**Draft CRP Strategic Plan (2023-2030)**

*(Draft for public comments)*

*Please send your comments and edits to CRP Program Director at CRP\_PD@utexas.edu*

*Public commenting period ends 5 PM, October 10, 2023*

**Graduate Program in Community and Regional Planning (CRP)**

**School of Architecture, The University of Texas at Austin**

1. **Introduction to CRP**

The University of Texas at Austin’s Community and Regional Planning (CRP) Program began offering undergraduate and graduate level curriculum as early as 1940. By 1950, the School of Architecture was a fully independent and autonomous school within the University. The Master of Science in Community and Regional Planning was formally initiated in 1959. Over its 64-year history, CRP has retained a durable identity of a program that balances the dimensions of social, environmental, and physical planning. The Program has also always centered itself on the belief that improving the quality of life of people in their communities requires attention to the health, social equity, efficiency, and beauty of the natural and built environments. The CRP Program has historically sought to draw students from around the U.S. and around the world, to broaden and deepen the exchange of experiences and ideas in our teaching, scholarship, and practice. Consistently more than 50% of our student body has come from out of state.

Additionally, the UT-CRP Program has utilized the Austin region as a laboratory for our teaching, practice, and service. Given the rapid growth and development of the metropolitan area, Austin faces a full spectrum of challenges, from congestion and pollution, to poor access related to transportation and land use patterns, to equity issues rooted in the region’s history of segregation and displacement of historically marginalized communities.

CRP offers five dual-degree programs - Law, Latin American Studies, Public Affairs, Sustainable Design, and Urban Design- which have expanded the Program’s interdisciplinary scope and focus, and aided in the Program’s growing leadership on diverse topics in planning and planning-related fields. Currently, the CRP Program has 94 students across our MSCRP and dual degree programs, supported by a highly productive and engaged faculty and staff.

1. **Planning Process and Stakeholder Involvement**

**Planning Process**

The 2023 UT-CRP Strategic Plan began with a faculty retreat in the Summer 2022. During that time, faculty reviewed of our then-operative 2016 Strategic Plan. This was followed by a review of our current curriculum, degree requirements, and learning objectives measure how our current programming and structure was upholding the vision and goals set forth in the Plan. These discussions isolated important strategic planning issues such as that we hoped could be informed by a deeper and more systematic process to create a new strategic plan for the Program.

Throughout the Fall 2022 and into the Spring 2023, we identified key stakeholders to work with during the strategic planning process: full-time faculty, adjunct faculty, current students, alumni, and employers of CRP Program graduates. We then held five focus groups to review the current curriculum, learning objectives and degree requirements, as well as Program culture and student preparedness for employment. The objective of these focus groups was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the Program’s curriculum, students and faculty support, contribution to the field, and the preparedness of the graduates. The focus groups also helped identify potential opportunities to take advantage of and threats to be aware of.

Focus group participants were asked to do a SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat) analysis of CRP before they attended in-person meetings. They received a SWOT analysis form in advance by email and were asked to respond individually to the following questions (the employer focus group, which was moderated by the third-party consultant, followed a different set of guiding questions):

1. What are the top three strengths of CRP?
2. What are the top three weaknesses of CRP?
3. What are the top three opportunities that CRP can take advantage of?
4. What are the top three challenges or threats we will face in the next five to seven years?
5. (*For the current student and alumni groups only*) Given our current curriculum structure and load (core vs. elective for a total of 48 hours),
	1. What are the top three topics that you think we should increase time and resources to?
	2. What are the top three topics that you think we should reduce time and resources?
6. Please use four keywords to characterize future CRP as you envision it.

When the participants gathered at the group meetings, they shared their responses to the above questions and were encouraged to offer additional thoughts beyond the SWOT questions.

The various perspectives of the stakeholders provided a holistic critique of the Program. The following highlights the key aspects of CRP strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats identified collectively by the focus group participants and other stakeholders involved in the strategic planning process. The highlights are listed in descending order of mentions observed during the focus groups. Please refer to the Appendix for detailed narratives and data from each focus group.

**Highlights of CRP Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats**

***Strengths***

* Camaraderie and collegiality shared by knowledgeable faculty and enthusiastic students make CRP a welcoming community
* Robust and growing sponsored research undertaken by CRP faculty and student assistants positions the Program at the forefront of planning scholarship and policy discourse.
* Faculty capitalize on access to Austin and the region, using it as a laboratory for service learning and collaborative practical research
* CRP’s interdisciplinary curriculum provides a wide breadth of course offerings and multiple dual degree options
* The Program tuition is competitive compared with other programs of similar prestige

***Weaknesses***

* There remain curriculum gaps and inadequacies: need closer connection of theories to practice, require more coordination among core courses, insufficient offerings of upskilling courses, lack of practice-oriented courses or contents in the existing courses, and limited attention to international planning issues in the course content
* The Program lacks representative diversity in faculty and student
* Under-resourced staff and facilities (IT and space) and lack of financial support for students and recruitment
* The Program lack a clearly defined sense of purpose and direction: very strong specifics, weaker at addressing big-picture issues

***Opportunities***

* Our location in Austin and the rapidly growing Central Texas presents a wealth of opportunities to learn, engage, practice, and find jobs
* City and regional progressive programs and initiatives addressing issues of equity, accessibility, resilience, and sustainability offer plenty of opportunities for applied planning research
* UT Austin, as a Tier-1 research university, offers many opportunities across campus for CRP to collaborate for sponsored research and interdisciplinary education
* New leadership at the University and School level provides new opportunities for CRP to strengthen capacity and enhance interdisciplinary collaboration

***Threats***

* Increasing cost of living in Austin presents a major threat to student recruitment
* State political environment has discouraged student and faculty applicants, particularly those of marginalized backgrounds
* New technologies such as AI may bring disruptive impacts on the planning profession, although they present opportunities for innovation
* Being siloed and overshadowed by other programs within the School is a major concern
* There have been dwindling full-time faculty numbers and under-resourced staff support

The engagement process for CRP strategic planning was inclusive and highly deliberative. The key stakeholders of the Program provided valuable insights about how the Program currently performs and can be further strengthened. CRP’s previous Strategic Plan (2016) was focused primarily on curriculum and student learning outcome assessment. The new Strategic Plan expands the scope to include faculty and student diversity, research, and professional development, in addition to teaching and learning. Based on the stakeholder input, we identified four primary goals. The goals are set to augment our Program strengths, overcome weaknesses, take advantage of opportunities, and minimize the threats to CRP. For each goal, we developed specific objectives, actions, measures, and methods to implement the plan and monitor the progress toward achieving the goal.

1. **Mission, Vision, Goals, and Objectives**

**Mission Statement**

The Community and Regional Planning (CRP) Program at the University of Texas at Austin seeks to continuously strengthen, adapt, and improve our teaching, research, and service activities to create and support healthy, safe, just and environmentally resilient communities. Our mission is to provide the knowledge, skills, and abilities that empower students to accomplish these goals through practical engagement in transparent and socially inclusive planning processes in a variety of settings in the United States and around the world.

**Vision**

We strive to provide an innovative environment in teaching, research and practice that accomplishes this mission while remaining faithful to our long-standing values of equity, fairness, diversity and dedication to creating and maintaining sustainable communities.

