

MRP Strategic Plan

Revised Spring 2018

A. Our Core Values

4E Sustainability: One of our key program strengths is that we have upheld a core commitment to promoting sustainability relative to ecology, economy, equity, and engagement, and providing coursework and research across all these. Our design work means we can add another element to the 4Es: aesthetic delight, as built environments may add joy and community to daily life.

Advocacy: We believe that our students, faculty and alumni must be change agents who will be politically informed, socially engaged, and dedicated to improving the lives of our communities. They should, can, and do practice inclusive, active citizenship relative to their constituencies.

Engagement and Outreach: We are committed to preserving and enhancing the University's Land Grant Mission, and believe that our students and faculty should have a strong connection to our region, state, nation, and world through academic, professional and research relationships. The goal is to extend our teaching and research equitably, beyond the university and local area to wider communities of concern, relating our knowledge, skills, and values to those of our diverse partners in the planning process.

Professional and Scholarly Collaboration: While we are committed foremost to our core mission of planning education, professionalism, and research, we also acknowledge the need for planners to serve as collaborators with other disciplines toward a mutual mission of improving quality of life within our communities. Planning has long been an interdisciplinary field that also partners with other interdisciplinary fields, academically as well as professionally.

Ecological Preservation and Environmental Quality: We focus teaching, research, and outreach on critical environmental issues worldwide, so that our students have a grounded understanding of the need for sustainability and the planning tools that will help ensure a healthy living climate. Students learn how to address system restoration and resilience through green infrastructure.

Social Equity and Cultural Heritage: We believe that it is critical that planners understand the impacts of impoverishment, exclusion, and discrimination on prospects for viable communities, and the benefits of human diversity, in professional as well as in community decision-making. Our professional work, outreach, and research efforts will help support communities in building capacity to improve their own quality of life. We recognize the importance of cultural character, and strive to respect that people working and living within communities may be different and approach issues in often distinctive ways. Our faculty and students aim to identify the most appropriate means to address community needs relative to a wide variety of local cultural values.

B. Our Regional Context and Competitive Advantage

Our regional competitive advantage comprises five major elements:

- location away from the urban metro areas of Boston, New York, etc. allows us a more varied focus on rural and small towns as well as on larger municipalities
- the economic transition of mill towns in the region allows us to address new adaptive reuse and creative economic redevelopment strategies
- the ecological, historical, and cultural character of the Connecticut River Valley supports our areas of research excellence in context-appropriate planning

- partnerships within the Five College Consortium strengthen our capacity for interdisciplinary collaboration and innovative, integrative pedagogy
- students in our program are well-prepared for professional practice whatever the size of the community through experience across multiple scales and sectors

Our program is located in Western Massachusetts in the Connecticut River Valley. Our region is rich in political, cultural, and economic history: where the first post-Revolutionary War protests began (Shay's Rebellion), where one of America's most famed feminist speakers stirred the nation with her "Ain't I a Woman?" speech (former slave Sojourner Truth), where America's most famous utopian novel was written (Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*), where Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost wrote many of their poems, as well as where the American System of Manufacturing began (the Springfield Armory). From Springfield's historical reputation as 'City of Firsts' in manufacturing to the current 'Knowledge Corridor', the Pioneer Valley (more recently rebranded WestMass) has long been an educational, cultural, and economic crossroads. We are also part of the Five College Consortium, where the University of Massachusetts, along with Amherst College, Hampshire College, Mount Holyoke College, and Smith College, and together create what many believe is the most successful cross-institutional collaborative in the United States, sharing library and database resources, curricular offerings, and faculty resources.

UMass Amherst is the flagship campus of our Carnegie 1 research institution. We are the only graduate planning program at a public university in New England currently accredited by the Planning Accreditation Board. Moreover, the University is located within four hours of Boston, New York City and six state capitals. In our region, there are communities of virtually every size and type that can be found in America. One can find the growing and the declining, vibrant cities and towns as well as legacy communities recovering from disinvestment. One can find those building on undeveloped greenfields or adaptively reusing brownfields. One can find places oriented to heritage and others that eagerly reinvent themselves to meet emerging needs. We are quite fortunate to have a region with such community diversity across multiple scales. Our campus is also located in the middle of one of America's greatest concentrations of planning education. Within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts alone, there are now four accredited planning programs, with two more to seek accreditation in the near future. Eight additional accredited programs lie within 300 miles of our campus. This competition is both an impetus for continuous innovation and an ongoing spur to enhance program quality.

We view this wide range of planning education options as a challenge we must meet: it stimulates us to constantly improve, to ensure that our students are well placed and that we are academically and professionally relevant to our region. It also requires that we carefully craft our mission; we do not need to be all things to all students, but rather offers a more asset-oriented approach that recognizes and addresses planning practice and scholarship relative to our peers. Being a practice-oriented regional planning program at a public institution with interdisciplinary strength in sustainability is our competitive advantage relative to other programs.

C. Our Program Vision Statement

Our particular area of expertise is in educating students to become outstanding planning practitioners in the Northeast region and beyond; our program aims to be one of the most valued graduate regional planning programs in the US. We teach the knowledge, skills, and values that students need for their first jobs as well as for their eventual senior practice positions, with a core commitment to sustainability. We train students to

engage planning issues across multiple scales from the site to the neighborhood, the city, and the region. Our students will be conscientious as well as confident dealing with quantitative and qualitative aspects of issues, in a way that respects culture and the need to account for demographic, social, environmental, and fiscal ‘ground truth’. Our faculty members are nationally and internationally-recognized scholars and mentors in our core areas of excellence. Together, faculty and students will help to empower citizens of our local communities as well as stewards of our global systems.

D. Our Program Mission Statement

Through our teaching and training, our theoretical and applied research, our creative placemaking and community engagement work, we endeavor to educate our students such that they can be accomplished, innovative, and reflective planning professionals. Our obligation is to ensure that students are capable of both conceptual-critical thought and grounded understanding of the tools and techniques required to guide communities to prosperous, equitable and healthy futures. Our research focus is dedicated to both quantitative and qualitative methods designed to advance planning as a rigorous academic discipline. Moreover, as a land grant institution, we are strongly committed to soliciting and addressing the needs of citizens in the Commonwealth, the Northeast region, and beyond. If our alumni practitioners and research faculty may advance the profession and discipline, and our outreach contributes to improvement of communities, then we have been and will remain successful accomplishing our mission, past, present, and future.

E. Areas of Excellence and Concentrations

The LARP department has identified six areas of excellence; of those, the MRP Program plays a leading role in pursuing five specific focus areas of excellence that have guided and will guide our future research, teaching and outreach leadership. Moreover, our MRP concentrations align well with these areas of excellence. The areas of excellence and their related concentrations include:

1. Community Engagement

Plans and designs have little meaning unless they represent the needs, hopes, values, and goals of those who will use them. Questions of justice in the distribution of costs and benefits and power and privilege are central to planning. Research in this area explores connections between engagement, justice, and multiple publics in policy and planning.

Concentration: Community and Equity Planning

2. Technological Innovation and Regional Economy

Sustaining communities and places requires integrating new and existing modes of production in communities. Our faculty are leaders in investigating entrepreneurship, regional networks, strategic development and redevelopment, technological change, and the reuse of industrial space to meet new social and economic needs.

Concentration: Economic and Regional Development Planning

3. Culture, Heritage and Society

The management of cultural landscapes (historic urban centers, changing suburban communities, rural towns) integrates culture, nature and history, and is increasingly important in planning. MRP faculty

have expertise in both theory and practice in the field. Their research investigates policy and planning issues in the identification, interpretation, and conservation of cultural heritage landscapes.

Concentration: Community and Equity Planning

4. Regenerative Urbanism

This theme connects emerging best practices in built form to the municipal, state, national and international policies and processes that are required to achieve them. Research addresses climate change, resilience, sustainable and low impact policy and settlement design practices in small towns, suburbs, cities, and metropolitan regions.

Concentration: Land Use and Environmental Planning

5. Regional and Greenway Planning

Regional-scale landscape planning promotes the thoughtful achievement of human and natural needs while linking edge, node and corridor across multiple scales. Regions are geophysical but also social, and defined through ecology and culture. The Department has particular strength in greenway planning and green infrastructure, and in interpreting the role of open space within their regional context in the US and internationally.

