

Community & Regional Planning

The Study of Planning

Community and regional planning is a professional field of study aimed at assessing the ever-changing socioeconomic and physical environments of our communities and planning for their future. Planners evaluate and seize opportunities to understand and solve problems. Most planners work at the local level, but they are concerned with issues that affect the world: the preservation and enhancement of the quality of life in a community, the protection of the environment, the promotion of equitable economic opportunity, and the management of growth and change of all kinds.

Planning has its roots in landscape architecture, architecture, engineering, law, economics, and public administration. Most contemporary planners are trained in the physical and social sciences so they can understand the society and economy in which plans must be implemented. Planning demands technical competence as well as creativity, plus pragmatism and an ability to envision alternatives to the physical and social environments in which we live.



How can we revitalize our cities?

How can we make housing more affordable?

How can we serve the human needs of our communities and preserve their environmental resources?

How do we decide where shopping centers should be located?

How can we enhance the development of our downtown areas?

How can small towns sustain their viability and plan for the future?

If questions like these interest you and you enjoy working with people, consider a major in community and regional planning.



Iowa State's undergraduate program in community and regional planning is one of the largest among the 12 accredited programs in the United States.



Planning at Iowa State University

Iowa State University offered one of the first courses in town planning in 1921, eight years before the first planning degree program in the United States was founded. A bachelor of science degree in urban planning was initiated in 1967, and the department of community and regional planning became a part of the newly created College of Design in 1978.

Together with the departments of architecture, art and design, and landscape architecture, the community and regional planning department provides a unique and innovative interdisciplinary environment. The only undergraduate planning program in the state, it is also one of only a dozen degree programs in the country accredited by the Planning Accreditation Board.

The Degree

The bachelor of science in community and regional planning is a four-year degree focused on creating and implementing parameters that describe broad patterns of land use and development policies. Students learn how to investigate and analyze information about communities and involve the affected people in the planning process. They gain an understanding of political processes, economics, and community form, and are prepared for work in local, county, state and federal planning agencies as well as with private organizations and consulting firms.

The department offers a master of community and regional planning (MCRP) degree as well as dual graduate degrees in architecture, business administration, landscape architecture, and public administration. Together with the departments of civil and construction engineering and transportation and logistics, it also offers a master of science degree in transportation.

The Curriculum

All students entering the College of Design are enrolled in the Core Design Program, which includes courses in design, drawing, and cultural studies as well as general education requirements such as math, science, English composition, an introduction to the university library, and electives. Upon completion of the first-year Core Program, students interested in community and regional planning advance into the professional planning program.

In the professional program, students complete a set of planning courses to understand the forces that shape our communities and also choose an area of concentration. These areas include housing and social policy, land-use and transportation planning, community economic development, and environmental planning and design. Courses are also offered in economic development, urban revitalization, geographic information systems (GIS), planning in developing countries, and planning administration.



Students get to know each other and the faculty in small, interactive classes and studios, exploring aspects of planning in the classroom and in the field. Recent studio projects have included downtown revitalization plans for several Iowa communities, comprehensive plans and zoning plans for rural counties, future land-use plans, neighborhood plans for cities and small towns, studies of wetlands and other environmental studies, and studies linking transportation systems to community growth and development. Many students participate in internships, which give them supervised professional experiences.



The Faculty

The department of community and regional planning has 10 faculty members with diverse academic and professional planning backgrounds. All are active in teaching, research and advising. Their areas of expertise include land-use and growth management, transportation, community economic development, planning and environmental law, environmental planning, housing and social planning, historic preservation, planning in developing countries, urban revitalization, and regional planning.

Students have the opportunity to work on a one-to-one basis with these faculty members and take part in funded research projects.



The Facilities

The College of Design, home to the department of community and regional planning, features five stories of studio classrooms and offices wrapped around a public atrium capped with a vaulted skylight. Outside are expansive lawns, native prairie plantings, and several display areas for public art. Inside are the art gallery, Design Reading Room, model shop, Design Cafe, art supply store, output center, and several computer labs.

The computer graphics lab—with 20 advanced microcomputers—allows students to concentrate on image editing, three-dimensional modeling, and animation. The geographic information systems (GIS) lab includes advanced workstations. Other computer labs focus on computer-aided design and desktop publishing.



Opportunities and Resources

Many students obtain internships with local governments, private firms and community organizations. Recent assignments have offered students the opportunity to participate in housing inventories, land-use surveys, transportation analyses, plans for making communities more accessible to those with disabilities, coordination of planning efforts between a Native American tribe and the cities and counties adjoining its land, market analyses for new housing projects, urban design studies of downtowns, and park and bikeway studies.

Other internship and research opportunities are available on campus through the College of Design. For example, the PLaCE (Partnering Landscape and Community Enhancement) program is an interdisciplinary outreach service in which students and faculty work jointly on projects that address community and urban development in Iowa.

Community and regional planning students also may take advantage of international study offerings, including the College of Design's summer program in Rome, as well as the opportunity to spend a semester at another American university through the National Student Exchange. The university honors program offers seminars, special programs and projects for undergraduates who have demonstrated the ability and motivation to assume more than the usual responsibility for their education.

Many students participate in the Association of Planning Students (APS) and also join the American Planning Association (APA). Because of the active involvement of Iowa State students in the APA, Iowa has one of the highest percentages of student membership in the organization of any state in the country. Every year, with the assistance of the department and the Iowa chapter of APA, students organize a trip to attend the national conference of the professional organization.



Demand for Graduates

Iowa State's undergraduate program in community and regional planning is one of the largest among the 12 accredited programs in the United States. Over the past several years, nearly all CRP students have gone on to careers in planning or continued their education within six months of graduation.

About two-thirds of the department's graduates work with cities, counties, metropolitan councils, regional planning councils, and state and federal government agencies. Others work in the private sector with consulting firms, real estate agencies, economic development corporations, and computer software companies, with nonprofit organizations, or as consultants serving both the private and public sectors. Many Iowa State graduates are directors in economic development, planning, housing and tourism. An increasing number also decide to pursue graduate studies in planning or related fields.

Financial Assistance

The university offers financial assistance in the form of grants, scholarships, loans and part-time employment. Scholarship recipients are selected on the basis of academic merit or other demonstrated talent as well as financial need.

For new students, two scholarships are available. One is awarded through the College of Design to students entering a design-related major, while the department of community and regional planning offers a scholarship for new students who have chosen to major in planning. The department also presents a number of awards and scholarships to currently enrolled students on the basis of academic achievement.

High School Preparation

Beyond the minimum requirements for admission to Iowa State University, many students find a semester of computer science that emphasizes problem solving helpful in preparing for college coursework.



Contact Us

For more information on how you can become involved in the study of community and regional planning at Iowa State University, contact the department or the Office of Admissions:

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