**Goals and Objectives**

**GOAL 1 – Enrich Learning Opportunities**

The CRP Program aims to prepare students with the capacity to become innovative practitioners and skilled leaders in the planning related professions. We seek to provide a comprehensive curriculum offering a strong foundation in planning history, theories, institutions, and methods in order to address the urgent challenges facing the planning profession, including climate change, social and environmental justice, and the new and disruptive technologies. We offer diverse options for students to embrace multi-/interdisciplinary training and to engage in service and experiential learning in the local and global communities.

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| **Objective 1.1 Strengthen the Curriculum** |
| ***Actions*** |
| * Review curriculum to identify content gaps, remove overlaps, and improve effectiveness
* Bolster ‘practical’ components in the core and elective courses
* Provide more elective offerings in the subject areas of environmental planning, climate change, and social justice
* Respond to student demand for course offerings in emerging subject areas, such as spatial analytics, data science, and applications of AI in planning.
* Strengthen our PR/Thesis advising
 |
| ***Measures*** |
| * Updated curriculum approved by CRP GSC, containing revised contents, streamlined core sequencing, and coordinated elective offerings
* Report from syllabus analysis on planning practice-oriented exercises built in all core and most elective courses (except for theory and history courses)
* 1~2 new courses on resilience and environmental justice, climate change, built environment and health, spatial analytics, and/or AI applications in planning in the forthcoming three years
* One new course in an emerging subject area
* 90% or more of graduates, 2 to 5 years after graduation, satisfied with CRP curriculum (currently 87%)
* 90% or more of graduating students indicate they are prepared for work in the planning profession provided by the curriculum
* 80% of PRs and Theses receive an overall score of ‘Very Good’ or ‘Excellent’
 |
| ***Methods and Data Sources*** |
| * Solicited comments on CRP curriculum from current students, alumni, and adjunct faculty/practitioners via focus groups
* Notes from 2~3 faculty work sessions on curriculum revision
* Syllabi of required and elective courses
* UT Registrar Office course schedule pages
* CRP Graduate Satisfaction and Service Survey (2 to 5 years after graduation)
* CRP Annual Exit Survey
 |
| **Objective 1.2 Promote Interdisciplinarity** |
| ***Actions*** |
| * Review and strengthen the existing dual degree programs
* Expand the non-degree graduate certificate programs
* Increase course cross-listing with LBJ School of Public Affairs, Civil Engineering, Latin American Studies, the Business School, Law, and others
* Encourage in-class student mixture from different programs within and beyond School of Architecture
* Support student participation in interdisciplinary competitions such as those organized by ULI, HUD, and APA
 |
| ***Measures*** |
| * Enrollment numbers boosted to pre-COVID levels in the existing five dual degree programs
* 1-2 new CRP-based stackable graduate certificates
* 30%+ CRP elective courses are cross listed with other disciplinary units within the SOA and/or across campus in a given academic year
* 50%+ CRP courses incorporate team assignments and practice in small group work and team management
* 80%+ external reviews of practicum courses indicate that students effectively engaged in interdisciplinary analysis in their work
* Results from employer focus groups will indicate that CRP graduates perform well in interdisciplinary teams and contribute effectively to complex projects
 |
| ***Methods and Data Sources*** |
| * UT Austin Registrar data
* UT Austin Graduate Catalog
* Syllabi of required and elective courses
* External review of practicum courses
* Employer focus group
* CRP Annual Exit Survey
 |
| **Objective 1.3 Broaden Learning Opportunities** |
| ***Actions*** |
| * Expand service learning opportunities for both core and elective courses, placing particular emphasis on City of Austin, public agencies in the Capital Area, and communities in Central Texas and the Gulf Coast
* Recruit adjunct faculty of rich practical experience to increase practicum options and to offer electives in regular and summer terms
* Increase contents related to global perspectives across curriculum
* Increase support to courses involving international experiential learning and educational collaboration
* Expand multi-cultural learning opportunities across curriculum
 |
| ***Measures*** |
| * 30% of CRP courses contain practice-oriented learning opportunities
* Each year CRP offers at least three practicum options that involve practice-oriented projects with local, regional, or international clients
* Students have at least one opportunity in their two-year course of study to take a study abroad course in the SOA to further their multinational and multicultural planning experience
* Results from employer focus groups indicate that CRP graduates perform well in culturally and ethnically diverse environments
* At least 90% of graduating students will indicate on the annual CRP exit survey that they are prepared in public engagement processes and to function in culturally and ethnically diverse environments
 |
| ***Methods and Data Sources*** |
| * Syllabi of required and elective courses
* Compilation of projects from practicum and elective offerings that involve local and regional practice-oriented work
* Compilation of projects from practicum and elective offerings that include study abroad opportunities
* External review of practicum courses
* Employer focus group
* CRP Annual Exit Survey
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**GOAL 2 –** **Nurture a Culture of Inclusion for Students and Faculty**

The CRP Program strives to foster a culture of inclusion welcoming people of all backgrounds. The Program makes continuous efforts to nurture a community where everyone feels represented and included in the Program’s daily operations and essential decision-making.

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| **Objective 2.1 Improve Recruitment and Diversity** |
| ***Actions*** |
| * Strengthen our outreach to communities of color and first-generation students
* Assess retention and whether retention issues disproportionately impact low-income students and students of color.
* Conceptualize and implement ‘feeder programs’ or partnership with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)
* Work closely with the SOA and UT Austin to implement the school- and university-level initiatives to diversify our faculty and student population
* Seek financial aid sources to increase recruiting funds and continuing scholarships for low-income, first-generation, and other students in need
 |
| ***Measures*** |
| * New advising practices instituted to address any retention issues
* 1~3 feeder programs established with HBCUs/HSIs
* Increase graduate applicants and enrollees from underrepresented groups by 15%
* 80%+ of the students from historically underrepresented groups receive funding support in the form of scholarships, fellowships, campus employment, research and/or teaching assistantships
* 70%+ of all CRP students receive funding support in the form of scholarships, fellowships, campus employment, research and/or teaching assistantships
 |
| ***Methods and Data Sources*** |
| * UT Austin Institutional Reporting, Research, Information and Surveys
* School of Architecture Scholarship and Fellowship Office
* Reports from recruitment and exchange trips
* CRP Annual Exit Survey
 |
| **Objective 2.2 Enhance Program’s Culture of Inclusion** |
| ***Actions*** |
| * Continue to improve student advising services and facilitate connections with faculty and professionals
* Improve mentoring of junior faculty and explore ways to support tenured faculty to prepare for promotion to full professor
* Increase student involvement in CRP decision making
* Develop opportunities for informal social engagement among students and faculty to build and sustain a supportive scholarly community
* Strengthen global outreach, including web-based communications, to increase the diversity of countries and cultural backgrounds in our student population
* Develop an archive in the Architecture and Planning Library of practicum projects and award-winning Professional Reports/Theses to exemplify expectations and excellence for student learning
 |
| ***Measures*** |
| * At least 80% of students express satisfaction in terms of academic advising, quality of faculty, computer and IT resources, and career/internship placement support
* A formal mentoring program and strategy instituted for Assistant and Associate professors
* Increase in the overall level of satisfaction by students from current 83 percent to 88 percent
* At least two social events to build a supportive scholarly community
* At least one town hall with all students per semester
* At least two guest speakers representing international and/or multi-cultural perspectives in planning per semester
 |
| ***Methods and Data Sources*** |
| * PR and Practicum archive in the Architecture and Planning Library
* CRP Annual Exit Survey
* CRP Town Halls
* UT Texas Global program database
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**GOAL 3 –** **Increase Visibility and Impact of CRP Research**

We aim to maintain our excellence in planning research and scholarship. CRP student and faculty researchers will deliver top-quality output that has high academic, professional, and societal impacts. We strive to integrate research with teaching and connect faculty and students with practitioners.

