



**BALL STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

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**W E F L Y**

**Department of Urban Planning**

**Master of Urban and Regional Planning**

*2024 - 2025*

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## A. Overview of Handbook

This handbook highlights the graduate program policies and procedures for students in the Master of Urban and Regional Planning degree program in the Department of Urban Planning. These guidelines exist in addition to the policies outlined in [Ball State's Graduate Catalog](#). This includes student rights, campus security, admissions, course withdrawal, fees, counseling, accessibility, and many other issues. You are encouraged to become familiar with both guides. In all cases where there is a discrepancy between the Graduate Catalog and this Handbook, please let us know. policies and degree requirements in the Graduate Catalog supersede any information in this Handbook.

## B. About the Department

- 1. Program Description** – The Department of Urban Planning is part of the R. Wayne Estopinal College of Architecture and Planning (CAP). The CAP also hosts departments of architecture, landscape architecture, and construction management and interior design. The Master of Urban and Regional Planning (MURP) is accredited by the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) and is the only accredited Master of Urban Planning degree in Indiana.
- 2. Department History** – Ball State established the CAP in 1965 and began offering a graduate urban planning program in 1975. The first master of urban and regional planning degree was awarded in 1977.

At this time, Ball State's College of Science and Humanities offered an undergraduate major in urban and regional studies (URS). In 1982, the URS program was transferred to the CAP, and work began on designing an undergraduate professional degree program.

Once the CAP developed the Bachelor of Urban Planning and Development (BUPD), the university phased out the URS program. In the fall of 1986, three students entered the BUPD program, and in 1990, the program's first students graduated. A year later in 1991, 34 master's degree students graduated, and in 2001, our accelerated track opened to graduates with accredited degrees. Both the MURP and the BUPD programs are accredited by the PAB and are the only accredited planning programs in Indiana.

Combined, more than 650 students have graduated from our degree programs. Our impact is strongest right here in the Hoosier state, but we have alumni from California to Maryland and from North Dakota to Florida. China, Ghana, Jordan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Saudi Arabia, and Spain are home to other graduates.

- 3. R. Wayne Estopinal College of Architecture and Planning** –The CAP is home to three other departments including the Departments of Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Construction Management and Interior Design. A graduate program in historic preservation is housed within the Department of Architecture and an urban design program is located in Indianapolis, at CAP: Indy.

The CAP has a long history of academic excellence and community engagement and enjoys strong alumni support. The dean of CAP is Dave Ferguson. You can find his office in AB 104. CAP also hosts events each year, including exhibits in the first-floor gallery and a guest lecture series.

Also on the first floor, you will find the Drawings and Documents Archive, the Building Materials Sample Collection, and a branch of University Libraries. In the basement, you will find the Communications Resource Center (commonly called the CRC) where you can print documents and purchase basic art supplies. These are resources available to CAP students. Also in the basement is the Institute for Digital Intermedia Arts, a newer addition to the CAP family.

### C. Admissions

1. **Materials & Criteria** – Admission information is on this [website](#). The department does not have a separate application for admission; apply to the graduate school at Ball State and select Urban Planning as your program of study.

To be eligible for admission to the MURP program, you must meet the criteria below:

- Earned a minimum of 3.0 GPA from your undergraduate degree-granting institution.
- Applicants whose GPA falls below the 3.0 department minimum but above the graduate school minimum of 2.75 may also be eligible for probationary admission to the MURP program. This option is available to students who have provided sufficient evidence of academic and/or professional achievement to indicate their potential for success in a graduate program. Additional application materials may be requested to be considered. Students admitted on a probationary status must earn a minimum GPA of 3.0 in their first 9 semester credits of graduate work or be academically dismissed.

To complete your application, you will need to upload the following required materials to your [Cardinal Landing Portal](#):

- **Transcript/credential evaluation from your highest earned degree:** learn more about BSU's [transcript/credential evaluation requirements](#).
  - **Resume:** summary of education, experiences, and skills.
  - **Statement of Purpose:** a 300 to 500-word statement of purpose.
2. **Deadlines** – All application materials, including a completed application form and unofficial transcripts, must be submitted to the Graduate School at least two weeks before the term in which the student wishes to begin graduate study. Your application must be completed two weeks before the start of the semester you're planning to enroll. Start of term dates can be found on our [Academic Calendar](#). If you are an international applicant, your application must be received by the [international admissions deadline](#).
  3. **Selection & Notification** – Once you're admitted, please check back to your Cardinal Landing Portal for information about the post-admissions process. Please feel free to contact the Graduate Director, Dr. Sanglim Yoo, and the Department Administrative Coordinator, Ms. Christine Rhine.

### D. Degree Requirements

See the [current Graduate Catalog](#) for the complete curriculum. Also see the [Curriculum Samples](#) for Two-Year Track (48 Credits), One-Year Track (36 Credits), and an Accelerated Track (48 Credits).

- 1. Required Courses and Electives** – For the required courses, please see the [curriculum samples](#).

