

BS URBAN & ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING PROGRAM

2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY & PLANNING

WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY

Vision Statement

We aspire to be a nationally recognized undergraduate urban and environmental planning program that gives students the foundational knowledge, skills and experience necessary to face the challenges of communities in the 21st century and to have a positive impact on their region and beyond.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Bachelor of Science in Urban and Environmental Planning is to ensure that students have the planning-related knowledge, skills, and values, supported by a strong liberal arts education, necessary to assume leadership roles to help communities foster sustainable, equitable, and healthy places. Students will be prepared to succeed in entry-level positions in planning and planning-related professions or pursue graduate education in planning or planning-related disciplines.

Program Goals and Measurable Objectives

Goal 1 Quality Education

Provide a high-quality, affordable undergraduate education for a diverse population, with a full range of planning knowledge and skills, to prepare students to be engaged and reflective practitioners with potential for entry-level positions in public, private, and non-profit sectors.

Objective 1.1 Continue to update and enhance the curriculum and strategically align with programs across campus and planning practice.

Strategies:

- Review new electives and general education courses and evaluate their fit for in the program.
- Raise the profile of planning on campus by increasing the general education credentials of introductory planning courses and the role of planning courses in other majors and minors.

Metrics:

- List of recommended electives and general education courses is up to date (Target: annual review)

Objective 1.2 Ensure that students have the support they need to be successful

Strategies:

- Develop an online BUEP Handbook that will include information on navigating the program and the job market.
- Explore strategies for increasing programming on preparing for the job market.
- Connect students to professional resources like PA APA student and professional membership and AICP exam information.
- Continue to track student retention.

Metrics:

- Digital BUEP Handbook is available to students (Target: by 2028)
- Percent of BUEP students who are members of APA-PA by their final year of the program (Target: 50%)

- Number of in-class or extracurricular workshops or events on job market skills, each Year (Target: 2)
- Percentage of BUEP students new to the university still enrolled in the program after one year (Target: 80%)

Objective 1.3 Maintain a student learning-outcomes driven approach to curricular development and student assurance of learning. Ensure that a learning assessment plan has clear measures to assess how well the program is preparing students for professional planning practice.

Strategies:

- Review the BUEP assurance of learning plan and adjust as necessary to accommodate program changes and ensure currency.
- Pilot-test a comprehensive exam that is modelled after the AICP exam.
- Increase the annual program exit survey to twice a year, to capture May and December graduates.
- Conduct a graduate satisfaction survey every 5 years.

Metrics:

- Number of students achieving 70% or higher on the pilot comprehensive exam (Target: 50%)
- Percent of recent graduates indicating satisfied or greater across all dimensions on the graduate satisfaction survey (Target: 75%)
- The passage rate for new graduates (within 7 years) who take the AICP exam (Target: 75%)

Objective 1.4 Support and expand opportunities for high-impact learning experiences including internships, applied community-based projects, and domestic and international study opportunities.

Strategies:

- Continue to maintain, but better publicize, the list of active internship opportunities.
- Maintain a list of past internship locations, organizations, and job titles, both as a resource for students and for internal record keeping.
- Better connect students with career and internship resources on campus and develop those resources to be more effective for planning job and internship seekers.
- Identify and develop new internship opportunities by engaging program alumni and other strategic partners.
- Create more opportunities to invite employers to campus to speak directly with students.

- Develop funding sources to provide internship opportunities through on-campus organizations such as the Center for GIS and Spatial Analysis and Center for Community Solutions.
- Better connect students with international opportunities that fit with their interests and consider creating an international urban planning spring break trip.

Metrics:

- Planning has a dedicated internship course, separate from GEO415: Internship in Planning and Geography (Target: by 2027)
- Faculty member is appointed to new “Internship Coordinator” role (Target: by 2027)
- Question in exit survey addresses participation in community-based projects, internships, and study away (Target: by 2027)
- Percentage of students who completed at least one internship before graduating from the program (Goal: 50%)

Objective 1.5 Increase and support diversity and inclusion in the student population.

The BUEP program defines diversity broadly to include race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, sex, sexual orientation, ability, first generation status, tribal affiliation, national origin, veteran status, and political and spiritual beliefs.