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| **Objective 3.1 Promote Innovative Basic, Applied, and Community Engaged Research** |
| ***Actions*** |
| * + Promote innovative basic, applied, and community engaged research that advances knowledge and practice of community and regional planning
	+ Strengthen partnerships with the City of Austin, other municipalities in the Central Texas, and regional and state agencies for research on pressing local and regional issues
	+ Encourage cross-campus collaboration on funding applications to federal and international sources as well as private foundations
	+ Seek administrative and funding support for creating a multi-unit center on affordable housing research
	+ Work with SOA and UT Austin administration to advance CRP research and research needs
 |
| ***Measures*** |
| * Number and amount of external grants and contracts from state, federal, and international sources
* Number of projects through interlocal agreements and partnerships with local communities and regional/state agencies
* 2~5 seed and internal grants per year from university sources for exploring new funding opportunities and external partnership
 |
| ***Methods and Data Sources*** |
| * UT Austin Office of Sponsored Projects database
* Center for Sustainable Development annual reports
 |
| **Objective 3.2 Increase Student Involvement in Academic and Practical Scholarship** |
| ***Actions*** |
| * + Increase student participation in research activities
	+ Encourage integration of research undertaken by faculty and students with Professional Report/Thesis
	+ Provide opportunities for student involvement in research through practicum and elective course projects
	+ Broaden program advertisement/engagement across campus to foster interdisciplinary research and opportunities
	+ Organize a poster session at the end of the spring semester for the students to share PR and Thesis projects
	+ Organize 1 lunch mixer per semester for faculty-student research exchange
	+ Broaden program advertisement/engagement across campus to foster interdisciplinary research and opportunities
 |
| ***Measures*** |
| * 40% to 50% of CRP students in paid research positions in faculty-led projects
* Annual compilation and distribution of research ideas exchanged during lunch mixers
* Number of student PRs/Theses related to sponsored research
* 15 or more graduating students present their PRs or theses during the spring poster session
 |
| ***Methods and Data Sources*** |
| * CRP Annual Exit Survey
* Faculty survey on student PRs/Theses related to sponsored research
* Course syllabi
* Guest reviews of PR/Thesis poster session
 |
| **Objective 3.3 Augment Research Impacts** |
| ***Actions*** |
| * Enhance our research community through recognizing scholarly achievements
* Diversify modes and venues for disseminating research outputs
* Increase national and global visibility of faculty and student research accomplishments
 |
| ***Measures*** |
| * Events recognizing faculty scholarly achievements
* Average number of publications per faculty in highly selective peer reviewed journals
* Number of published book chapters and books per faculty
* Number of faculty and student presentations in professional and academic conferences
* Number of citations
* Instances of media coverage of CRP project reports, policy papers, and publications
* Annual brochure collecting and publicizing faculty and student scholarly honors and awards, publications, and community service projects
 |
| ***Methods and Data Sources*** |
| * Faculty annual review reports
* SOA and social media coverage
* Google Scholar
 |

**GOAL 4 –** **Enhance Professional Development; Increase Local and Global Connections and Influence**

The CRP Program aims to streamline the transition from student to professional. We seek to actively engage with the public, private sectors and non-profit organizations locally, regionally, and globally. CRP’s visibility and influence are up and coming currently. We aspire to become internationally recognized as a top planning program.

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| **Objective 4.1 Enhance Professional Development** |
| ***Actions*** |
| * Strengthen relationship with APA Texas State Chapter and Central Section
* Increase support to students and faculty for engaging with planning and planning-related professional organizations
* Expand partnerships for internship and job placement opportunities with state, regional, and municipal agencies
* Leverage professional opportunities provided by other programs in the school and campus-wide
* Earmark funds to support student participation in professional events, such as APA and TRB conferences and workshops
* Calibrate CRP professional development opportunities at the UTSOA
 |
| ***Measures*** |
| * 85%+ of graduates employed within 1 year of graduation in a professional planning or planning-related job (currently 3-year average: 82%)
* Number of students participating in APA or other professional events increases by 30%
* 1~2 training sessions per year on resume writing, interview skills, and professional networking
 |
| ***Methods and Data Sources*** |
| * Job placement records from the UT SOA Career Development Office
* CRP Planning Student Organization
 |
| **Objective 4.2 Strengthen Alumni Connections** |
| ***Actions*** |
| * Facilitate regular interactions between current students and alumni
* Increase the number of alumni gatherings at state and/or national professional events (APA, TRB, and ACSP conferences)
* Increase alumni engagement in CRP teaching as guest speakers and instructors
 |
| ***Measures*** |
| * Number of alumni speaking in courses and CRP events increases by 20%
* Annual alumni attendance at alumni events increases from 15-20 to 25-40 people
* Alumni contact book
 |
| ***Methods and Data Sources*** |
| * CRP Planning Student Organization
* Faculty survey of guest lectures and curricular activities involving CRP alumni
 |
| **Objective 4.3 Increase CRP’s Local and Global Influence** |
| ***Actions*** |
| * Encourage faculty and students to join task forces, committees, and/or organizations serving local communities and agencies
* Encourage participation of faculty and students in discussions on high-profile planning and related issues in the City of Austin and the Central Texas area
* Incentivize, with travel support, CRP student and faculty participation in national and international award programs and other public events
* Designating funds to encourage faculty-led interactions (non-conference presentations) with peer programs in the United States and beyond
 |
| ***Measures*** |
| * Membership or representation in task forces, committees, and/or organizations serving local communities and agencies increases by 30%
* 8 exchange visits (hosting, or visiting other programs in the US and abroad) per year
* Number of participating and winning teams in national and international competitions
 |
| ***Methods and Data Sources*** |
| * Faculty annual review reports
* Media coverage of faculty and student activities and accomplishments
* Alumni survey
* Focus group report of CRP graduate employers
* Lists (like https://www.planetizen.com/topschools)
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1. **AppendiX: Summary of CRP SWOT Analysis and data**
2. Faculty Focus Group
3. Student Focus Group
4. Adjunct Focus Group
5. Alumni Focus Group
6. Employer Focus Group
7. Curriculum Comments

**1) Faculty Focus Group**

(November 17, 2022; Number of participants: 13)

***Summary of SWOT Analysis***

**Strengths**: The CRP faculty believes the Program’s major strength is its high faculty contact for the students. Camaraderie and collegiality shared in CRP make it a welcoming community. The faculty has kept up with robust and growing sponsored research, providing rich opportunities for the students. The high quality of faculty and students with enthusiasm and creativity is another strength of the Program. The faculty and students have strong connections with local and regional stakeholders. Additionally, the connections within the School of Architecture and dual degree programs help to facilitate multi-disciplinary education. The Program offers diverse subjects while maintaining equity and social justice themes across the curriculum, having the capacity to teach in-depth transportation planning, and offering many international learning opportunities.

