MSURPL PROFESSIONAL PROJECT LUNCH & LEARN

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2026

Kurt Paulsen, Professor, MSURPL Program Director
Amy Rivera, Graduate Program Manager

What is a Professional Project?

Professional Project

- The purpose of the Professional Project is to both establish competency of each student and to provide the student with materials that may be useful in interacting with future employers.
- 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 comprising 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.

Professional Project Options

- Professional Projects need to address a planning-related question or issue.
- The Professional Project includes both preparation of a Professional Project report and defense of the report before an examination committee.
- To satisfy the Professional Project competency requirement, reports must do more than simply record events.
- They must prepare specific plans or analyze or evaluate processes or outcomes and draw conclusions that are relevant to the practice of planning.

Professional projects that focus on your area of concentration, for example, could center on:

- 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.

Other professional projects may prepare a report directed toward a specific case or specific place. For example, these projects may:

- 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.

Consider your options.

- You 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.
- You can do the professional project without direct sponsorship of actual clients.

Overview of Professional Project Process

- 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. You will prepare 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.).

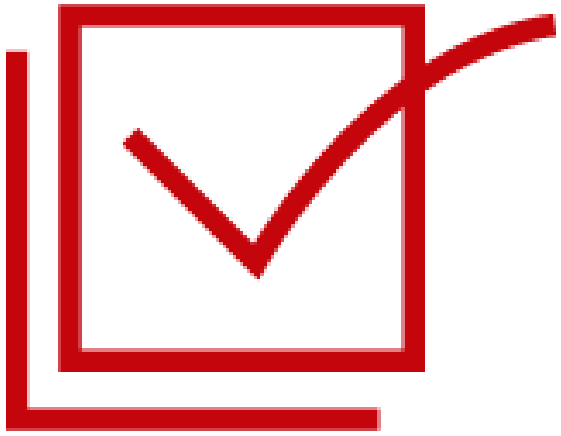
- The final project report will be work over and above that undertaken for a course paper or papers.
- Copies of the completed report must be submitted to your examination committee at least one week prior to the scheduled presentation.



- 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 student will be expected to demonstrate a coherent and logical presentation, utilization of appropriate presentation methods, and the ability to respond to critical questioning.
- Presentation of the Professional Project Report will be open, public presentations (except committee deliberations).
- Presentation of the Professional Project is expected to be about 20 minutes, and no longer than 30 minutes, followed by questions from the public and committee members.

- Evaluation. Both the Report and the presentation of the report will be evaluated 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.

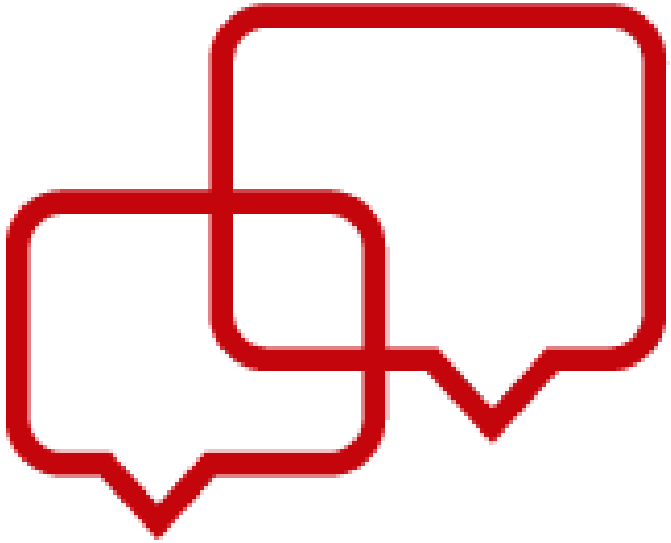


Assessment

Assessment:

- Pass. Student exceeded minimum requirements for *both* the Professional Project Report and the presentation. The student has demonstrated at least an adequate level of competency for a Master of Science Degree in Urban and Regional Planning.
- Pass with Distinction. The student has demonstrated a level of competency far beyond the normal level expected of a person with a Master of Science Degree in Urban and Regional Planning.
- Fail. Student received an inadequate to poor score on either the Professional Project Report or presentation or both. The student needs to address deficiencies to be able to demonstrate competency in urban and regional planning.