Strategies:

- Include questions about student climate in the exit survey.
- Elevate a diverse array of voices, planners, and places in classes and projects
- Engage and build partnerships with a variety of communities through studio projects.
- Continue to recommend GEO204: Introduction to Urban Studies as a ~~directed~~ general education course, which highlights diverse communities and populations.
- Continue efforts to diversify the faculty

Metrics:

- Percentage of students from historically marginalized groups (Target: consistent with or exceeds that of the College and University).
- Question in the exit survey addresses students’ sense of belonging in the program (Target: by 2027)
- The diversity of planning faculty increases during our PAB accreditation cycle

Goal 2 Community Outreach

Maintain engagement with the local and regional planning community, including professional and academic planning organizations and practitioners, and regional and state planning associations, in order to enhance academic and professional opportunities for students, and to support underserved communities.

Objective 2.1 Maintain relationships with planning professionals and educators to serve the program as: speakers; guest lecturers to teach classes in their specialization, and; as adjunct faculty to teach courses in their specialization.

Strategies:

- Draw on outstanding planning professionals in our region for temporary faculty positions.
- Continue to explore opportunities for these professionals, especially alumni, to engage with students as guest lecturers and invited speakers.
- Participate in extra-curricular opportunities to train planners and local government officials by developing programs and projects, especially those that qualify for CMs.
- Continue to be a visible presence at local, regional, and state planning events.

Metrics:

- Number of planning professionals serving as adjunct faculty
- Number of planning professionals serving as guest speakers or attending events on campus.
- Number of non-academic events attended by planning faculty, and number of faculty attending.
- Number of extra-curricular materials or reports for planning professionals created by faculty.

Objective 2.2 Maintain an active presence of faculty and students in the American Institute of Certified Planners, the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, the American Planning Association, the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Planning Association, and participate in APA activities through membership and local activities of the Southeast Section.

Strategies:

- Identify a course to require enrollment as a student member of the American Planning Association and to engage with the PA chapter and Southeast PA section events (consider PLN302: Community Engagement).
- Prioritize faculty and students attending APA-PA conferences and take advantage of opportunities for faculty to present.

- Facilitate transportation for students attending APA-PA and Southeast PA section events (e.g. reimbursement, carpool organization, university van).
- Maintain or increase the role of faculty on APA-PA committees.
- Increase the number of program faculty with AICP certification and support students in working toward AICP exam passage.
- Explore holding a Southeast PA section event in West Chester.
- Continuing participation and involvement with ACSP.

Metrics:

- Number of BUEP students who are members of APA-PA by their final year of the program (Target: 50%) *also in 1.2*
- Faculty and students attending APA-PA and Southeast section events
- Number of presentations by faculty at professional conferences, such as APA-PA. *Also in 3.3.*
- Faculty serving on APA-PA committees
- Faculty with AICP certification (Target: 50%)
- Faculty serving on ACSP committees or active in interest groups (Target: 50%)

Objective 2.3 Continue to maintain a strong connection with program graduates and help to connect students with program alumni and other planning professionals in the region.

Strategies:

- Update recent graduate employment spreadsheet, biannually.
- Create and maintain a department LinkedIn page, facilitate connections to current students, and maintain the connections after graduation.
- Explore flexible (virtual) involvement options for alumni, synchronous or asynchronous.
- Create more opportunities to invite alumni to campus to speak directly with students, for example as part of existing events like Urban Planning Day or GIS Day.
- Enhance opportunities to involve alumni in BUEP program development, including through the Strategic Planning Committee.
- Submit content on planning program goings-on and alumni highlights to the Geography & Planning Department newsletter.
- Explore creating an alumni forum for sharing information between alumni.
- Participate in meetings and events that graduates attend and advertise our presence (e.g. Philly Parking Day, SE Section of APA-PA, APA-PA conferences)

Metrics:

- Percentage of students employed in planning-related fields or in graduate school in one year, by graduation year (Target: 75%)
- Department LinkedIn page is active and up-to-date (Target: by 2027)

- Number of classes in which alumni participate, per year (Target: 3)
- Number of extra-curricular events in which alumni participate, per year (Target: 3)
- Number of alumni receiving the Geography and Planning Department newsletter (Target: 50% of alumni)
- Number of non-academic events attended by planning faculty, and number of faculty attending. *Also in 2.1.*

Objective 2.4 Continue to identify opportunities to support and provide resources for local communities, with special attention to underserved neighborhoods including applied research and class projects.