**Weaknesses**: The CRP faculty identifies the Program’s biggest weakness as a lack of student and faculty diversity. The faculty also observes deficiencies in the current curriculum, for instance, inadequate coordination among core classes, gaps in subject matter (students want more computing/quantitative skills), lack of a consistent, coherent set of environmental planning and policy courses, insufficient practice-oriented courses, and the practicum offerings being ad hoc. The lack of an undergraduate program is a CRP’s weakness as well. Resource limitation is another weakness of the Program. There has been insufficient financial support for students and recruitment. Program operations are under-resourced in terms of staff time, study space, and software needs. The faculty believes that CRP lacks sufficient school support and is losing program autonomy. CRP faculty size is diminishing due to retirement and sudden deaths, weakening the area in which CRP has had robust offerings in the past, for example, participatory methods and law. CRP also needs to strengthen its visibility nationwide and globally.

**Opportunities**: The Program’s Austin location presents grand planning research opportunities. Austin is an excellent living laboratory for researching contemporary planning issues in the United States, as the city and the region are experiencing many of them. The University and the City of Austin have signed an umbrella contract to facilitate research collaborations. State agencies such as the Texas General Land Office and the Texas Department of Transportation are close partners with UT Austin and CRP in tackling development issues facing the Capital region and statewide. There are burgeoning funding opportunities from federal agencies such as NSF, EPA, HUD, and the National Endowment of Arts for research on climate change, adaptation, and social and environmental justice. Furthermore, the large number of tech firms in Austin offers the potential for CRP to tap into corporate funding for collaborative research. The University initiatives such as the ConTex Programs (cooperation between UT System and Mexico’s National Council of Science and Technology) and the new UT Austin Strategic Plan provide excellent opportunities for CRP to collaborate with campus-wide partners. CRP faculty sees the new leadership at the University and School level as an opportunity for the Program to augment its strengths and overcome its weaknesses. CRP’s enthusiastic alumni can help build Program presence and identity, yet they have been under-engaged.

**Threats**: The Program’s location in Austin also presents challenges. CRP faculty worry that the rapidly rising cost of living in Austin and the worsening state political environment have negatively affected the retention and recruitment of students and faculty. Potential economic recession presents a threat, while climate impacts, evidenced by the 2021 winter storm and the annual summer extreme heat, likely make Texas an unattractive place to live. The faculty feels the threat of being undervalued/misunderstood within the School, which consequently restricts faculty hiring and limits funding support for students. CRP has lost many strong applicants to peer institutions due to relatively low levels of assistantships and scholarships.

***Tabulation of SWOT Responses***

*Note: Column # shows the number of times a topic was raised by the participants in a focus group. Column % is # divided by the total number of participants in the focus group. The percentage indicates the relative importance of the topic viewed by the focus group participants.*

**Faculty Focus Group**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Strengths** | **#** | **%** |
| Supportive faculty/High faculty contact for students | 7 | 54% |
| Camaraderie/Collegiality | 4 | 31% |
| Robust and growing research  | 3 | 23% |
| Quality of faculty and students | 3 | 23% |
| Depth in transportation planning | 3 | 23% |
| Faculty and student connections with regional/local stakeholders | 3 | 23% |
| Student quality and enthusiasm/creativity | 2 | 15% |
| Connections within SOA degree programs / Dual degree programs | 2 | 15% |
| Equity and social justice themes cut across the curriculum | 2 | 15% |
| Research opportunities for students | 1 | 8% |
| International opportunities | 1 | 8% |

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Weaknesses** | **#** | **%** |
| Lack of student/faculty diversity | 8 | 62% |
| Subject matter gaps (students want more computing/quantitative skills); Lack of consistent, coherent set of environmental planning and policy courses; Lack of practice-oriented courses | 4 | 31% |
| Lack of financial support for students and recruitment | 4 | 31% |
| Need more coordination among core classes; Practicums are ad hoc | 3 | 23% |
| Lack of undergrad program | 3 | 23% |
| Under resourced staff / increasing burdens for faculty and students; Under resourced (IT, space); Limited resources for students | 3 | 23% |
| Lack of school support | 3 | 23% |
| Lack of independence (governance) | 2 | 15% |
| Diminishing faculty numbers and resources/ About to lose strength in participatory method | 2 | 15% |
| Lack of national visibility | 1 | 8% |

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Opportunities** | **#** | **%** |
| Research collaborations: CoA-UT umbrella contract; GLO; CoA initiatives | 7 | 54% |
| New leadership (UT, SOA) | 5 | 38% |
| ConTex, relationship with Mexico; CSD funded research | 4 | 31% |
| Alumni, enthusiastic but under-engaged to build Program presence/identity | 4 | 31% |
| Burgeoning opportunities for research and practice (environmental, housing); NEA, NSF climate funding; Climate adaptation funding | 4 | 31% |
| Austin tech firms (corporate money to CRP) | 3 | 23% |
| Opportunities to collaborate with Urban Studies/CE/UT Health | 2 | 15% |
| UT strategic plan; UT's focus on empirical/engaged research and implementation | 2 | 15% |
| Growing interest societally in resilience / climate change | 2 | 15% |
| Thriving local economy | 1 | 8% |

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| **Threats** | **#** | **%** |
| Cost of living/Affordability; Ongoing housing crisis | 8 | 62% |
| Worsening state political environment; Healthcare and guns | 7 | 54% |
| Recession | 4 | 31% |
| Climate impacts making TX unattractive place to live | 4 | 31% |
| being undervalued/misunderstood in SOA (affect faculty hire) | 3 | 23% |
| Losing students due to low GRA pay | 3 | 23% |
| Restrictions on faculty hiring / lost line | 2 | 15% |
| Money; Lack of funding for students | 1 | 8% |
| Being a "minor" profession | 1 | 8% |
| Lack of UT support | 1 | 8% |

**2) Student Focus Group**

(December 12, 2022; Number of participants: 10**)**

***Summary of SWOT Analysis***

**Strengths**: CRP students most value the Program's interdisciplinarity. The expansive reach of faculty expertise, the various student passions, the Program connections, and cross-listed courses help cater to the different interests of each student. The students also value the inclusive community between students, faculty, and local professionals. They feel this inclusivity fosters collaboration, reinforcing the Program's interdisciplinarity. Faculty research funded by external and local grant sources provides valuable opportunities for the students to learn by engaging in scholarly activities and to earn assistantships that help partially offset the high cost of living in Austin. The students recognize the knowledgeable faculty, the in-depth curriculum, and the relatively inexpensive tuition as the Program's top strengths. Lastly, the students value the Program's substantial equity & social justice focus.

**Weaknesses**: While the in-depth curriculum is a strength of the Program recognized by the students, it is also the area that the students consider to be the Program's major weakness. The students observe insufficient course offerings, for instance, a lack of practicum options, inadequate coverage of technical skills, lack of community engagement in classes, few climate-focused electives (until spring 2023), and lack of class-level international perspectives. Another Program weakness noted by the students is that the Program feels unorganized and unfocused. Internal organization and communication with the students appear ineffective. In addition, the students think that the Program does not adequately address modern planning issues and is not very civically oriented in terms of service to the community. The lack of faculty diversity is another major weakness of the Program. Furthermore, the Program is inadequate in providing GRA/TA positions and funding support, career services, and work/study spaces.

**Opportunities**: The students see the Program's unique location in Austin and the capital region offer excellent opportunities to study planning and engage in applied research. The need to plan for affordable housing, equitable transportation, and sustainable growth creates opportunities for students to gain hands-on experience. While some students feel the Program is being neglected in UTSOA, the students also see that being a part of SOA presents opportunities to learn from and work with other disciplines, for instance, gaining design/heard skills. The students acknowledge that being a part of the University of Texas is an opportunity that can be taken advantage of. UT Austin has a lot of prestigious programs that could lend themselves to even more cross-collaboration and multidisciplinary studies. Some students consider the School of Architecture’s Dean change to be an opportunity to make CRP more of a priority.