Elective classes at the 500 or 600 level with the prefixes ARCH, CAP, LA, PLAN, SUST, and UD can be used toward your MURP degree. Other electives must be approved by the MURP graduate director. Typically, these come from areas such as Sociology, Political Science, Public Administration, Religious Studies, Natural Resources, or Anthropology, but others may be permitted. A limited number of transfer classes may also count either as electives or in place of required classes. Your advisor can answer questions about these.

Electives give you an opportunity to explore multiple topics that interest you or to narrow in on a focused interest that you want to develop. This section is designed to point out some of those focused areas that fit well with our curriculum and are closely aligned with planning. Electives must be taken at either the 500 or 600 level to count toward a graduate degree.

- 2. Concentrations, Tracks, Cognates** – The Department of Urban Planning offers the following three tracks:
  - **MURP Track 1 (Two-Year Track, 48 Credits):** If you're pursuing a degree in planning for the first time, this two-year, 48-credit program is for you. The standard track is also for students already in the workforce.
  - **MURP Track 2 (One-Year Track, 36 Credits):** This one-year, 36-credit course of study is for students who've earned a bachelor's degree in planning, accredited by the Planning Accreditation Board.
  - **Accelerated Track (Two Semesters and 2 Summers Track, 48 Credits):** Begin your studies as an undergraduate at Ball State and double count 9 hours. Learn how an [Accelerated Masters Program](#) works.
- 3. Dual Degree Options** – It is possible at Ball State to earn two master's degrees simultaneously and to share some credits between the two of them. This can sometimes be completed by adding as little as one more semester to your schedule. The best advice is to start planning early. The most common dual degree our students seek is the Master of Urban Design, which is a one-year program offered only at Ball State's Indianapolis campus.
- 4. Certificate Program Options** – You might choose to earn a certificate alongside your MURP degree.
  - **[Real Estate Development](#)** is a common choice here and can easily be earned alongside your MURP degree. It is a popular certificate option offered through the Department of Urban Planning and requires 15 credit hours, with 9 credit hours of required, core courses and 6 credit hours of electives.
  - **[Geographic Information Science \(GIS\)](#)** is another certificate option offered through the Department of Geography. It requires 15 credit hours, making it a comfortable use for your MURP electives and giving you expertise in using the industry standard GIS software commonly used in cities and towns.

- **Social and Environmental Justice** is offered through the Department of Architecture in CAP and requires 12 credit hours, with our **PLAN 613 Quantitative Methods and Social Justice** counting for three of those.
- **Certificate in Sustainability** is an online certificate that requires 12 credit hours.

### **E. Guidelines for Satisfactory Progress**

1. **Hours Required** – Even if you are allowed to make substitutions for required classes, you must complete 48 hours to earn the MURP degree (or 36 hours if you are a fast-track student with an undergraduate degree in planning from an institution accredited by the PAB).

Taking 12 credit hours per semester will keep you on track to graduate in two years. You are permitted to take up to 15 hours per semester. Fast-track students must typically take 15 hours per semester to finish in one calendar year and must take care to ensure that 60 percent of their credit hours are taken at the 600 level, a requirement of graduate school.

2. **Independent Studies** – You are permitted to take up to nine credit hours of independent study as you work toward the MURP degree. You must submit your proposed course of study to a faculty member and gain that faculty member's approval to work with you and supervise your study. Faculty members are under no obligation to grant requests to do independent study, and students in an independent study course need to work diligently and meet their obligations as in any other course. If a faculty member agrees to work with you, the administrative coordinator will create an independent study course specifically for you and will give the CRN for that course only to you.
3. **Advising** – The chair of the department is Dr. John West, and your academic advisor is Dr. Sanglim Yoo. You are encouraged to make an appointment to talk about your goals with either of them. Graduate School is a time for you to claim a specialty and to explore topics of interest to you. We allow for ample electives because of this. Your advisor can help you select classes that will meet your needs and set you up for future success. The department's administrative coordinator keeps a check sheet that shows your progress toward graduation. This can help you make sure you are on track. You will receive updated copies periodically; it is okay to ask for an update as well.
4. **Requirements** – You must maintain a 3.0 graduate GPA to remain in the MURP program after completing 9 credits. Students whose cumulative GPA falls below this minimum will be placed on academic warning and may need to take additional steps. To remove warning status, students must raise their GPA to 3.0 by the time they complete their next 9 credits.

### **F. Program Milestones**

1. **Milestone #1: First Semester** – You must sign up for the **PLAN 500 Planning Entrance Survey**, an entrance assessment in your first semester. Your replies are important for our internal bookkeeping purposes. It is not a test and will not affect

your admission to the program or grades. The assessment will be in Canvas and should be taken during the first month of the semester.

The first semester is also a good time to consider how you want to use your electives. You may organize these around a particular theme and develop a specialty for yourself. The department recommends considering a specialization that aligns with one of the graduate certificates offered at Ball State, such as sustainability, or real-estate development. Graduate Director Dr. Yoo can also work with students who want to complete dual degree programs. Regardless of whether you are choosing a certificate or a dual degree, your electives can often count towards both degree programs.

- 2. Milestone #2: Second Semester**—In your second semester, you will register for the **PLAN 690 Portfolio Review**. Appendix B explains the portfolio creation and review processes in detail, and **PLAN 605 Design and Graphic Communication** discusses them in depth. Portfolio completion is required before registering for an internship.

