**August 26, 2022**

**To:** College of Social Science Committee on Curriculum and Academic Policy

**From:** Urban and Regional Planning Program, School of Planning Design and Construction

**Subject:** Reinstatement of secondary admissions policy for the BSURP Program

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**Request**

Reinstate the secondary-admission requirement for the Bachelor of Science in Urban and Regional Planning major to comply with national accreditation standards.

**Background**

Urban and Regional Planning (URP) Program has two professional, accredited degrees. The Master’s in Urban and Regional Planning (MURP) and the Bachelor of Science in Urban and Regional Planning (BSURP). Both degree programs are accredited by the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB). Our last accreditation visit was in 2020, and we received the maximum possible term of seven years. Our next self-study report is due in 2025 for a 2026 accreditation visit.

One of the PAB requirements for accreditation is the Faculty Teaching Equivalency (FTE) to Student Ratio in the program (<https://www.planningaccreditationboard.org/accreditation-standards-2022/>). Standard 3.C: Faculty Size states:

*The faculty shall be of a sufficient size to accomplish the Program’s mission and goals, administer the Program, and teach the curriculum. The Program shall have no greater than a 15/1 ratio of undergraduate student FTE to instructional faculty FTE.*

PAB requires programs to define the instructional faculty FTE. One faculty member cannot exceed one FTE regardless of the teaching load. The unit defines a faculty member teaching three or more courses in the program (customary 45% teaching assignment for TS faculty) as one instructional facultyFTE. Our BSURP program has exceeded the program FTE ratio for the past two years and is expected to exceed this threshold again this year. We currently have an FTE ratio of 17.3/1.

The program faced a similar issue in 2010-2012 and instated a secondary-admission requirement in 2013. In subsequent years, following a national trend of dropping enrollments, we discontinued the secondary admissions process in 2018. However, our program has experienced a trend over the last several years of surprising increases in enrollment. As such, we need to address this situation in a systematic manner before our next accreditation cycle.

In Fall 2021, URP faculty submitted a curriculum change package along with a reinstatement of the secondary-admission requirement to the College of Social Science Committee on Curriculum and Academic Policy (CCAP). The changes were approved by CCAP and passed along to the University Committee on Curriculum and the University Committee on Undergraduate Education (UCUE). UCUE asked for some key changes prior to their approval, which we have addressed in this memo:

1. By law, diversity cannot be included as an admission criteria (Major concern))
   1. *We have struck this language from the drafted policy.*
2. Admission requirement should be specific regarding the need to complete and earn a 2.0 or higher grade in UP 201.
   1. *We have clarified this language in the drafted policy.*
3. Whether the changes in required coursework (Requirements section 3b/c are appropriate and would be approved by the accrediting body).
   1. *This concern related to the College STEM requirement, and we have conferred with the College of Social Science that our changes do, in fact, meet College expectations and comply with accreditation requirements. We will not outline our STEM changes in this memo, as this memo pertains only to the admission requirement.*
4. While the committee understands the need to manage enrollment to maintain accreditation-required student to faculty ratios, there was significant concern that the request is not addressing the larger issue of why so many students are selecting the major and that the admission request/changes were not equitable or appropriate to address this issue.
   1. *We have conferred with Dr. Jim Lucas, Assistant Dean of Global Education and Curriculum in the Office of Undergraduate Education in the Provost’s Office, to explore best avenues for addressing our FTE limits. With support from Dr. Lucas, we have refined our secondary admission plan outlined in this memo. Regarding why students select the major, the program faculty have identified several theories, including increased national attention to planning disciplines, as well as the inclusion of our introductory courses in interdisciplinary minors. We aim to use the secondary admission process to better assess this increased interest over time.*

We now propose a reinstatement of a secondary-admission requirement for the BSURP program to control the number of students in the upper division of the program and in the required courses to maintain our FTE ratio as required by accreditation. Maintaining the FTE ratio through a secondary-admission process will ensure the program is in full compliance with PAB standards while also ensuring timely graduation for all admitted students.

**Secondary Admissions Process**

Our goal is to make the secondary admissions process as simple and transparent as possible. Our BSURP Program consists of 38 credits in Urban Planning (UP) coursework. The BSURP already requires all students to earn a 2.0 or higher grade in each of the UP-core courses (i.e.: UP201, UP314, UP353, UP365, UP424, UP433, UP454, and UP494) to graduate from the program.

These factors, combined with the FTE requirement, forms the basis for our admission criteria below:

1. Students must earn 2.0 or higher in UP 201, our required, introductory Urban and Regional Planning course.
2. To enter the major and enroll for the required UP-core courses at the upper-division, students must complete an admission application package that will include:
   1. a resume;
   2. an application form indicating intent to apply to the upper division of the URP program for the upcoming academic year; and
   3. an academic/career goals statement, which can be submitted in essay or video format.