**Threats**: The students see the growing unaffordability in Austin as the greatest threat to the Program. Rising housing costs and other living costs threaten those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The students are concerned that the changing political climate in Texas may discourage students from applying and joining CRP. Being overshadowed by other disciplines in the School and out-bidden by peer institutions with better funding are also threats to CRP, as observed by the students.

***Tabulation of SWOT Responses***

*Note: Column # shows the number of times a topic was raised by the participants in a focus group. Column % is # divided by the total number of participants in the focus group. The percentage indicates the relative importance of the topic viewed by the focus group participants.*

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Strengths** | **#** | **%** |
| Interdisciplinary: CRP is well integrated with other disciplines; Interdisciplinary programs available (MPaff. and MSUD); Dual degree opportunities/cross listed classes; Diverse course offerings and dual offerings; Connections within UTSOA are of high quality – UTSOA as highly ranked school | 5 | 50% |
| Inclusive and supportive community; Students – community created; Collaboration: CRP sets students up for effective collaboration with community members; Flexibility, accommodation of different interests & part time schedules; Welcoming student body with diverse interests; Engagement opportunities/student involvement; Non-competitive nature of CRP student culture | 5 | 50% |
| Sponsored research; Location within SOA at UT (major research and collaboration options); Affordable/ great funding opportunities; CRP has a foundation in climate change research | 4 | 40% |
| Faculty knowledge and work; Knowledgeable professors/in depth curriculum | 3 | 30% |
| Curriculum; Practicum/client courses; Builds strong basis in foundational principles of planning | 3 | 30% |
| Cheaper than other programs of similar prestige | 2 | 20% |
| Relatively small student to teacher ratio | 1 | 10% |
| Strong equity/social justice focus | 1 | 10% |
| Alumni connections prominent at UT | 1 | 10% |
| Diversity of student population and staff | 1 | 10% |

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| **Weaknesses** | **#** | **%** |
| A range of practicum options/qualitative methods classes; Technical skills (Viz com); Class level international perspectives; Lack of community engagement in classes like other schools (alumni/city opportunities?) ; Less faculty/course options; Few climate focused electives until SP 23 | 5 | 50% |
| Unorganized: the Program feels unfocused; Difficult to focus on a skill area (no concentrations/limited class sizes); No particular specialty/focus of CRP Program; Internal organization and communication to students | 4 | 40% |
| Risk of professors leaving; Dwindling faculty; Lack of open faculty positions and difficulty maintaining department size; Faculty (may be difficult to find new faculty?) | 4 | 40% |
| Lack of diversity, particularly among faculty; Amount/diversity of faculty; Lack of faculty diversity (gender, race, age as well as in terms of disciplines they are a part of) – much focus on environment/transportation but other disciplines get less attention | 3 | 30% |
| Not relevant: doesn’t feel like it addresses modern planning issues; Not very civically oriented in terms of service to community | 2 | 20% |
| Lack of secured funding e.g. reserved GRA/TA positions within the department; Funding | 2 | 20% |
| Career services; Less opportunities compared to architecture for professional development | 2 | 20% |
| Facilities: lack of study space; Lack of student space | 2 | 20% |
| Feels like Program is neglected in UTSOA | 1 | 10% |
| Alumni connections | 1 | 10% |

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| **Opportunities** | **#** | **%** |
| Austin: we are located in a region with many relevant planning issues; City location; Connection to Austin; Changes upcoming in local Austin Community and Texas; Austin is rapidly growing and needs planning solutions; Focus/ability of planning within the Austin community; Location – Austin | 7 | 70% |
| Opportunities for applied research in Texas; Project connect | 2 | 20% |
| Being a part of SOA – design/hard skills; Working with other disciplines | 2 | 20% |
| Dean changing – how can we make CRP more of a priority; Dean search | 2 | 20% |
| Opportunities for collaboration across UT | 1 | 10% |

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| **Threats** | **#** | **%** |
| Increased tuition costs and cost of living; Rising costs; Rising housing costs; Growing unaffordability in Austin; Increased cost of living in Austin; Affordability within Austin, especially for people from disadvantaged backgrounds; Unaffordability: Program is located in an unaffordable region; Housing/job market; Housing market | 9 | 90% |
| Political climate in TX; Political issues; Political climate; Climate issues/political issues that might discourage students | 4 | 40% |
| Irrelevant: Program could be overshadowed by other disciplines in the school; Representation within SOA | 2 | 20% |
| Risk that more programs will offer cheaper online options to learn same material; Remote learning wanted by students | 2 | 20% |
| Students may choose programs with better funding/affordability; Attractiveness of other planning programs | 2 | 20% |
| Continuing to be progressive in community as Austin continues to grow | 1 | 10% |
| Ability to find jobs/financial difficulties | 1 | 10% |
| Competition among other universities for diverse faculty | 1 | 10% |
| Program continuity in hazards (COVID, Freeze) | 1 | 10% |

**3) Adjunct Faculty Focus Group**

(December 12, 2022; Number of participants: 8)

***Summary of SWOT Analysis***

**Strengths**: The biggest strength of the CRP Program in the eyes of the adjunct faculty is having Austin as a fantastic laboratory for studying urban growth, vitality, and change. Regionally, the Austin metro is growing extraordinarily fast. The Texas megaregion, economy, and culture all serve as strengths to the Program. Being a part of a top-tier public research university also presents a strength. The adjunct faculty share that many of their star employees have come from CRP, demonstrating the high quality of planning education offered by the Program. The Program provides multiple dual degree options, abundant group or collaborative projects, strong faculty research, and the chance to work with other perspectives and professions. CRP training enables its graduates to take advantage of flexible employment options, a valuable Program strength in uncertain economic times.

**Weaknesses**: The adjunct faculty believes that CRP needs to be stronger in connecting planning theory with practical application and in teaching skills about how to navigate the policy world. In addition, the CRP Program can be more integrated into the conversation with Architecture and better connected to the whole university. Planning can and does intersect with many other schools (engineering, business, social work, etc.), and the Program should collaborate more. Other weaknesses of the Program that the adjunct faculty point out include a lack of representative diversity in student and faculty, difficulty in bringing faculty together, staff and student turnover, and not having a clearly defined sense of purpose/direction, very strong specifics but weaker at the level of a big picture.

**Opportunities**: The adjunct faculty stresses the historical challenges facing various levels of planning geography. For instance, regionally, disconnection with rural communities makes them vulnerable. Municipally, a lack of planning history and vision means a hyperfocus on codes and rules. Radical changes happening within society post-COVID present grand opportunities to tackle the challenges. The adjunct faculty sees excellent opportunities on a regional scale to work with low-income communities and communities of color impacted by gentrification. Municipalities in the region are progressive, focusing on equity, ecology, and now, resilience. CRP should take the opportunity to work with municipal departments to test new methods to advance equity. CRP can grow the representative diversity of the Program to reflect Texas populations by recruiting from a large undergrad population that wants to stay in Austin. The adjunct faculty see many other opportunities for CRP, for example, becoming a leader in growth management policy, planning, and development issues, investing heavily in conversations and initiatives that advance equity within the field, creating long-term community connections that can enable students to work in the community responsibly, and connecting planning theory with practical planning applications and challenges in our vital regional center and local communities. Within UT Austin, CRP should leverage other departmental strengths and incorporate those into the Program, such as incorporating more design in CRP student work and collaborating more with LBJ.

**Threats**: The adjunct faculty views the general threats to planning as coming from radical changes in how people wish to engage civically within society and how people access, perceive, and produce information. Threats also exist in failing to respond to big-picture issues like climate change, social justice, and sustainability and in disengaging with municipal and regional stakeholders to take action.

Like the other focus groups, the adjunct faculty fear that rising housing costs in Austin and tuition costs at the university level will threaten recruitment. Additionally, there is concern that the Program will not be able to keep up with current student interests. Right now, there is a lot of interest in food and climate, but what will it be in 5 years?

Overall, the adjunct faculty feels the Program is practical and flexible, connected and diverse, and imaginative. They also feel that this Program has a unique opportunity to emerge as a leader of sustainable growth because of the Texas culture and very real history of inequity, and for the Program to become better known nationally, our students need to graduate as well-equipped leaders.

***Tabulation of SWOT Responses***

*Note: Column # shows the number of times a topic was raised by the participants in a focus group. Column % is # divided by the total number of participants in the focus group. The percentage indicates the relative importance of the topic viewed by the focus group participants.*

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| **Strengths** | **#** | **%** |
| Austin itself is a lab - growing metropolitan areas are happening everywhere but that is on display/on steroids in Austin; Austin location: fantastic laboratory for studying urban growth, vitality, and change; Context of being in Austin; Context of being at UT; Located in a city where people want to be | **5** | **63%** |
| Institutional setting: UT Austin - top tier Public Research Universities in TX and USA; University - we have great students and faculty; A lot of our star employees have come from CRP Program - they are coming out with great technical/writing skills. Our community does not embrace planning as something positive, and CRP can jump into that and see what’s going on there. Have the good things be focused on, explored, and celebrate and ask how can we do more of this?  | **3** | **38%** |
| Context of Texas: TX megaregions, TX economy, TX human resources, ethos & cultures; Regional scale - we are growing really fast. A lot of cities are stuck with current infrastructure whereas we get to build | **2** | **25%** |
| Dual degree options; A lot of group/collaborative projects. Chance to work with other perspectives/professions;  | **2** | **25%** |
| Flexible employment options, particularly when we enter uncertain economic times. Alumni career paths are extremely different and unique. Policy side is so divisive - most divisive are on land use and planning!! Flexible employment options | **2** | **25%** |
| Strong faculty research  | **1** | **13%** |
| Relatively low tuition | **1** | **13%** |

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| **Weaknesses** | **#** | **%** |
| Connecting planning theory and practical application could be better; Sometimes too much theory, not enough practical experience; Need skills about how to navigate policy world | **3** | **38%** |
| SOA/CRP can be better connected to the whole university. CRP is not unique in this. Planning can and does intersect all of the other schools - engineering, business, social work, liberal arts, fine arts even, geography, public health; Not integrated enough in conversation with Architecture (this has always been a problem, and often from the architecture side more than the planning side) | **2** | **25%** |
| Not having a clearly defined sense of purpose/direction. Very strong specifics, weaker at the level of a big picture | **1** | **13%** |
| Difficult to bring faculty together | **1** | **13%** |
| Representative diversity in student and faculty Program is a challenge | **1** | **13%** |
| University: affordability for students and staff turnover | **1** | **13%** |
| Growth management Policy, Planning & Development leadership - missed opportunity | **1** | **13%** |
| Regionally: disconnection with rural communities makes them vulnerable | **1** | **13%** |
| Municipally: lack of planning history and vision means a hyperfocus on codes and rules | **1** | **13%** |

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| **Opportunities** | **#** | **%** |
| Regionally: working on a regional scale with low income/communities of color impacted by gentrification; Municipally: working with departments to test new methods to advance equity; Municipal - we are progressive with a focus on equity, ecology, and now, resilience | **3** | **38%** |
| Grow the representative diversity of the program to reflect Texas population(s); Could recruit from large, undergrad population that want to stay in Austin | **2** | **25%** |
| Take head on the radical changes happening within society post COVID. | **1** | **13%** |
| Invest heavily in conversations and initiatives that advance equity within the field | **1** | **13%** |
| Create long-term community connections that can enable students to work in the community responsibly (as opposed to semester by semester projects) | **1** | **13%** |
| Become a leader in Growth Management Policy, Planning, and Development issues | **1** | **13%** |
| Connect planning theory with practical planning applications and challenges in our vital regional center and local communities | **1** | **13%** |
| University: incorporating more design in students work while leveraging other departmental strengths (i.e. LBJ) | **1** | **13%** |
| In uncertain times, planners are flexible with multiple employment options - private and public | **1** | **13%** |

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| **Threats** | **#** | **%** |
| Radical changes in the way people wish to engage civically within society; Radical changes in the ways in which people access information; Radical changes in the ways people both produce and perceive information | 3 | 38% |
| Rising housing costs; Rising tuition costs | 2 | 25% |
| Worry about post-graduate salaries | 1 | 13% |
| Climate change: mitigating impacts/transitions from carbon/urban changes | 1 | 13% |
| Social justice: continuing social transformations/ equity of rights and freedoms | 1 | 13% |
| Sustainability: energy/water/urban ecologies/achieving long term balance | 1 | 13% |
| Regionally: ignoring those most impacted by economic and climate pressures | 1 | 13% |
| Municipally: not engaging with the city and making a difference  | 1 | 13% |
| University: accommodating student interest in the coming years. Its food and climate now, what will it be in 5 years? | 1 | 13% |

**4) Alumni Focus Group**

(February 9, 2023; Number of participants: 11**)**

***Summary of SWOT Analysis***

**Strengths**: This focus group brought together CRP alumni currently practicing with private firms, nonprofit organizations, or public agencies. The most frequently cited Program strength is the CRP curriculum, which covers a wide breadth of coursework, provides flexibility to pursue specific areas of interest, and offers in-depth exposure to planning topics, concepts, and processes. The alumni value the Program’s dual degree options and multi-disciplinary, cross-learning opportunities. Close access to the local job market is another strength of the Program noted by the alumni. Furthermore, the alumni highlight that CRP has a strong community culture, with its faculty caring deeply and the students having a sense of camaraderie. The Program provides real-world practice opportunities and prepares the students well for the professional world. Other Program strengths noted by the alumni include well-funded research, national recognition, diverse faculty backgrounds, and education value relative to tuition.

**Weaknesses**: While citing the CRP curriculum as the Program’s major strength, the alumni also note the gaps in the curriculum as the Program’s major weakness. The alumni stress that some courses lack depth and rigor. Course offerings are insufficient in areas such as street design for bike/pedestrian/transit, qualitative and quantitative analysis, economic development, social justice planning, and development timelines and processes. The curriculum lacks coverage of practical software upskills (R/Python/AI) and an introduction to applications of new technologies and planning practices. The lack of faculty and student diversity and lack of resources to advance diversity are obvious weaknesses of the Program. Another Program weakness in the eyes of the alumni is being mostly theoretical, too rote, and inadequate integration with the private sector for practice. The Program seems to have no strong guiding principles and is overwhelmingly local-focused. Yet the Program’s connections to communities appear weak.