For the portfolio review, you will create a portfolio of your coursework as detailed in the portfolio guide at the end of this document and throughout **PLAN 605, Design and Presentation Techniques**. Typically, in the spring semester of your first year, you will register for portfolio review, **PLAN 690**. In this class, you will turn in printed and electronic copies of your portfolio and related documents and go through a mock interview with a team of faculty members who will provide feedback on your work. Passing the portfolio process is required before embarking upon an internship.

To learn more about the portfolio, see Appendix B. Click [here](#) to see examples of portfolios.

- 3. Milestone #3: Summer Semester** – Usually, students complete a summer internship, **PLAN 691 Internship**, between their first and second years.

**Internship:** An internship of 200 hours or more is required of all students. Most graduate students do their internship during the summer between the first and second years. It is permissible to do it during a later semester, however.

The office receives many notices of internships each semester. These are posted on the bulletin board outside the conference room and emailed to students. CAP organizes a job and internship fair each spring, and typically half a dozen providers of planning internships attend. Most of our providers, however, do not make the trip for the fair and will be expecting you to apply online and visit their offices for interviews or conduct virtual interviews.

Often, students find internships by approaching people they would like to work for and asking for an opportunity. It's best to do this early, even over the holiday break. The [Career Center](#) provides many opportunities to have your resume reviewed, practice interview skills, and other job-related help. Sometimes employers post internships there as well.

Besides signing up in Banner to get credit for your internship (**PLAN 691 Internship**), you will also fill out the internship registration form and send that to the administrative coordinator once you have confirmed a position. At the close of your

internship, you and your supervisor will both evaluate your work. [The forms required for these steps are here.](#)

- 4. Milestone #4: Third Semester** – In your third semester, you will have more space for electives and study research methods as you begin thinking about your final project.

**Capstone, thesis, or creative project:** Part of your education includes a final ‘capstone’ experience. The capstone sequence includes **PLAN 694 Planning Research Methods**, which you will take in the fall of your second year, and **PLAN 692 Capstone Planning Studio**, which you will take in your final semester. These classes will be oriented around a year-long collective project with real-world impact. Students move from theory to practice to reflection over the year, honing both practical skills and a critical sense of what constitutes good planning.

In the past, students have worked on the sustainability plan for Ball State University and a public participation plan for the Delaware-Muncie Metropolitan Plan Commission.

Alternatively, students may complete an independent thesis or creative project. To learn more about independent projects, see Appendix A.

- 5. Milestone #5: Fourth Semester** – In your fourth semester, you will register for **PLAN 699 Planning Exit Survey**, an exit assessment. Like the entrance assessment, it is found in Canvas and is used for internal bookkeeping purposes.

Typically, you will follow the MURP curriculum plan in the Graduate Catalog, but exceptions can be made if you have taken similar classes in the past or have a design background. If you think you qualify for an exception, provide documentation such as a syllabus or course description of your previous work to the graduate director and discuss your options.

- 6. Milestone #6: Graduation** – Graduation is not automatic. You must apply in Banner to graduate. Do this at the beginning of your final semester. If you are working toward a dual degree or have added a certificate to your curriculum, be sure to apply to graduate from both programs. The [Graduate School web pages](#) contain important information about deadlines, forms, and procedures. Please become familiar with what is there.

If you have not finished your coursework by the end of the fourth semester, you may still walk at graduation. You will have to reapply for graduation and pay the fee again in the semester you expect to complete your work. To receive the degree, you are expected to complete it within 6 years from enrollment. See the Graduate Catalog for full details.

- 7. Milestone #7: After Graduation** – You will always be part of the CAP family, and we hope you will continue your relationship with us after graduation. Toward the end of your program, we will ask for your permanent email address so we can keep in touch. It is important to our accreditation and to our ability to continue to meet the needs of professionals in the field that we can occasionally send you a survey to see how your education is meeting your needs and to hear any feedback you have for us. We will occasionally share news with you as well. You will be welcome to come



back and serve on review juries in our studio classes, take part in the annual job/internship fair, or perhaps be a guest lecturer. We hope you will follow us on social media and keep us informed about your accomplishments as well.

- 8. Milestone #8: The Job Market** – Each year, many of our graduates land jobs before they even finish classes. They find jobs with city, state, regional, and national government agencies, nonprofit organizations, community development corporations, architecture firms, real estate development firms, and others. A few pursue teaching or apply to PhD programs as well. Many grads work in Indiana, particularly in Indianapolis and its suburbs. Chicago draws other alumni. Our graduates are scattered across the United States, from Florida to Montana and California to Rhode Island. A few work overseas as well. The job market for planners is strong: The Bureau of Labor Statistics says it is growing at an average clip with a median salary of \$78,500. Good places to hunt for open jobs include APA, ACSP, Planetizen, Indiana APA, LinkedIn, and our department’s own Facebook groups page, along with other social media sites.

## G. Graduate Assistantships

- 1. Description** – Holding an assistantship is a privilege. If you have been awarded such a position, a great deal of trust has been placed in you and your abilities. Graduate assistants are required to work either 10 or 20 hours per week, depending on the position. Graduate assistants are required to work each week during a semester, including finals week. They are not required to work during university breaks (fall break, spring break, etc.), but students working for off-campus sponsors must communicate these dates to their supervisors. All of our off-campus sponsors are supportive of students’ needs to take part in events like field trip week and to attend conferences, but, again, it is critical to discuss these events and the dates with supervisors in advance.

You can learn more about what to expect as a graduate assistant [here](#), please see the graduate assistantship guidelines.

- 2. Application Process** – To apply for a graduate assistantship, you will email a completed [application](#) with **three letters of reference, your resume**, and a **one- to two-page essay** that tells of your interest in planning and what you hope to do as a planning professional. The letters may be sent directly from your reference writers. All materials should be emailed to [planning@bsu.edu](mailto:planning@bsu.edu) before the **March 1** priority consideration deadline.
- 3. Expectations** – Full-time graduate assistants are required to work 20 hours per week. Part-time Graduate Assistants are required to work 10 hours per week.

All on-campus graduate assistants must maintain an on-campus presence during their assistantship. They are required to work each week during a semester, including finals week. They do not work during federal holidays when the University is closed, per the University calendar, and thus they can pro-rate their hours during these periods.

Some of our graduate assistants work for off-campus sponsors such as the city of Muncie or the Department of Metropolitan Development in Indianapolis. Graduate

assistants who are working for off-campus sponsors must communicate these dates to their supervisors. All of our off-campus sponsors are supportive of students' needs to take part in events like field trip week and to attend conferences, but, again, it is critical to discuss these events and the dates with supervisors in advance.

All graduate assistants are required to record PPACA hours in UKG every two weeks as instructed by the administrative coordinator, who verifies those hours with the graduate assistant's supervisor.

## H. Additional Resources: Department Level

1. **Field Trip Week:** Planners must become familiar with a variety of cities and neighborhoods and be exposed to new environments. These first-hand experiences will be part of the toolbox of ideas you will take into the world as a professional planner. The trips provide a great opportunity to really get to know the faculty member leading the excursion and students in other cohorts in the department as well.

Field trip week happens each year in October and includes most departments in CAP. You may be able to take a trip to a major US city such as New York or Seattle (budget in the \$800 to \$1,000), a medium-range trip to a large Midwestern city such as Pittsburgh or Nashville (budget in the \$300 to \$500 range) or a one-day Indiana-based trip of minimal cost. You may choose which trip best suits your needs and budget. We will send an electronic notice that you can share with instructors whose classes you will miss by attending our trip. Plan ahead and talk with each instructor to be sure you understand what work is required of you and the associated deadlines.

**Field trip week is NOT a vacation from classes.**

In the fall of 2024, field trip week is **Sept. 30-Oct. 4**. This year, we will not have an expensive option during field trip week; we suggest you save up for the spring [APA National Planning Conference in Denver, March 29 – April 1, 2025](#).

Typically, a deposit will be required **early** in the semester for a field trip, maybe even during the first week of classes. You will be able to make the payment online after you have signed and returned a field trip permission to the department. The down payment is not refundable. The balance of the trip cost must be paid before the trip begins.

We will also require you to fill out an emergency contact form before the trip. The form can be filled out electronically at the beginning of the school year. If the trip you have chosen includes airfare, you will be required to provide us with a copy of your driver's license so that we can secure your flight.

2. **American Planning Association (APA):** The [American Planning Association](#) is the national association of professional planners. Membership is free to students, and you are encouraged to join. It is up to you to sign up for membership. The APA website contains career resources, news, and an explanation of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) Candidate Pilot Program which is a path to earning the professional (AICP) certification you may wish to earn to become a professional planner. (AICP certification is not required to be a planner, but being able to put

those initials after your name shows that you have a depth of knowledge and experience in the field.)

- 3. Conferences:** Sometimes we travel to the fall and spring conferences offered by the Indiana APA chapter. These typically rotate among such cities as Bloomington, Lafayette, Muncie, and South Bend and provide great networking opportunities with people who may someday be your internship supervisor or even your employer. We encourage students to attend, and we help with the costs when we are able. Typically, these are inexpensive trips and involve only one overnight or perhaps none at all. Sometimes there is an option for online attendance as well. We will keep you apprised about those opportunities.

We also travel to the site of the national APA conference most year. These conferences are in major US cities such as New Orleans and San Francisco. There is much you can learn at such a conference as there will be many professional sessions for you to choose from each hour of the day. The networking opportunities are endless, and we typically have a meet-up event for students and alumni as well. We encourage you to plan ahead for these spring conferences and try to schedule at least one into your education plan. In spring 2025, we will travel to Denver for the national conference. We expect this to be a popular trip for students.

Faculty also attend conferences such as the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP) which is the gathering of planning professors and scholars in North America but is also attended by a large number of the same across the world. Attending these will enable you to learn the latest knowledge developed in the field, learn about research, meet graduate students from other planning schools, and is particularly helpful to you if you are considering applying to a PhD program after you finish the MURP program.

There are many other conferences in the areas of geography, anthropology, GIS, transportation, and drawing that may be useful for you. Some of our faculty members attend these and they can provide timely information if you need it. Don't hesitate to ask.

## **I. Additional Resources: All Ball State University Level**

- 1. [The Graduate School](#):** We are a good one-stop shop for students with concerns or inquiries about graduate student policies in terms of graduation processes; thesis/dissertation processes; time limits; graduate assistantship policies, etc., and we can also refer them to additional resources as needed. They can always call our office to ask questions (765-285-1301) or email [gradschool@bsu.edu](mailto:gradschool@bsu.edu).
- 2. [Graduate Student Wellness Initiative \(GSWI\)](#):** This is an ongoing program that seeks to help create a culture of health and wellness for all Ball State University graduate students, both online and on-campus. The website includes a list of all GSWI-sponsored events as well as resources for students.
- 3. [Cardinal Central](#):** In addition to serving as a one-stop to answer students' registration, financial aid, and academic support needs, Cardinal Central includes Enrollment Support Services which should be contacted as soon as an extended familial, health, or mental wellness crisis presents. You can also reach out to the Director of

Enrollment Support Services, Gloria Pavlik (5-3311) for assistance in navigating the situation appropriately.

4. [The Multicultural Center](#): The Multicultural Center offers programs and events throughout the year that educate the Ball State community, support students of color, and celebrate faculty, staff, and students' achievements.
5. [Title IX](#): This is where you or students should report a sexual assault or harassment, intimate partner violence, or other sexual misconduct toward or by a student; or report a concern about a student or a student's well-being: (765) 285-1545 or complete the Person of Concern Report. All faculty and GAs are mandatory reporters.
6. [The Counseling Center](#): The Counseling Center is for graduate students too, especially given the adjustment issues and imposter's syndrome often facing first-time graduate students (5-1736). Please do not discourage your students from going to the Counseling Center because of wait times or other rumors regarding their welcome there. Students in distress must be encouraged to seek available resources. For online students far from campus, note that the Counseling Center has a [page devoted to self-help](#), including an online screening for some common mental wellness issues and some basic information and resources on common mental wellness afflictions.
7. [Disability Services](#): We tend to think of this service as being for undergraduate students, but it applies just as much to graduate students. Please remind students that they can work with this office to receive accommodations if they need them (5-5293).
8. [The Career Center](#): The Career Center has increased its focus on and services for graduate students in the past few years—you might consider asking them to speak at your graduate student seminar (if you have one), orientation, class, or reach out to them for workshops for your students seeking career direction for when they graduate. New and current students seeking assistantships can peruse openings on their [website here](#).
9. [Sponsored Projects Administration](#): A number of grants (research and travel) just for graduate students, as well as Fulbright opportunities, exist through SPA. Students interested in having their research funded should look into the campus-wide ASPiRE program for students (5- 1660; <https://www.bsu.edu/about/administrativeoffices/sponsored-projects-administration>). In 2018, the Graduate School, in collaboration with SPA, increased research and travel awards for students to up to \$700 per student.
10. [University Libraries](#): This is an incredible resource for on-campus and online students. Staff there will be happy to work with any DGS to host workshops on how to find resources for research. Every year they host a very comprehensive Thesis Research Workshop, which is highly recommended. Tech Center is another resource in Bracken Library that students can reach out to for deals on software and assistance with hardware and software. Students can also [borrow equipment](#) (e.g., laptops, cameras, microphones, etc.), [reserve](#) study rooms, take advantage of [InterLibrary loan](#), and request a [scholar carrel](#).

11. [The Writing Center](#): Every semester, the Writing Center holds a Graduate School-sponsored writing boot camp for graduate students, called “A Write Start” which trains students about tools and skills for approaching their large research and writing projects. Encourage or require students to take advantage of the Writing Center’s numerous services as part of your courses.
12. [Office of Community Engagement](#): Ball State has some amazing initiatives for community outreach and partnerships, and they are often willing and able to assist students in becoming involved in these efforts. If community engagement is something valued by your field or just something a student has expressed a particular interest in, definitely reach out.
13. [Research Design Studio](#): The Research Design Studio, run as a co-op by a number of units on campus, is a free service for students and faculty. Staffed by a cooperative group of researchers, students, and educators, the Studio provides the following services: research design, grant development, instrument selection and design, professional development and research mentoring, synthesis, and support of research collaborations. This unit is always willing to help graduate students with their research projects, once approved by their faculty advisor, and can assist.

## J. Appendix A – Thesis

### What is a Thesis?

If you choose, you can elect to do a six-hour thesis (see Appendix A), which will be submitted to the graduate school instead of the final capstone studio project. The thesis comes with deadlines and forms that will need to be completed, and it requires some early planning on your part. If you think you will want to pursue a thesis, please talk this over with the graduate advisor early in your academic career and familiarize yourself with the dates and deadlines available from the [Graduate School](#).

Students must complete a draft research proposal and submit it to the graduate school in the Spring before their final year to be eligible to do a thesis, or creative project.

Our qualitative and quantitative courses, **PLAN 613 Qualitative Methods and Social Justice** and **PLAN 614 Quantitative Analysis** will prepare you to understand and conduct research for the capstone or thesis. The research course, **PLAN 694 Research Proposal**, will teach you how to apply those skills to your project.

A thesis is a research project. It is an attempt to contribute to our knowledge about planning by thoroughly investigating some problems. A thesis poses a question or hypothesis and sets out to answer it using data or evidence from the real world. The "issue" should be a significant one, relevant to planning. It should also be sharply focused so that you can do a convincing job of investigating it. The most common thesis problem is picking a topic that is too broad, and then being unable to deal with it conclusively.

### Topic Examples

Examples of thesis topics might be:

1. Determining whether a particular public program is successful (Example: Does urban homesteading work in Indianapolis?). This requires setting the criteria for success and collecting data to see whether these criteria are met. The data could be a case study of a single program application, or it could be a statistical analysis of data from lots of applications.
2. Determining options or strategies for a planning body to follow (Example: Would regional planning agencies in Indiana be more effective if they concentrated on economic development or on coordination?). Usually, this involves comparing what is actually being done with some alternative models or comparing two examples that follow different models.
3. Developing a new technique for dealing with some planning problems (Example: Developing a new methodology for locating transit extensions in peripheral urban areas). This approach requires thorough knowledge of the present state of the art in some areas, so you don't simply reinvent the wheel.
4. Investigating problems or aspects of applying some present planning methodology (Example: Exploring problems and consequences in applying a standard air quality dispersion model in urban areas).
5. Studying the dynamics of urban growth (Example: Why and how does a "commercial strip" evolve in a specific city?).
6. Examining various roles of those involved in planning (Example: How do neighborhood planning groups interact with the central planning agency in shaping city plans and priorities?).

The key to a good thesis topic is specific and one that has a clear methodology. A good topic is one on which there is a reasonable amount of data or information – but not an overwhelming amount. Studying the relative interest of eighth graders in Muncie in planning-related issues would be a manageable topic; examining the correlation between commuting distances in the New York metropolitan region and the ownership of hybrid cars would require far too much data gathering and analysis to be worth undertaking for a masters’ thesis or project. On the other hand, an attempt to study the careers of all professional planners who graduated from Muncie Central High School could be very frustrating -- first, because the data would be difficult, if not impossible, to assemble; second, because there may be none. It is also important to pick a topic that interests you because you will be spending a lot of time on it. A thesis is worth six credit hours.

The Graduate School provides a guidebook for students working on a thesis. Use [this page](#) to find the document.

You might choose to write a research paper for your final project. This might describe something in depth without trying to solve a problem. A research paper might trace the history of planning in Muncie or compare (without necessarily evaluating) two state programs for preserving agricultural lands.

You might choose to complete a creative project instead of a research paper. This reflects the application of creative skills in developing an appropriate professional product. It differs from a thesis in that it does not ask and answer a research question. Instead, it presents a piece of top-quality applied work of the sort a professional planner might be expected to do. It often deals with specific local problems.

### **Examples of Topics**

Examples of creative projects might include:

1. A professionally done plan or proposal for part or all of an urban area, grappling with real issues and interacting with the appropriate policy decision-makers.
2. A thorough impact analysis of a proposed project, investigating in detail the relevant fiscal, environmental, or social impacts, as appropriate, of the proposal.
3. A substantial and thorough inventory of some resource or area, such as a detailed historic structures inventory of an urban area, with policy suggestions or recommendations for proper use of the resource.
4. Modifications of an existing planning tool, such as improvements to an existing model or computer package, to make it more useful.
5. A detailed feasibility study for the development or re-use of a building or area, with cost estimates and all details worked out.

The creative project is less research-oriented and more applied.

A typical outline of a creative project might look like this:

**Statement of the Creative Project.** This should include an explanation of the project, including the reason for its selection, the writer's reaction to the project, and the general need and value of the creative project.



Planning Background. This section should provide the context for the creative project – an explanation of the problem addressed, a description of its physical context, and the parameters guiding a solution, if any.

Literature Review. Planners take pride in finding new solutions to old problems, but it is important to learn from those who have studied the same problem before. The literature review provides a summary of the research that you have done to understand how others have addressed similar problems, and it gives the reader a context in which to evaluate how your solution relates to what other planners have done and what scholars have recommended.

Project Description. This section should describe your solution to the problem that you set out to solve or the plan that you developed in a particular context. When viewed in the context of your literature review, your solution may turn out not to be new but to be a successful application of what you have learned from others in a new context.

Summary and Conclusions. This section – often fairly brief – should explain what you have learned from the process that might be useful to others. Sometimes it is helpful to think of this section as a series of “Lessons Learned.”

Bibliography. The bibliography includes all sources used, even if not mentioned in the report. Classify sources alphabetically and preferably in the following subdivisions: books, yearbooks, magazine articles, bulletins, unpublished theses, laws, newspaper articles, and encyclopedia references.

Appendix. The appendix includes any supplementary data in the form of tables, questionnaires, records, or other information that is pertinent to the report but not appropriate and/or too bulky for inclusion in the text. This might include a professional report or other major piece of work.

A creative project or research paper will be completed in class and will NOT be submitted to the graduate school. (This is a change applicable only to students entering the program in fall 2020 or afterward.)

Some students, especially those who write a thesis, go on to publish something related to their research. A few alumni of our program have authored or co-authored journal articles and book chapters. Others use it as a springboard to study at the doctoral level. PhD programs require certain GPAs and test results such as GRE. However, the competitiveness to get admissions and to receive funding increases when the student can prove that s/he is PhD material, i.e., s/he already has a research background. This can be demonstrated through a good thesis.





# PORTFOLIO

# GUIDE

**Michael A. Burayidi, PhD.**  
**Professor of Urban Planning**  
**Department of Urban Planning**  
**Ball State University**  
**Muncie, IN 47306**

# 01 COVER LETTER



- Every cover letter must be written for a specific job description. Therefore, your skills and work experience must relate to and emphasize the job skills that the employer is seeking.
- Be sure to include your address and that of the firm/business at the top right corner and left corner of the cover letter, respectively.
- Include your contact information in the cover letter, including your phone number and email address.
- Begin the letter with a salutation to the person to whom you are sending the letter.
- Do not use “To Whom It May Concern”. This may be interpreted as not doing enough of a background research on the firm to know who to send your letter. If no name is included in the job ad, you should call the firm to find out to whom you should address the letter.

# More Tips

- Use a byline after the salutation to indicate the position you are applying for in the organization. Since the firm is likely to have more than one position opening, it is important for them to know how to file your application letter and documents.
- Your letter should directly link your skills to the job for which you are applying. Highlight both your professional skills and technical skills in the letter. You will be hired for your professional planning skills so those are the most important ones to emphasize in the letter. Your technical skills are supportive of your planning skills and not the other way around.
- The cover letter should show how you will add value to the work or service that the company provides.
- End the letter on a positive and proactive note. E.g., I look forward to hearing from you and discovering more about your firm [agency]. Please allow me to contact you [please receive my call] in two weeks to discuss the status of my application.



# 02 RESUME



- At your age, resumes should be single page. As you gain work experience they get longer.
- Every resume should be written and tailored to a specific job. You should therefore avoid using the same resume for all job applications.
- Start with your profile “Seeking...[match your interests and experience with agency needs and agenda]”
- It is conventional practice to have your education credential first, followed by your work experience, and skills.
- Be sure that your resume differentiates between your professional skills and your technical skills. Indeed, you should categorize your skills into the two areas of professional skills [e.g. land use and comprehensive planning, data analysis, economic analysis, development impact analysis, GIS], and technical skills [e.g., sketch-up, spreadsheet formulations]. Skills may be graphed on a scale of competency; don’t puff your ego.

- Your latest educational attainment should come before previous educational degrees. For your Ball State degree, since you have not yet completed the degree requirements, you can show the anticipated graduation date or year.
- You are likely to have worked in non-planning jobs such as landscaping, retail, or customer service. Do not discount these jobs in your resume. However, be sure to identify the skills sets you used or gained from these work places that will be relevant to your planning career. These are your transferable skills. For example, a job as a restaurant waiter provided you with skills in multi-tasking, customer relations, time management, dealing with difficult customers, teamwork, and organizational skills. These same skills will be useful in your planning career.
- Your resume should be comprehensive onto itself. This means it should also provide your contact information, including your address, phone number, and email address.
- Hobbies and references are best left to the interview or follow-up letter. However, travel and volunteer/ political/ social experiences can be of relevance.

## 03 Prelude to Your Sample Work

In a page before your sample work on writing, analysis, and graphics, you should provide the reader with:

- The types of work you are including for each of the sections.
- The rationale for including the sample work [e.g., this demonstrates my capabilities in site plan review, etc.].
- Which of the work included is your individual work, and which is group work, if any. If group work is included, then you should specify your contribution to the group work as a collaborator.
- Preliminary to presenting each work you should provide context [e.g., the studio assignment \_\_\_\_, and my team assignment \_\_\_\_\_].



# 04 Writing Work

The purpose of the written section of the portfolio is to show that you have the experience and the skills to conduct a variety of written work. At a minimum, you should include three types of written samples: Memorandum (Memo), technical reports, and research papers. Given your job opportunity, the preference is work that belongs in your planning and development profession.

## Memo

A memo is a short paper written for an audience that provides information, makes a recommendation on a subject, informs employers of a procedural change, policy recommendations, or summarizes terms of agreement, among others. In your professional planning careers, you are likely to write memos to the planning commission, city council or staff of your employer.

The conventional structure of a memo includes the person to whom it is addressed (TO), the person that the memo is from (From), the date of the memo, the subject matter or purpose, and conclusion or recommendation.

The Memo should be concise, its purpose clear, and content well organized. The body of the memo should begin with a clear purpose, explain what you need the readers to know, and conclude with what you need readers to do, if necessary. Keep in mind that the readers are likely to be busy and may just skim the memo to get an idea of what it is about, so use short paragraphs, and avoid jargon.





## Sample Memo

To: Heather Jones, Chairman,

From: Wilson Gayle  
Community Development Department  
Milton, NY 10945.  
January 12, 2012

Subject: Meeting for the Inspection event planning.

This to inform all the project heads and team leaders that management has decided to conduct a meeting on 13.01.2012. The agenda of the meeting is to discuss the audit and inspection to be conducted. Therefore, we request you all to attend the meeting without any fail.

