is to both establish competency of each student and to provide the student with materials that may be useful in interacting with future employers.

Professional Project Options

Professional Projects need to address a planning-related question or issue. The Professional Project consists of both preparation of a Professional Project report and defense of the report before an examining committee.

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Area of Concentration Project

Students identify issues that reflect their chosen Area of Concentration. Issues could, for example, include:

- Major questions faced or assumptions made by practitioners.
- Analysis of major strategies or programs that have been utilized in the past.
- Comparison across programs, regions, different income groups, etc.
- Emerging trends and issues.
- Comparison of different theories of planning.
- Identification of important emerging social or economic trends.
- Evaluation of planning tools and methods.

Case-Oriented Project

Students prepare a report directed toward a specific case or specific place. In this track, students may for example:

- Analyze processes or results.
- Analyze and develop site plans for specific areas.
- Propose appropriate planning practices, policies or actual plans for a specific case.
- Analyze impacts associated with major changes, plans or policies.

Start early on planning your final project!

In preparing the Case-Oriented Project, students may want to work for actual clients such as municipal planning departments, neighborhood groups or non-profit organizations and analyze the process or results of this effort. Students may also prepare Case-Oriented

Projects without direct sponsorship of actual clients. Case-Oriented Projects may result because of a student's internship but require more than simply recording the internship experience.

Special Exceptions

In special (rare) circumstances, students may define a project that does not fall within the "standard" tracks identified above but serves to demonstrate the student's competency in planning. A Special Exception to the standard Professional Project tracks can be granted and must have prior approval of the faculty advisor. A letter from the advisor must be attached to the Professional Planning Project Option Intent Form at the time the form is submitted to the Graduate Coordinator.



Overview of Professional Project Process

Students work with their advisor to identify and complete Professional Project requirements. The general process that is involved is as follows:

- **Identify Topic:** Each student identifies topics that are of interest to the student and discusses potential topics with their advisor. This should occur as early in the course of study as possible.
- **Analysis:** With consent of the faculty advisor, the student undertakes research, analysis, etc. on the topic selected.
- **Report Preparation:** The student prepares a Professional Project Report that defines the project and presents results. The maximum length of the report is 3,500 words (excluding bibliography, tables, graphs, maps, etc.). The final project report will be work over and above that undertaken for a course paper or papers. Two copies of the completed report must be submitted to the student's advisor at least 1 week prior to the scheduled presentation.
- **Report Presentation:** The student presents and defends the report to a two - member faculty examination committee. The student's advisor will serve as the lead member of the examining committee. The second committee member will be a faculty suggested by the student and chosen by the MS URPL Committee & will serve only to provide secondary scoring of the project.

- Evaluation: Both the Report and the presentation of the report will be evaluate individually by each member of the committee using the professional project rubric approved by the Department. Each member of the examining committee uses the professional project rubric to evaluate the competency demonstrated by both the Report and the presentation. Both independent assessments are then combined to produce an overall evaluation score.

Please note that every advisor works in a different style. Students should be aware that if they feel that their advisor is not versed in the research interests of the student, they should pursue an advisor that matches these interests.

It will take students 9 months to a year to complete their final project!





What to write about?

Each student identifies topics that are of interest to the student and discusses potential topics with their advisor. This should occur as early in the course of study as possible.

*Students may refer to the
Professional Project
Archive!*



<https://bit.ly/professional-project-archive-msurpl>



TIMELINE

FOLLOW THIS PATH TO YOUR FINAL PROJECT:



TIMELINE

TIMELINE CONTINUED...



GRADUATE!





FAQs

- What do I do if my advisor can't do XYZ?
 - Meet with the Graduate Coordinator or with Carey McAndrews, the MS URPL Program Chair. They can assist with what would be the appropriate next steps.
- What do I do if my advisor is not willing to help?
 - Advisors should always be willing to help, even if it means letting students know that they *cannot* help due to various reasons. If you feel that your advisor is not willing, please meet with the Graduate Coordinator or Carey McAndrews, the MS Program Chair.