- A student not receiving a passing evaluation on either the Professional Project Report or the presentation has one additional opportunity before the end of the semester in which the evaluation is made to remedy deficiencies.
- Students may be required to do additional work on either their report, their presentation, or both.



- For students receiving an adequate or better evaluation of their Professional Project report, but a failing evaluation on their presentation, the student may provide an additional oral presentation of the existing report (without further refinement to the report).
- Students receiving an inadequate evaluation on the report but an adequate or better evaluation of their presentation must provide a revised report and need not provide an additional oral presentation to the examining committee.
- The examining committee will provide feedback to the student on items found deficient. A student may exercise the Opportunity for Retake up to 3 times (in total) before being removed from the master's program.

- A student may appeal examination committee decisions to the MS URPL program Committee.
  - The student may be asked to provide supporting information to the MS URPL program Committee as necessary.
  - The MS URPL program Committee is limited to two decisions:
    - (1) require an additional retake [whether with the existing examining committee or a newly constituted examining committee]; or
    - (2) confirm the decision of the original examining committee.

Who is responsible for assessment?

- Assessment of professional projects will be conducted by the student's area-of- concentration advisor and one additional faculty member assigned by the MS URPL Committee in consultation with the student and the student's advisor.
- Assessments of the internship will be conducted by the student, the student's supervisor, and the student's area-of-concentration advisor. The MS URPL director will report annually on program outcomes and program-level student learning outcomes.

Step #	Step Description	May Graduation	Dec Graduation	Aug Graduation
1	INITIAL NOTIFICATION Grad Coord notifies students via email of upcoming schedule for completing Professional Project requirements	December 1*	May 1*	May 1*
2	SECOND NOTIFICATION Grad Coord sends reminder email of schedule deadlines	February 1*	September 15*	n/a
3	INTENT TO EXERCISE OPTION B Students complete Declaration of Intent to Graduate/Competency Requirement (Plan of Study) Form • Include professional project title and abstract • Have met with one's advisor, has given input on second committee member (if desired)	February 15*	October 1*	June 25*
4	EXAMINATION COMMITTEE ASSIGNED MS URPL Committee confirms 2-member examination committees and notifies committees	By Mar 1	By October 15	By June 25
5	EXAMINATION PERIOD Student prepares Professional Project Report to the Box directory and notifies their committee; sets exam date/time with examiners and DPLA staff; Student presents and defends Professional Project Report • We will invite you to upload your professional project report with a Box link that faculty can access. The deadline for uploading the report is March 31st). • Presentations will take place between April 5 and April 21	Mar 1*- Apr 15*	Oct 15*- Nov 30*	July 10*- Aug 20*
6	EXAMINATION RESULTS Students informed of result at conclusion of meeting; Project evaluative rubrics filled in electronically and submitted via email to Grad Coord; Copy provided to student in the event of a "fail." Copies of all rubrics will be available in student file on box by end of semester.			
7A	EXAMINATION RE-TAKE If students do not receive a passing grade, meet with advisor to discuss corrective actions; Reschedule and retake exam	Apr 16*- May 6*	Dec 1*- Dec 21*	Aug 25*
7B	EXAMINATION RESULTS Students informed of result at conclusion of meeting; Project evaluative rubrics filled in electronically submitted via email to Grad Coord; Copy provided to student in the event of a "fail." Copies of all rubrics will be available in student file on box by end of semester or degree window period.			

*or closest working day

^ this date occurs after the end of the summer term; student will graduate in fall with successful examination re-take.

Flash Talk

Flash Talk

- Students choosing the professional project option are required to concisely summarize their projects by creating a flash talk that will take place at the end of each spring semester.
- The flash talk event will be coordinated by the department and communicated to students each spring semester.

Academic Credits

Academic Credit

- Students may take up to 3 credits of URPL 999 Independent Work in support of the development and presentation of their Professional Project.
- URPL 999 must be taken as a "graded course," with the grade determined by the advisor.
- These credits will be counted as "electives."

Resources

Resources:

- Professional Project Resources:
- https://dpla.wisc.edu/academics/graduate-programs/ms-urban-and-regional-planning/professional-project-resources/
- The current rubric is available at:
  - https://dpla.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1021/2024/11/rubric_professional_project_20240229.pdf
- A professional project style guide is available at:
  - https://dpla.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1021/2025/07/MS-URPL-Prof-Project-Style-Guide-2025.pdf

QUESTIONS?


WISCONSIN
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON