

# UrbanPlan at the University

## An Overview for Professors

### University Program at a Glance

**Objective:** Professional development

**Students:** Graduate students with real estate or land use focus

**Courses:** Planning, architecture/design, real estate development, real estate finance, law (real estate), sustainability

**Number of UP classes:** Varies with class and student profile - minimum of 5 and maximum of 6 classes plus presentations

**Optimal timing:** Beginning of semester

**Effective class size range:** 15 – 30

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### Bringing UrbanPlan to the University

- UrbanPlan is a pedagogical partnership between a professor and the local ULI District Council's land use practitioner members.
- UP runs as a unit within an existing course. It is suitable for several types of courses in disciplines including architecture, finance, real estate development, city & regional planning and real estate law.
- The unit is effective with **graduate level students**. (Some universities offer MBA classes that integrate selected 4<sup>th</sup> year undergraduates whose professional focus is land use may. UP can be run in these classes; however, the quality of outcomes varies. In these cases ULI's National UP Director will discuss the challenges with the professor). **It is not suitable for lower level undergraduates or for any students whose professional focus does not relate directly to land use.**

### Why do professors introduce UP into their curricula?

**UrbanPlan** moves students from their theoretical and ideological understanding of their discipline to the practical realities and demands of the development team and process.

*UrbanPlan distills and transmits the essence of the development process more effectively, more comprehensively, in less time, with more lasting results than any other program suitable for a classroom environment.*

David Green, Professor of Architecture, Georgia Tech; Principal, Perkins + Will, Atlanta, GA

*Every City & Regional Planning student should take UrbanPlan. Understanding **markets** and **risk** make planners better communicators with developer partners. For MBAs - understanding social and political influences help developers manage risk more effectively.*

Mark Rhoades, AICP, past Planning Manager, City of Berkeley, CA; Partner, Citycentric Investments, Oakland, CA

*UrbanPlan offers a framework to examine the interdisciplinary nature of the real estate development process and the various forces that influence the built environment. The feedback provided by industry practitioners throughout the process is invaluable and forces students to expand their critical thinking skills in a way that could not be replicated by other means.”*

Dustin Read, J.D, Associate Director, Center for Real Estate, University of North Carolina-Charlotte.

*University of Texas, Arlington is dedicated to offering a real estate program that produces sophisticated, effective developers, investors and lenders. We believe UrbanPlan is an important component of that effort.*

Professor Andrew Hansz, Department of Finance and Real Estate, University of Texas, Arlington

*UrbanPlan helped my students internalize the complex, interrelated, economic, and political aspects of public/private development and introduces the concept of risk.... The UP “roles” forced students to experience the impact of each development decision and tradeoff through the lens of a particular stakeholder: developer, politician, neighborhood group. That will have a positive impact on the communities where they will work.*

Hilary Nixon, Ass. Professor, Urban & Regional Planning, San Jose State University

*The Urban Studies and Planning Program at the University of Maryland requires that our graduate students become proficient in the leadership, communication and conflict resolution skills necessary to resolve team and project challenges as they occur in the actual practice of development. UrbanPlan provides a unique opportunity for our students to develop these skills effectively and quickly....*

Alex Chen, Director, Urban Studies and Planning Program, University of Maryland

*Urban Plan poses a complex development problem that drives students to propose remarkably sophisticated solutions within a short, focused module of a course. It engages my students as no other exercise I have ever used.*

Susanne Ethridge Cannon, Director, The Real Estate Center & Professor of Finance, DePaul University,

**Professors** who incorporate *UrbanPlan* into their courses believe that most MBA’s, planners and architects fresh out of graduate school, leave the university fully grounded in the theoretical or ideological understanding of their discipline, but have little or no understanding or experience with the practical realities of the development process, the multidisciplinary teams on which they’ll be working, or skill in presenting to a real client.

**Students** report that their *UrbanPlan* experience is one of the most valuable educational takeaways for their professional careers. They have been powerful advocates for adding UP to their core curriculum.

**Professors** agree that *UrbanPlan* **quickly** and **powerfully** addresses four significant voids in the professional preparation of future land use professionals.

1. **Lack of practical experience in multi-disciplinary teams.** UP prepares students for the reality and challenge of the multi-disciplinary teams, the client environments in which they will actually practice, and land use problems as they present in the “real world.” Practical,

real, dynamic, frustrating – requiring them to see where practice collides with theory, ideology or modeling.

2. **Lack of a practical understanding of and respect for the complex market and non-market forces that impact development and how each professional discipline contributes to a buildable, sustainable solution.** Through role assignments, which are different from their academic field of study, students are forced to understand **risk**, the approaches, pressures and issues of the other disciplines on a development team. For example, architecture students are assigned the role of Financial Analyst or Marketing Director; finance students are assigned the role of Site Planner or Neighborhood Liaison.
3. **Lack of critical thinking – optimizing the opportunities presented by outside speakers.** After completing UP, students are able to think more critically about their course material and ask more penetrating questions of land use professionals who speak in their classes.
4. **Weak skills in articulating and advocating for their vision to colleagues outside their academic discipline as well as to “real clients.”** UP success requires cogent presentations to a “real client,” based on client need, goals and objectives, rather than presentations to “peers” or judges from the student’s own discipline. The student must effectively articulate the vision and benefits of her/his proposal in the language of the “civilian” client, not in professional jargon... That “real” client who may have rejected, or may not be aware of a trend, philosophy, or ideology that may be current in the student’s finance, urban planning, or architecture department.

**Additionally**, UrbanPlan provides **professional opportunities** for students. They interact and develop relationships with leading real estate practitioners in their community who act as classroom “facilitators” and “city council members”

**NOTE:** *UrbanPlan’s* value and intent is not as a studio/design project, a financial case study, a community needs assessment/mapping project, etc. and should not be implemented if the professor is seeking a problem or project-based curriculum that will achieve those outcomes.

The greatest challenge for the professor is to drive his/her students to focus on the problem and intended lessons of UP. Students will consistently attempt to turn UP into an exercise related to their academic discipline, missing the key lessons and insights that UP offers. ULI’s most skilled facilitators are critical to supporting the professors in this effort.

Ten ULI District Councils currently support Urban programs at the university level and of the list of universities below, ten included UrbanPlan in a course or courses in the 2013-14 academic year.

- Atlanta – Georgia Tech, Emory University
- Boston – Boston University
- Charlotte – University of North Carolina, Charlotte (not offered in 2013-14)
- Chicago – DePaul University, Chicago Loyola
- Hawaii – University of Hawaii
- Minnesota – University of Minnesota’s Hubert Humphrey Institute for Public Policy
- North Texas – Southern Methodist University (not offered in 2013-14)
- Orange County – UC Irvine
- San Francisco – San Jose State University; St. Mary’s College; Fresno State University
- Washington DC –American University

## **How Does UrbanPlan Work in the University Classroom?**

Student development teams respond to a “Request for Proposal” for the redevelopment of a blighted site in a hypothetical community. Each team member assumes one of five roles: finance director, marketing director, city liaison, neighborhood liaison, or site planner. Through these roles, students develop a visceral understanding of the various market and non-market forces and stakeholders in the development process. They must reconcile the often-competing agendas to create a well designed, market responsive, and sustainable project.

Teams address challenging financial, market, social, political, and design issues; develop a proforma and three-dimensional model of their plan; and present their proposal to a “**City Council**” of ULI members that awards the development contract to the winning team.

**At strategic times** during the project, land use professionals, who have attended a full day of UrbanPlan volunteer training, interact several times with the student teams.

“**Facilitators**”- Through Socratic interaction, UrbanPlan volunteers challenge the students to think more critically about the UrbanPlan issues and the specific responsibilities of their “role” (Financial Analyst, Marketing Director, Site Planner, City Liaison, Neighborhood Liaison).

“**Presenters**” - UrbanPlan volunteers engage in interactive discussion with students on their own project work or professional challenges and, how these relate to issues and decisions the students are struggling with in UrbanPlan.

“**City Council**”- UrbanPlan volunteers hear student presentations, engage and challenge their proposals as in an actual city council hearing, and award the development contract to the winning team.

### **Curriculum & Format**

The UrbanPlan curriculum is constant through student profiles and disciplines. The format changes depending upon the following:

- Student level, i.e. first or second year graduate students Course: MBA real estate (real estate finance/development), city & regional planning, architecture/urban design, real estate law
- Class size –recommended minimum class size is 15 students/maximum 30
- Class meeting schedule and class length (UP segment = 4-6 classes plus presentations)
- Class instructor(s), i.e. professor only versus professor with TAs

**ULI’s Director of UrbanPlan works with each professor and District Council representative to help create a workable format that ensures the intended outcomes.**

### **Training**

- Professors attend a ULI member training (6-8 hours) and a one-day training session taught by ULI’s Director of UrbanPlan.
- Potential professors are encouraged to go and see UrbanPlan in action at another university or high school in their area, if possible.

## **Materials & Costs**

- Materials
  - UrbanPlan Handbooks – one per student
  - Site plans - one per team
  - UrbanPlan Lego building kits- one per team
  - Exercises/assignments
  - Laptop computers loaded with MS Excel – one per 5 person team
  - Urban Plan financial model
  - Award to winning team
  
- Typically, the costs are borne as indicated below; however, each District Council will work with the professor/university involved to confirm costs and responsibilities.
  - UrbanPlan Handbook - Provided as PDF for University or external vendor to print. Student's purchase as course "reader." ULI has a relationship with FedEx to print the handbooks. The District Council may elect to order the handbooks through the existing ULI contact and be reimbursed by the University. Depending on the vendor the cost ranges from \$9 to \$12.
  - Site plans – Provided by ULI as PDF for University to print on foam core
  - Lego kits – University purchases– Approximately \$100 per kit
  - Exercises & assignments – Provided in electronic form to professor by District Council. Most professors put these on-line for students for students to download
  - Laptop computers – Student use their own computers. Typically, universities can provide access to Excel if the students do not have the program
  - Financial Model program – Excel spreadsheet provided to professor by ULI District Council for distribution to students
  - Award to winning team – Typically, the ULI District Council provides the award, which enables students to attend a ULI District Council program free of charge or get a student membership to ULI

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