Concentration: Land Use and Environmental Planning

F. MRP Program Goals, Objectives, Strategies, Responsibilities and Indicators

Goal One: Maintain and Improve Public Perception and Reputation of MRP Program Quality

- a) Gain full Planning Accreditation Board accreditation in 2019 and thereafter
- b) Continue to have at least three MRP alumni participate on the Alumni Board
- c) Create the Distinguished Alumni Award to be given to a high-profile MRP graduate each year at a distinguished lecture, symposium, or commencement
- d) Encourage faculty and students to attend and present at CPTC, APA state, regional, or national conferences and to submit applications for award competitions
- e) Encourage faculty to become AICP-certified as a model for students and alumni

Goal Two: Build and Promote Areas of Excellence to Ensure Recognition of Our Expertise in Teaching, Research, and Outreach

- a) Encourage faculty to submit course or studio work for planning award competitions: our objective should be at least one submission per year
- b) Identify and secure excellent practicum/studio projects for our students
- c) Employ department funds to create one regional planning event every other year
- d) Motivate all faculty members to participate in Scholarworks
- e) Showcase 'Areas of Excellence' through various department forums and media

Goal Three: Improve and Increase Recruitment as well as Retention of Quality Students

- a) Use connections with regional high schools, community colleges and state universities to recruit high achieving students, especially from underrepresented cohorts
- b) Send out personal communications to colleagues in undergraduate institutions across New England asking them to identify prospective candidates for the MRP program

- c) Develop marketing materials and presentations for MRP program recruitment.
- d) Prepare targeted news and events pages that celebrate the accomplishments of our program, faculty, and graduates and update it regularly (e.g., website, social media)

Goal Four: Increase Support for Student and Faculty Diversity in Recruitment and Retention

- a) Meet with diversity representatives at the university to identify metrics of progress and performance in retention and recruitment, and resources to achieve both goals
- b) Identify and request the assistance of willing graduates in serving as mentor/advisors to MRP diversity students prior to matriculation
- c) Seek expanded funding and financial assistance for enrolled diversity students
- d) Continue to work with Springfield, Holyoke, and other Gateway Cities/Legacy Cities in organizing studios, practica and fieldwork that focus on diversity and equity issues

Goal Five: Enhance the Student Professional Experience during and after Matriculation

- a) Review course content every three years
- b) Every two years undertake a survey of recent graduates to determine how well they were prepared for their professional work
- c) Offer an annual or bi-annual in-house (live or online) workshop introducing students to the APA and AICP examination, potentially in collaboration with APA-MA
- d) Encourage students to attend Graduate School professional development courses in technical writing, public speaking, meeting management, and professional ethics
- e) Along with the PSO, ensure that the orientation is a community-building experience. It should include academic, social and bonding events
- f) Experiment with having the Alumni Board provide a 'mentoring night' with students; if successful, repeat annually

Goal Six: Identify how the new John W. Olver Design Building (opened January 2017) can create new opportunities for teaching, studio, research, and social collaborations with other affiliated design disciplines (Landscape Architecture, Architecture, Building and Construction Technology, etc.)

- a) Collaborate with Landscape Architecture, Architecture, and Building Construction Technology programs to consider development of shared classes in sustainability planning, design, and development principles
- b) Use building spaces to maximize interaction between disciplines while maintaining a sense of ownership of each program regarding their own program space
- c) Support efforts to have the new building be as innovative and sustainable as fiscally possible, not only in its construction but also operations, maintenance, and pedagogy

G. MRP Implementation Matrix

Goal One: Maintain and Improve Perception and Reputation of UMass MRP Program Quality

Objective 1a: Gain Full Planning Board Accreditation in 2019 and thereafter

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing	Indicators achieved
Begin working on accreditation SSR documents 6 months in advance of site visit and 4 months in advance of SSR due date	Department Chair (DC); MRP GPD; Staff support (Terry, Stacy, Kellie, etc.)	Work on SSR begun by January 2018	Assignments given in Fall 2017; work begun in earnest in January (Faculty Meeting 1/18)
After SSR completion, identify information that should be collected annually toward next accreditation	DC, MRP GPD, Support staff	Plan in place for data collection revisions by January 2019	

Objective 1b: Continue to have at least three MRP alums participate on the Alumni Board.

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing	Indicators achieved
Place Three Distinguished MRP Alums on Alumni Board	DC obtains input from MRP Faculty	Three members identified for 2018-2019	1 st meeting, Spring 2019 for new nominees

Objective 1c: Create the Distinguished Alumni Award to be given to a high-profile MRP graduate each year at a distinguished lecture, symposium, or commencement

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
Develop Award Criteria and Process	DC, MRP GPD	Distinguished Alumni Award given to MRPs Melanie Army 2016 and Katie Stebbins 2018 during the review period
	Funds provided by Department GOF	

Objective 1d: Encourage faculty and students to attend and present at CPTC, APA state, regional, or national conferences and to submit applications for award competitions

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
Identify in position descriptions faculty for whom local/practice-based presentations are expected	DC and RP faculty members	At least one faculty member has included in position description an expectation that he/she will present at practice-oriented conferences (DiPasquale)

Publicize the CPTC and New England APA conferences to students and faculty	APA liaison on faculty and in PSO	Early and reminder emails are sent each year for CPTC and regional APA conferences; timing varies to match conference timing
Cover incidental expenses for students preparing presentations for conferences or competitions	DC	One to four students/student groups apply to show posters or present

Objective 1e: Encourage faculty to become AICP-certified as a model for students and alumni

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
Pay for fees for exam and preparation materials. If possible, offer one week of salary to pay for study time.	DC, between \$2,000 and \$6,000	DiPasquale AICP

Goal Two: Build and Promote Areas of Excellence to Ensure Recognition of Our Expertise in Research, Teaching, and Outreach

Objective 2a: Encourage faculty to submit course or studio work for planning award competitions; our objective should be at least one submission per year

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
Provide staff support and cover incidental expenses for faculty preparing materials for regional or national competitions.	Faculty, especially studio instructors, and DC	One project or student report submitted annually

Objective 2b: Identify and secure excellent practicum/studio projects for our students

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
Work with Alumni Board and other local contacts to identify likely partners	Studio instructor(s) and others teaching practica	One to three funded projects per year serving communities
Work with municipal agencies, RPAs, and NPOs to identify likely projects/communities	Same	Same

Objective 2c: Employ department funds to create one regionally-oriented planning event every other year as may be fiscally possible

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
Offer one major symposium per year as fiscally possible (may alternate years of LA/RP major focus)	One year in advance, faculty member is identified to design and coordinate symposium for that year	We will host P4+2 MA APA Meeting in Fall 2018; host Fábos Symposium in Spring 2019
Continue to promote weekly Zube lectures during the semester	Zube coordinator; hourly or RA assistance paid through Zube fund	Zube lectures most weeks of the semester
Invite several outstanding alumni to give Zube talks each year	Zube coordinator; hourly or RA assistance paid through Zube fund	At least one or two lectures by MRP alumni each year

Objective 2d: Motivate all faculty members to participate in Scholarworks

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
Offer assistance over summer to all faculty	DC and staff	Summer 2014 for initial lists, each summer after for updates

Objective 2e: Showcase 'Areas of Excellence' through department forums and media

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
Assure that areas of excellence relevant to MRP have faculty, or replace with new hiring	DC; faculty lines available upon retirements	Areas of excellence have identified MRP faculty
Ask faculty in each area of excellence to send in news to put on website for that group	DC and all faculty	Areas are regularly updated with news

Goal Three: Improve and Increase Recruitment as well as Retention of Quality Students

Objective 3a: Use connections with regional high schools, community colleges and state universities to recruit high achieving students, especially from underrepresented cohorts

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
MRP GPD works with area connections to identify ways to promote and recruit	MRP GPD, Individual Faculty members, staff assistance in outreach	Ongoing connections and annual visits that can enable increased enrollment

Objective 3b: Send out personal communications to colleagues in educational institutions across New England asking them to identify prospective candidates for the MRP program

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
MRP director works with faculty members to identify professors	MRP director writes form letter, faculty embellishes, staff processes	Increase applicant pool of regional candidates by 30%

Objective 3c: Develop marketing materials and presentations for MRP program recruitment

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
Develop quality printed brochure for program	Department staff works with MRP director	Brochures printed Fall 2014; updated 2017
Distribute materials to regional or national sources of candidates based on LARP brand	DC with staff	Posters mailed Winter 2015. Updated 2019

Objective 3d: Prepare targeted news and events pages that celebrate the accomplishments of our program, faculty, and graduates and update it regularly (e.g., website, social media)

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
DC gains funds for editorial assistance from the Dean	MRP GPD, DC	Emailed or mailed to alumni and to local institutions likely to have good candidates for MRP
Work with SBS College staff for media and newsletter distribution/ publicity.	Printing/Editorial costs Staff places on website	

Goal Four: Increase Support for Student and Faculty Diversity in Recruitment and Retention

Objective 4a: Meet with diversity representatives at the university to identify metrics of progress and performance in retention and recruitment, and resources to improve both goals

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
Identified faculty on diversity committee reach out to university officials	MRP GPD, Diversity Committee chair	Improved climate for diverse members of the MRP program
Diversity committee chair follows through on available resources or ideas for improvement	MRP GPD, Diversity Committee chair and DC	Spring 2015, spring 2017 and so on.