Strategies:

- Seek out opportunities for students to be involved in applied community projects outside of studio.
- Continue to identify and advertise internships at a wide array of communities.
- Develop internship support for positions in under-resourced communities, for example through the WCU Unpaid Internship Fund and the Center for Community Solutions.
- Create a formal call for studio project ideas, distributed to county governments and non-profits in our region.
- Continue to support local communities through faculty service on local boards and commissions.
- Continue to track graduate community service and volunteerism through the graduate satisfaction survey.

Metrics:

- Number of planning-related internships advertised to students, via email and website
- Number of student jobs or internships funded through the WCU Unpaid Internship Fund or Center for Community Solutions.
- Respondents to the Studio Call
- Percent of faculty serving on local boards, committees, advisory groups, or similar community organizations (Target: 50%)
- Percentage of students indicating in the graduate satisfaction survey that they have served or volunteered in their community in a capacity that enabled them to utilize education in planning (Target: 30%)

Goal 3 Scholarship

Support faculty and students to advance scholarship that impacts planning practice and planning pedagogy in different forms as defined by the department teacher scholar model.

Objective 3.1 Engage students in research efforts and look for opportunities to showcase outcomes.

Strategies:

- Increase the number of BUEP students serving as research assistants in faculty research
- Increase the number of BUEP students participating in established WCU programs that fund undergraduate research.
- Explore opportunities to hire BUEP students to support projects through WCU centers such as the Center for GIS and Spatial Analysis

Metrics:

- Number of students serving as research assistants in faculty research
- Number of students participating in WCU programs that fund undergraduate research

Objective 3.2 Expand opportunities to engage in scholarly work including funded and unfunded research, grant development, contracts and commissioned research, to produce scholarship, especially at the regional and state levels, consistent with the Department Teacher-Scholar model and individual statements of expectations.

Strategies:

- Identify potential funding sources to support applied research
- Include students in funded faculty work
- Continue to collaborate with the Center for Community Solutions to enable students to work on community-based projects

Metrics:

- Number of students funded through faculty grants
- Number of class projects related to faculty research
- Number of funded faculty grants
- Number of publications by planning faculty

Objective 3.3. Present and publish research findings to inform the regional and state planning communities, as well as the larger academic planning community.

Strategies:

- Continue to produce a range of scholarship including sponsored research (technical reports, applied community-based research, and non-peer reviewed funded research) as well as peer-reviewed research in regional and other academic journals.
- Continue to present research at regional and national academic conferences, including ACSP.
- Continue to present research at professional conferences like APA-PA, in addition to academic conferences, to enhance the impact of program scholarship on practice.

Metrics:

- Number of presentations by faculty at academic conferences
- Number of presentations by faculty at professional conferences, such as APA-PA. *Also in to 2.2.*

Goal 4 Collaboration and University Community

Maintain collaborative relationships with other programs within the department and with other departments in the College and University in order to supplement the planning curriculum and enhance the student experience

Objective 4.1 Continue the strong curricular ties with Geography programs and strengthen relationships within the College of Business and Public Management

Strategies:

- Identify opportunities to create interdisciplinary programs with other departments in the College of Business and Public Management
- Identify opportunities to collaborate with business programs with the integration of planning subfields like land use, economics, and geo-spatial technologies in targeted areas including location analytics, economic development, real estate development, and supply chain management.
- Identify how the department's disciplinary expertise in Environmental Geography supports the BUEP program and leverage these strengths in the curriculum to ensure that the programs are clearly distinct and benefit students in both programs.
- Identify how the department's disciplinary expertise in geospatial technologies supports the BUEP program and leverage these strengths in the curriculum to benefit students in both programs.

Metrics:

- Percentage of graduating BUEP students who earn a minor or certificate (Target: 50%)

Objective 4.2 Continue to serve as a leader in the College of Business and Public Management in support of sustainability initiatives.

Strategies:

- Continue to market and promote the minor in Applied Community and Environmental Sustainability and develop opportunities for additional sustainability-related minors and certificates.
- Maintain faculty membership on the CBPM PRME committee and subcommittees

Metrics:

- Number of students in the Department of Geography and Planning who graduate with the ACES minor

- Number of students enrolled in the ACES minor, overall (Target: 40)
- Number of faculty serving on CBPM PRME committees