

STANDARD 1 – STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PROGRESS

The Program or the Department in which it resides shall strive for self-improvement using an intentional process of goal articulation, planning, outcomes assessment, reflection, and improvement.

Between August 2022 and September 2023, the faculty and students of the Community and Regional Planning program at the University of Texas at Austin (UT-CRP), together with alumni and members of the professional planning community, undertook an extensive strategic planning process. We reviewed our previous strategic plans (2016 and 2020 revision) and created an updated plan that reflects emerging challenges in the planning profession and guides our actions over the next five to seven years. The updated strategic plan retains the mission and vision of the previous plans but expands the Program goals and objectives based on the priorities that CRP faculty, students, alumni, and other stakeholders identified in the plan-making process.

1A. Strategic Plan: The Program shall have a strategic plan for achieving its goals and objectives – either as a free-standing plan or part of a broader departmental strategic plan – and must be able to demonstrate progress towards goal attainment. Programs must document active engagement in plan development by faculty, students, alumni, practitioners and any other key stakeholders the Program deems important to the process. Practitioners and other key stakeholders may include a broad spectrum of professionals who can be resources for the Program during plan development and implementation. The strategic plan shall include the Program’s definition of diversity, equity, inclusion and social justice, and goals and measurable objectives aimed at achieving them. The strategic plan must include the following elements:

The 2023 UT-CRP Strategic Plan began with a faculty retreat in the Summer 2022. During that time, faculty reviewed our then-operative 2016/2020 Strategic Plan (PART IVC: SSR EVIDENCE, S1.2, page 33). This was followed by a review of our current curriculum, degree requirements, and learning objectives that measure how our current programming and structure was upholding the vision and goals set forth in the Plan. These discussions isolated important programmatic and strategic issues 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 of 2022 and into the Spring of 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 PART IVC: SSR EVIDENCE, S1.1 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.

- Staff and facilities (IT and space) are under-resourced and there is 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 present 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 exclusively 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.

In 2016, the UT School of Architecture (UTSOA) adopted a strategic guide, *A Framework for Diversity* (see PART IVC: SSR EVIDENCE, S1.3, page 41. The SOA will review the document to address the legal requirements of Texas SB17.) The diversity plan sets four goals: create a culture of inclusivity in the School; enhance recruitment of diverse students, faculty, and staff; prepare students to address and solve issues for people and communities of all backgrounds; and strengthen relationships with diverse cultures and societies.

In May 2022, UT Austin released its *UT 10-Year Strategic Plan* developed under the new university leadership. The University's strategic plan provides an overarching guide to the making of CRP's new Strategic Plan. Based on the stakeholder input and guided by the University's *UT 10-Year Strategic Plan*, we identified four primary goals for the CRP Strategic Plan (2023-2030). 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.

The intermediate version of the CRP Strategic Plan (2023-2030) was shared in Google Docs with the CRP community seeking input and comments. The final draft of the CRP Strategic Plan (2023-2030) was posted on the CRP website for public comments in September - October 2023. In October 2023, the CRP Graduate Studies Committee voted to adopt the Plan (The SOA did not have an updated strategic plan following the University's adoption of *UT 10-Year Strategic Plan*. Upon her arrival in the fall of 2023, the new Dean started a school-wide effort to develop a new SOA Strategic Plan. We expect the CRP Strategic Plan as a living document will be further refined and strengthened after the School completes and adopts its new strategic plan in fall 2024).

1) *Mission Statement*: The Program or the Department in which it resides shall have a clear and concise mission statement that expresses its core values and fundamental purpose and role in training professional planners.

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.

2) *Program Vision*: The Program or the Department in which it resides shall have a clear and aspirational long-term vision for change resulting from the Program's work.

We strive to provide an environment of innovation 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. We aspire to be a leading planning program in the United States with a strong global influence.

3) *Program Goals and Measurable Objectives*: The Program's strategic plan shall identify goals and measurable objectives that advance the Program's mission and vision. The goals shall identify the Program's future aspirations in the context of its mission and that of the University, and shall aim toward excellence beyond that which may already exist. These should include strategic issues for the next 5-7 years and goals. Goals shall reflect the Program's intent to achieve and maintain diversity, as defined by the Program, in its student body and faculty, and to incorporate into the curriculum the knowledge and skills needed to serve a diverse society.

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.

Objective 1.1 Strengthen the Curriculum
Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 CRP annual 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

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.

Objective 2.1 Improve Recruitment and Diversity
Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen our outreach to communities of first-generation students • Assess retention and whether retention issues disproportionately impact low-income students and students of underserved population. • 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 the 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PR and Practicum archive in the Architecture and Planning Library • CRP Annual Exit Survey • CRP Town Halls • UT Texas Global program database

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.

Objective 3.1 Promote Innovative Basic, Applied, and Community Engaged Research
Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.

Objective 4.1 Enhance Professional Development
Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 UT SOA
Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job placement records from the UT SOA Career Development Office • CRP Planning Student Organization
Objective 4.2 Strengthen Alumni Connections
Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate regular interactions between current students and alumni

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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)