The number of available faculty will dictate the number of seats available for admission. The faculty will carry out the admission process as follows:

1. The faculty will review applications at the end of each Spring semester for admission in the subsequent Fall semester.
2. Review and evaluation of the applicants will follow PAB Accreditation Standard 2.A Student Quality, which states: “*The Program shall admit students whose educational attainment, previous academic performance, work experience, aptitude, maturity, and motivation indicate potential for success in their studies and in professional practice”.* As such, the faculty will evaluate:
   1. previous work, service, and research experience;
   2. overall grades and performance in UP 201;
   3. motivation and goals relative to the major and potential career; and
   4. non-cognitive factors such as ability to overcome adversity, perseverance, teamwork, and work ethic.
3. The faculty will distribute admission decisions at the end of the Spring semester prior to the start of the Summer semester.
4. Students admitted into the major will be eligible, as a cohort, to take core classes and be advised to enroll accordingly.

**Current Academic Plan**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **2nd Year** | **Admission** | **3rd Year** | | **4th Year** | |
|  | **Fall** | **Spring** | **Fall** | **Spring** |
| UP201 | UP 353 | UP 314 | UP 424 | UP 494 |
|  |  | UP 365 | UP 454 |  |
|  |  |  | UP 433 |  |

The secondary-admission process will also serve as a point of assessment for the BSURP program. Faculty will assess the admission process to identify who our students are and why they chose the program. This will allow us to better plan our recruitment efforts and student success programming for the future. Additionally, the program will use the secondary-admission process to track the volume of that interest over time. If interest continues to grow beyond our program capacity, as determined by accreditation, we can use the data to advocate for more instructional resources to increase program capacity while still maintaining FTE ratios.

**Communication and Support**

The School of Planning, Design and Construction (SPDC) already houses three other accredited undergraduate programs that are cohort-modeled with limited enrollment and secondary-admission processes. Prospective students are informed of all admissions processes on our School’s website, on the transfer admission requirements page maintained by the Office of Admissions, and in all meetings with academic advisors and College recruitment staff prior to coming to MSU. As they matriculate to MSU, students are informed about admission requirements during New Student Orientation, during our Fall Welcome events, through in-class presentations, and through emails from and appointments with academic advisors. The SPDC Student Services office maintains lists of alternative major programs, provides alternative major advising, and supports parallel program planning to students both before and after admission decisions are rendered.

Transfer students starting at MSU below junior status will not be adversely affected by these admission requirements. Transfer students who are coming in at junior status will be advised to transfer with credit equivalent to UP 201 and to apply for secondary admission along with our on-campus students. If transfer students do not have credit in UP 201, they would be required to take that course on campus and the advisors will work with them on fast-track options for secondary admission after their primary admission to MSU is complete. UP 201 is offered every semester (Fall, Spring and Summer). We maintain similar expectations for our three other limited enrollment programs with secondary admissions processes, and those transfer requirements are posted on the Office of Admissions Web site.

Advisors in SPDC regularly talk with prospective transfer students about how to navigate our secondary admission processes. We network with admissions counselors working with transfer students to ensure they also understand how to talk about our admissions processes with students. We have historically provided advisors at feeder institutions with trainings/presentations on our secondary admissions processes and on how to advise students who intend to transfer into one of our programs. We will continue this pattern with the Urban and Regional Planning program, as well.

**Timeline Explanation**

The URP faculty intend to carry out admission reviews every Spring semester for students to begin the upper-division course sequence the following Fall semester (i.e., UP 353 is a fall course). Prior to admission as a junior, students will be required to take UP 201. To remain connected with the program before entering the upper division, students will have the option to take non-core UP courses (12 credits required) to meet major requirements, in addition to any courses toward minor, College, and University requirements, including free electives. Upon admission to the upper-division of the BSURP program, students will proceed as a cohort, completing the remaining UP-core courses together over a two-year period.

This timeline and cohort model is on par with the three other limited enrollment programs within SPDC, so it will fit in administratively with our unit calendar and School-wide communications. Beyond its administrative consistency for our School, Spring admission will also allow us to better manage our program’s cohort model, which maximizes the number of students we can admit and graduate. Additionally, one major admission cycle per cohort allows us to distribute the level of competition for seats within each cohort more evenly so that some students are not adversely disadvantaged due to the timing in which they enroll in UP 201. This timeline is particularly important for a program like URP, which has long been a major students discover after spending 1-1.5 years at MSU.

**Potential language for the re-instated admissions policy**

*Admission*

Admission is competitive, and enrollment is limited for each entering class. The department accepts and reviews applications during the Spring semester of each year for admission into the UP core courses the following Fall.

All students interested in applying for admission as juniors to the bachelor’s degree program in Urban and Regional Planning must:

1. Complete UP 201 with 2.0 or better
2. Submit an application package that will include:
   1. a resume;
   2. an application form indicating intent to apply to the upper division of the URP program for the upcoming academic year; and
   3. an academic/career goals statement, which can be submitted in essay or video format.

Program faculty and academic staff determine admissions based on the applicants’ qualifications and the program’s enrollment capacity. Review committees will consider factors such as applicants’:

1. Previous work, service, and research experiences;
2. Overall GPA and performance in UP 201;
3. Motivation and goals relative to the major and potential career; and
4. Factors such as ability to overcome adversity, perseverance, teamwork, and work ethic.

Admission decisions are made each year at the end of the Spring semester.

For additional information about admission criteria and procedures, students should contact the Urban and Regional Planning program in the School of Planning, Design and Construction.