Objective 4b: Identify and request the assistance of willing graduates in serving as mentor/advisors to MRP diversity students prior to matriculation

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
MRP GPD identifies likely graduates and requests assistance;	MRP GPD	Improved climate
MRP GPD asks diversity students if they would like to have an external mentor; MRP GPD matches students and mentors;		
Annual check-in with mentors and students on how the program is working	MRP GPD and DC	Assessment of program and improvement as needed

Objective 4c: Seek expanded funding and financial assistance for enrolled diversity students

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
DC works with graduate dean to identify funding opportunities	DC	Three Diversity Students enroll annually in MRP
DC designates overhead funds for diversity students		

Objective 4d: Continue to work with Springfield, Holyoke, and other Gateway Cities/Legacy Cities in organizing studios, practica and fieldwork that focuses on diversity and equity issues

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
	MRP GPD Faculty	Increased Diversity Content

Goal Five: Enhance the Student Professional Experience during and after Matriculation

Objective 5a: Review course content every three years to ensure it meets PAB accreditation goals

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
MRP GPD circulates PAB requirements	MRP GPD	Review in Fall 2017
Faculty fill in matrix from PAB and make notes about emerging topics or issues to be discussed	Faculty members	Fall 2017 prior to Spring 2018 retreat
Faculty meet to discuss curricular gaps and overlaps	MRP GPD organizes and records results	Spring 2018
Course content and/or course offerings change to address needs identified in review	Faculty members change syllabi; MRP GPD submits curriculum changes to Faculty Senate; DC considers resources and if possible rearranges course offerings to meet identified needs	Spring 2019
MRP GPD circulates PAB requirements	MRP GPD	Review in Fall 2017

Objective 5b: Every two years undertake a survey of recent graduates to determine how well they were prepared for their professional work

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
MRP GPD obtains model surveys from other programs	DC	30% return of surveys
MRP GPD and faculty tailor the survey to MRP	MRP GPD	Implemented in spring every two years??
DC obtains alum list, APA list and personal contact list from faculty	Alumni Affairs	

Objective 5c: Offer an annual or bi-annual in-house (live or online) workshop introducing students to the APA and AICP examination, potentially in collaboration with APA-MA and other planning programs

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
MRP GPD reaches out to MassAPA/Alums for assistance	DC gains funds (\$100 for refreshments) MRP GPD coordinates	School year 2014, 2016, etc.

Objective 5d: Encourage students to attend Graduate School professional development courses in technical writing, public speaking, meeting management, and professional ethics

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
Get a listing from GS of workshops and post	MRP GPD and staff	Students attend workshops as available from GS
Send emails to students to alert them of opportunities	MRP GPD and staff	Students attend workshops as relevant

Objective 5e: Along with the PSO, ensure that the orientation is a community-building experience. It should include academic, social and bonding events

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
Department provides funds;	DC	Implemented in fall 2015, held annually
DC creates committee with PSO	MRP GPD	
Faculty scripts academic side; PSO plans social side; MRP GPD sends out invitations	Faculty PSO Staff	

Objective 5f: Experiment with having the Alumni Board provide a ‘mentoring night’ with students; if successful, repeat annually

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
Invite alumni board members to meet with students after one Board meeting for ‘speed advising’ session	DC	Event organized. Spring 2014
Survey/discuss with students and Board members their perceptions of success and whether it should be done each year	DC	directly after mentoring night
Hold each year if success merits	DC; refreshments	

Goal Six: Identify how the new Olver Design Building (opened January 2017) can create new opportunities for teaching, studio, research, and social collaborations with other affiliated design disciplines (Landscape Architecture, Architecture, Building and Construction Technology, etc.)

Objective 6a: Collaborate in consideration of development of core shared classes in sustainability principles and design principles

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
Work with DB curriculum team on issue	DC with MRP GPD and MRP faculty advice	Basic agreement by fall 2014
Revise MRP curriculum if needed to meet this goal	MRP GPD with MRP faculty advice	Work with School of Earth and Sustainability staff to increase offerings.

Objective 6b: Use building spaces to maximize interaction between disciplines while maintaining a sense of ownership of each program regarding their own program space.

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
Ensure that there is common space in building where casual interaction can occur	DC	Lobby/atrium/cafe is included in design

Objective 6c: Support efforts to have the new building be as innovative and sustainable as fiscally possible, not only in its construction but also operations, maintenance, and pedagogy

Strategies	Responsible Party and Resource Needs	Indicators and Planned Timing
Attend all IDB meetings and push forward sustainability agenda	DC	LEED certification for building and movement toward net-zero energy