**Opportunities**: The alumni cite many opportunities, locally and nationally, facing CRP. Proximity to the fast-growing tech industries, the state legislature, the strong real estate market, the rich professional resources in surrounding areas, and the vibrant Austin employment market could bring many opportunities for planning education and practice. Many collaborative opportunities exist in Austin and Central Texas for practical research projects and courses that focus on problem-solving using real-world scenarios. On the UT Austin campus, there are opportunities for collaborating with different schools, for instance, dual degree tracks with engineering/transportation and the urban lab at LBJ. The alumni believe that the Program can get ahead of the curve in updating the curriculum to reflect the many serious issues facing the world.

**Threats**: While new technologies such as AI bring opportunities, they can also become threats disrupting the planning fields, as the alumni point out. Some planning graduates have left the planning practice to work in the tech industry. The shifting planning priorities in the professional world and the ever-changing nature of practice present challenges to CRP and planning education in general. Faculty and student recruitment, especially recruiting people of color, become increasingly challenging in the face of local/ state political pressure. The rising living cost is offsetting the attractiveness of Austin to prospective students. Lack of resources, tools, and training adds further threats to CRP. The prolonged impacts of COVID-19 and other potential pandemics affect all aspects of how society functions, including the planning field. The alumni warn that threats could worsen if CRP becomes siloed from academically adjacent departments and does not retain strong connections to local planning organizations and the City of Austin.

***Tabulation of SWOT Responses***

*Note: Column # shows the number of times a topic was raised by the participants in a focus group. Column % is # divided by the total number of participants in the focus group. The percentage indicates the relative importance of the topic viewed by the focus group participants.*

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Strengths** | **#** | **%** |
| Breath of coursework; Flexibility in curriculum to pursue area of interest; Opportunity to pursue preferred tract; Wide range of areas of focus; many transportation related course offerings; In-depth exposure to planning topics/ concepts/ process; Strong introduction to fundamentals of practice  | 6 | 55% |
| Dual degree options; Multi-disciplinary with SOA programs; Cross learning opportunities  | 3 | 27% |
| In Austin (dev-politics-fast-growing); Proximity; Job market  | 3 | 27% |
| Professional oriented. Provided real world practice opportunities; Practical orientation  | 2 | 18% |
| Community culture; professors and sense of comradery amongst students; Professors care deeply and have diverse backgrounds  | 2 | 18% |
| Faculty, location, job market, tuition, and funding; faculty grants | 2 | 18% |
| Student preparation for professional world; Justice minded- graduate have strong equity lens  | 2 | 18% |
| Diversity  | 1 | 9% |
| Nationally recognized | 1 | 9% |
| Program value related to tuition and education value  | 1 | 9% |
| UT resources/ connection  | 1 | 9% |

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| **Weaknesses** | **#** | **%** |
| lack of depth in some subject matters; VisComm was not strong in terms of material; lack of equity related knowledge; Lack of street design courses, especially bike/pedestrian/transit; lack of qualitative and quantitative analysis; economic development offerings lacking; social justice planning; lack of focus on development timelines and processes  | 8 | 73% |
| Practical software upskills (excel, python); No tech (coding/AI) classes; R/Python/GIS skills; lack of introduction to applications of new technology and planning practices  | 4 | 36% |
| lack of diversity and resources to solve diversity related conflicts; lack of student diversity; lack of tenured female professors; Staff diversity- racial/ lived experience  | 4 | 36% |
| mostly theoretical education; Practical understanding of practice; Integration with private sector for practice; Too rote  | 4 | 36% |
| no strong guiding principles; overwhelmingly local focused  | 2 | 18% |
| giving back/ community building; lack of internship program/ connections to surrounding area  | 2 | 18% |
| No clearly defined tracts outside of planning track areas | 1 | 9% |
| the program seems to be more appropriate with the LBJ school instead of SOA | 1 | 9% |
| lack of strong advising system  | 1 | 9% |
| capital improvement  | 1 | 9% |

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| **Opportunities** | **#** | **%** |
| Proximity to tech, legislature, real estate; Professional resources in surrounding areas; Austin employment market | 3 | 27% |
| chance to work on practical projects/ courses that focus on problem solving using real world scenarios; National issues concentrated in central Texas; project connect | 3 | 27% |
| The exponential growth in Austin metropolitan area could bring a lot of opportunities for practice and many problems to solve; collaborating with all ongoing planning initiatives in City of Austin (Project Connect, ETOD); more projects with local organizations and jurisdictions for courses to get practical experience; | 3 | 27% |
| Multidisciplinary projects collaborating with different schools; Expansion of dual degree tracks including transportation, engineering; Perspective offered by adjacent department's example urban lab at public affairs | 3 | 27% |
| International practice integration; International study opportunities | 2 | 18% |
| Can get ahead of the curve on updating curriculum to reflect the many serious issues facing the world; alignment with R or Python + tableau work | 2 | 18% |
| Integration with private sector, policy sector, tech sector (Big data, AI) | 1 | 9% |
| coordination with professionals to lead courses, example practitioners as guest lecturers | 1 | 9% |
| student experiences and community building for internal student network | 1 | 9% |

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| **Threats**  | **#** | **%** |
| new technologies disrupting the fields; graduates leaving the planning practice to work in the tech industry; AI trends in planning  | 3 | 27% |
| shifting planning priorities in professional world; the everchanging nature of practice; job satisfaction in the planning profession  | 3 | 27% |
| faculty recruitment in face of local/ state political pressure; How to recruit more people of color; Political pressure at UT towards some disciplines  | 3 | 27% |
| lack of tool and resources; lack of faculty training; Staffing in a competitive job market  | 3 | 27% |
| Affordability; cost of living in Austin + attracting students  | 2 | 18% |
| impacts of COVID and other potential pandemics on all aspects of how society functions; post-pandemic adjustments to UT "social norms" business as usual | 2 | 18% |
| how to focus the program on sustainability; Climate action and accountability  | 2 | 18% |
| Climate action and accountability  | 1 | 9% |
| lack of diversity in student body  | 1 | 9% |
| becoming siloed from academically adjacent departments | 1 | 9% |
| no retaining strong connections to local planning organizations/ COA | 1 | 9% |

**5) Employer Focus Group (December 16, 2022)**

The CRP Program hires a third-party consultant to conduct an annual focus group of the employers of CRP graduates. The focus group does not follow a SWOT analysis process like other focus groups. Instead, the employer focus group involves discussions and conversations guided by nine open-ended questions. The following summarizes the report from the 2022 employer focus group.

Graduates of the UT Community and Regional Planning Program generally impress their employers. During the employer focus group, every employer described their CRP employees as proactive, competent, and within the top 10-15% caliber. While these employers look for prospective employees who can do a broad range of tasks and feel like their CRP employees do check that box, some skills that these employers specifically look for include quantitative analysis/GIS, writing, strategic thinking, and communication (interpersonal and presentations with an audience).

All CRP employees at these firms excel at visual communication data analysis and are very self-driven. Additionally, CRP employees are eager and quick learners, which has aided in their success at each firm. The employers emphasized that writing, specifically technical reports and memorandum writing, are essential skills that are difficult to teach – though their CRP employees are not necessarily lacking in this skill. Many of the skills employers mentioned that graduates, not just CRP graduates, could use more training if they were recognized to be easier to learn on the job, such as report writing, project management, and time management – especially in consulting. In acknowledgment that these skills need practical experience to get better at, the employers mentioned that recent graduates primarily need just to be eager and fast learners.