We also like to request the accounts department to be ready with all the accounts of the company and its sales. The administration is also requesting all the project managers to provide a report on the production and services offered by the team on the last month.

The board is also arranging an award ceremony on the inspection day for the best employees and staffs of the organization in various categories. Therefore, we would request the staffs and other concerned persons to perform well on the day.

The management is also attaching all the information and details related to the meeting along with this memo. For any doubts or queries, contact us.

## Technical paper

A technical paper is usually an internal paper written by an organization to provide information about the process, progress, or results of a technical or scientific research or problem. In urban planning this is likely to take the form of an environmental impact assessment, housing needs assessment for a community, level of service by transportation mode, or an infrastructure project. The goal of the technical paper may be to change people's behavior, or to disseminate a new approach to doing things. The technical paper should grasp the interest of the audience, and show how the problem can be solved or addressed.

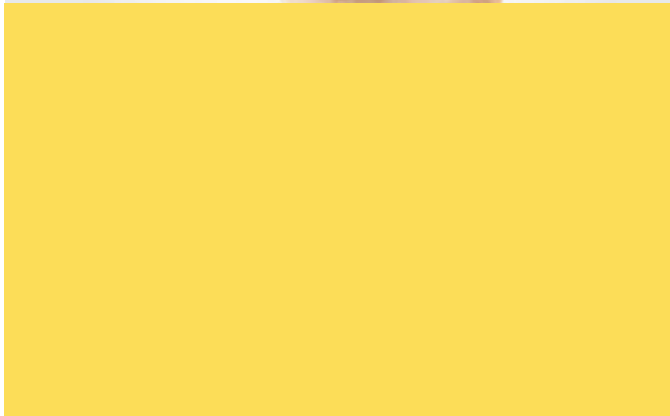
Best practice in writing a technical paper is to know your audience, and communicate clearly the main ideas of your research or study. The paper should also be concise and to the point, use the active rather than passive voice, and avoid using the first person, and value judgments. State the facts and let the reader judge for themselves. Be sure to explain concepts clearly to the reader.

## Research Paper

A research paper is an academic writing that documents research into a topic, describes the procedure and methodology, and presents the findings from the investigation. A research paper builds on existing knowledge on the subject. A research paper includes a title, a statement of the problem and hypothesis, review of the literature on the subject, limitations of the study, methodology, body of the paper that includes a discussion of the results of the research, and conclusions or proposals.



# 05 Analytical Work



This section should demonstrate your ability to conduct planning analysis and understanding of planning problems or how to solve them, or both.

The analysis sample should not just be a dumping of information, and should not end with a graph or chart, but with the interpretation and implications of your findings. It should include work that demonstrates a multistep process of analysis in each of your sample work. These include:

- What problem or challenge were you presented?
- What you did to better understand or solve the problem (the methodology used in the analysis).
- What you found as salient and significant?
- What you recommend as to actions in addressing the problem and acting on your findings? How the findings should be or were used (the action you took, for example how the findings were used to prepare a plan, a policy, adopt regulations, or design modifications to the environment)?

The analysis section should include examples of your work in at least three areas as relevant to your profile:

1. land use and development controls.
2. urban economics or economic development.
3. demographics.
4. development impacts on human settlements and the environment.
5. functional areas, such as affordable housing, transportation, public facilities, etc.

Examples of three areas of analysis on land use, economic development and demographics should give you an idea of the expectations in this section.



### Land use

This section should provide an example of a land use analysis you performed and the proposals emanating from the analysis. An example would include a site analysis, a land use compatibility analysis, a land use change analysis, etc. The document should show how you used findings from the analysis to make proposals for improving the site or land use.



### Economic analysis

This segment should demonstrate your ability to conduct economic analysis including economic base analysis, basic and non-basic activity analysis, changes in the economic sectors of a settlement over time, shift share analysis, input-output analysis, etc. Here again, the goal is to show that you have a good understanding of these analytical skills, and also that you used the results of the analysis to take action to improve the situation. This could take the form of a plan, policy, design or regulation.



### Demographic analysis

All plans are for the purpose of improving the welfare of a population. It is therefore important to know the population that will be beneficiaries of the plan. Planning is also about the future so we need to know the demographics of the future population of the municipality or settlement for which we are planning. This makes understanding the present and future population critical to planning. The demographic analysis should therefore include a projection of the future population, its composition, and structure.

# 06 Graphics Work



People have different ways of absorbing information, and graphics is one way to communicate planning information to our audience. The graphics section of the portfolio is a means to show how you communicate information visually. A Chinese proverb admonishes that “A picture is worth a thousand words.” However, the medium of “boards” presents both graphics and narratives.

The graphics sample of your work could take several forms including hand rendering visuals, computer aided design, and digital drawings and graphics. Basic information that should be included in your graphics include:

- Scale, so the reader can tell distance.
- North arrow, to provide orientation.
- Context of the graphics, so they are not in an island but provide information of the surrounding land uses.
- Legend where appropriate, to tell different land uses apart from each other.

**More information about requirements and due dates can be found in the Canvas course associated with your portfolio class.**

**Undergraduates: PLAN 368.**

**Graduate students: PLAN 690.**