In addition to the skills mentioned above, employers believe recent graduates are not always anticipating needing the following skills: project management – though recent hires most likely won't be project managers, they still need to understand their role; competency of the entire picture – understanding data analysis, cost analysis, design and space allocation, and understanding tradeoffs are all important; lastly, the ability to adapt and be resilient – change is constantly happening, and we cannot always stick to what we learn in school. The employers recommend to recent graduates that they discuss preferred communication styles with their respective bosses so communication is on the same page, and there are no misunderstandings.

In terms of most common ethical concerns or dilemmas, employers advise that graduates should be prepared for unintended consequences and should always ‘own’ their plans or recommendations. Each employer emphasized that on occasion, you may be asked to do something you are uncomfortable with and you have to be able to state your values and accept the consequences that may come from that. Furthermore, employers have noticed that recent graduates bring a good background in social justice and have a hard time understanding when a client's priorities do not align with their own, and they have a hard time understanding when something is an ethical issue or an advocacy issue. These employers recognized the challenges here and did not have exact answers; they just advised that graduates be prepared for this to happen. The employers do feel that their CRP employees understand the importance of working across functional areas of planning, and each employee has helped the firms in this regard.

A majority of the CRP graduates at these firms are working in many different sectors and are able to provide some level of insight into every aspect of planning, even if they specialize in one specific aspect. The employers recommend that the CRP Program challenge the students to think differently – think about and hear various political beliefs – as having many different political beliefs in the room is a real challenge in planning. The employers also recommend that students specialize in and really understand two things so as to have something to fall back on. Lastly, the employers also recommend collaboration with other disciplines to gain an understanding of how everything is connected – they mentioned the LBJ School of Public Affairs, the McCombs School of Business, and other programs within the School of Architecture. In conclusion, these employers are very satisfied with their employees who are CRP graduates. The CRP graduates have excellent research skills and are great at visual communication. Additionally, the CRP graduates are all proactive and quick learners, which is a primary reason for their success in their work.

**6) Curriculum Comments**

As part of the strategic planning efforts, we solicited feedback from CRP’s current and former students on the Program’s curriculum and course offerings. Participants of the student and alumni focus groups were asked to name the top three topics that they believe CRP should increase or reduce time and resources, respectively. In addition, two *ad hoc* group meetings were organized, one during the 2022 APA Texas Chapter annual conference in El Paso and the other during the 2023 Transportation Research Board annual meeting in Washington, D.C. The *ad hoc* meeting participants were invited to share their thoughts on the courses and contents that CRP should strengthen or increase.

The following tabulates the responses from two focus groups, with the topics ranked in descending order of frequencies that they appeared on the participants’ top-three lists. The notes taken from the *ad hoc* meetings are provided below, after the frequency tables.

The feedback learned from the focus groups and *ad hoc* meetings provides direct input to the formulation of the Objectives and Actions under Goal #1 in the new CRP Strategic Plan.

***Tabulation of Student and Alumni Responses to Focus Group Questions on CRP Curriculum***

*Note: Column # shows the number of times a topic was raised by the participants in a focus group. Column % is # divided by the total number of participants in the focus group. The percentage indicates the relative importance of the topic viewed by the focus group participants.*

***Student Focus Group***

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| **Top Three Topics CRP Should Increase Time and Resources** | **#** | **%** |
| Climate adaptation; Climate resilience; Climate change; Environmental planning; Sustainable development | 8 | 80% |
| Technological skills; GIS and hard skills (software); Hard skills and GIS; GIS methods | 5 | 50% |
| Global/international; Bringing international perspectives; Regional/global planning | 3 | 30% |
| Social justice; Inclusivity | 3 | 30% |
| Economic development | 2 | 20% |
| Quantitative/qualitative courses | 2 | 20% |
| Social work/community organizing; Community engagement | 2 | 20% |
| Food planning | 1 | 10% |
| Housing policy | 1 | 10% |
| Public health | 1 | 10% |
| Rural areas | 1 | 10% |
| Solutions based courses | 1 | 10% |
| Thesis/OR | 1 | 10% |
| Dual degree/specialization | 1 | 10% |

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| **Top Three Topics CRP Should Reduce Time and Resources** | **#** | **%** |
| Transportation planning; Transportation – make it more integrated into other courses/inter-related | 3 | 30% |
| Legal; Law – merge with history and ethics | 2 | 20% |
| Decrease core classes | 2 | 20% |
| Community engagement | 1 | 10% |
| History | 1 | 10% |
| Environmentalism/sustainability | 1 | 10% |
| Budget/fiscal management | 1 | 10% |
| Instead of reducing resources, allow students to narrow in on key topics via elected/floating core classes | 1 | 10% |

***Alumni Focus Group***

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| **Top Three Topics CRP Should Increase Time and Resources**  | **#** | **%** |
| Equity  | 3 | 27% |
| Design  | 3 | 27% |
| Data analysis/ analytics; Practical software- GIS/ Excel/ Adobe software | 2 | 18% |
| land use + development/ planning (process and timeline) - maybe integrate into SLUP  | 2 | 18% |
| Public speaking + writing skills  | 2 | 18% |
| Planning in practice; Expectation of working in Public vs private consulting  | 3 | 27% |
| Transit/ transportation | 1 | 9% |
| community engagement  | 1 | 9% |
| Government/ governance  | 1 | 9% |
| Rural planning issues | 1 | 9% |
| socially informed planning  | 1 | 9% |
| surveillance/ future issues  | 1 | 9% |

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| **Top Three Topics CRP Should Reduce Time and Resources**  | **#** | **%** |
| Theoretical/ non-practical subjects  | 3 | 27% |
| Law | 2 | 18% |
| Courses that people are least likely to use in real life  | 1 | 9% |
| American centric practices  | 1 | 9% |
| Land use in abstract  | 1 | 9% |
| Avoiding CRT  | 1 | 9% |
| History of planning without critical lens  | 1 | 9% |

***Notes from Ad Hoc Groups***

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| **Mixed Group of 8 Current Students and Alumni, January 2023, Washington, D.C.** |
| * Public economics and finance could potentially be separated and made into separate courses. The same was discussed for GIS and Viz-com. In order to not increase the credit hours for core courses, the group discussed that these different components of classes can be divided into modules, instead of separate classes
 |
| * Planning Law could be shifted to a second-year core course instead of being taught in the first semester as it is intimidating for international students to take it at the beginning of the program
 |
| * Intro to the American judicial system as a module for planning law could also be helpful for international students
 |
| * Core courses could be more spread out across the two years instead of largely being taught in the first year
 |
| * Currently, Planning History, Theory, and Ethics class is largely focused on only American planning. More diversification and a larger focus on planning ethics is required
 |
| * The CRP Program is more focused on the qualitative side of planning, hence, it could be useful to add an extra core class on quantitative research and computing, which introduces students to visualization techniques through R and Python
 |
|   |
| **Alumni of 7, October 2022, El Paso** |
| * Do more to teach the form-giving part of planning
 |
| * Teach students how to read ordinances
 |
| * Teach more about the public approval process
 |
| * Teach more finance - we have some, but it could be strengthened
 |
| * Incorporate more practical skill work like reading through actual plans, going through the day to day tasks of a planner, etc. (comment from alumnus that they never read through an ordinance in the program)
 |
| * Some other schools build more of a relationship between students and practitioners starting in the first semester. CRP might consider building these relationships that give students practical experience and mentorship opportunities
 |
| * Agreement that environmental planning concerns are more prominent today
 |