2026

Program Information

URBAN PLANNING

Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation

Columbia University

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01

FROM THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR

FROM THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Fall 2026

Dear Prospective Students,

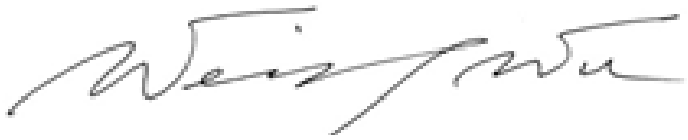
Welcome to the Urban Planning Program at Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP). As future planning students, you have an important task at hand—matching your interests and aspirations with what we have to offer. As much as we encourage you to apply for a spot in our incoming class, we want to be sure it's the right decision for you. Through your communications and observations, we hope that you will learn more about what makes the Urban Planning Program at Columbia an outstanding choice. Among many strengths, I encourage you to explore these highlights of our program:

- Global outlook – we look to planning issues in New York City and internationally for studio projects, classroom case studies, and thesis and capstone research. By studying the impact of global linked processes (e.g. climate change and immigration) as well as local conditions on cities and communities, we think creatively about planning and policy approaches to improve processes and outcomes in cities around the world. We also have a new exchange program with University College London.
- Social justice – our curriculum connects the study of the urban built environment with grounded analysis of socioeconomic and political conditions to inform planning practice and praxis toward social, racial, and climate justice. We prepare students to confront and break down structures and practices of oppression rooted in class inequality, racism, and sexism.
- Urban analytics – we are among the first in planning programs to engage data science and visualization in addition to spatial analysis to address urban problems, collaborate on design projects for the built environment, and inform planning efforts within a variety of contexts and practices.
- Innovative and flexible curriculum – we support our students' interests in planning and related fields, and you can fulfill some or all of the elective requirements by taking courses offered in the Urban Planning Program, GSAPP, or other schools at Columbia. Curricular innovations take place regularly, through new courses (e.g. climate change adaptation, machine learning, urban informatics, social entrepreneurship, planning in comparative perspectives for cities in crisis), as well as practicums and joint studios, to name just a few.
- Connection to practice – we draw from the large and diverse community of planners, practitioners, and scholars in New York and beyond to support our extensive curriculum, in addition to dedicated full-time faculty. Being part of

GSAPP, our program also connects with design, preservation, and real estate faculty and professionals to add to ideas and techniques developed by planners and social activists.

- Career services – New York City presents unmatched opportunities for internships and jobs. Our extensive career services include individual career counseling, alumni panels and networking events, job search workshops, resume and portfolio feedback, visits to public planning agencies and private consulting firms, one-on-one meetings with local employers at the Career Fair, and an alumni mentorship program, as well as a job board with up-to-date postings of employment, internship, and fellowship offerings. We prepare students to be well positioned for evolving roles of planners and to be agile in a shifting career landscape.

Take your time to learn about our program, to ask questions, or to observe a class. We are here to help you make the right decision. Our Assistant Director, Kian Goldman (kmg2227@columbia.edu) can follow up with you on any questions you may have.



Weiping Wu
Professor and Director

02

FACULTY

FULL TIME

Weiping Wu, MS Program Director and Professor. B.Arch and MUP, Tsinghua University; PhD, Rutgers University.

Specializations: International Planning and Development, Infrastructure and Financing, Urban Economic Policy, China.

Hiba Bou Akar, Assoicate Professor. B. Arch, American University of Beirut; MCP, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; PhD, University of California at Berkeley.

Specializations: International Planning and Development, Urban Theory, Conflict Urbanism, Middle East.

Hugo Sarmiento, Assistant Professor. PhD, Urban Planning, University of California, Los Angeles.

Specializations: Climate Change Adaptation, Post Disaster Recovery, Spatial Inequalities, Political Economy, Latin American Urban Geographies.

Tom Slater, Professor and PhD Program Director. B.A. Geography, University of London; PhD, King's College London.

Specializations: Gentrification and Displacement, Urban Marginality, Territorial Stigmatization, Critical Urban Theory, Housing Justice Movements.

Jonathan Stiles, Lecturer. BA, Bard College, MA, The New School; PhD, Rutgers University

Specializations: Transportation, Geopgraphic Information Systems, Data Science, Technology Studies

Anthony Vanky, Assistant Professor. B.Arch and M.Arch, Tulane University; M.Arch Studies and PhD, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Specializations: Transportation and Mobility, Theory of Urbanism, Urban Design, Urban Information and Technology, Spatial Analysis and Statistics.

PART TIME

Matthew Bauer, President, Madison Avenue District Management Assoication, Inc/ Madison Avenue Business Improvement District, New York

Jake Berman, Lawyer, Historian, Cartographer, Auther of *The Lost Subways of North America*

Suprima Bhele, Vice President, Data & Analytics at Morgan Stanley

Anthony Borelli, Vice President, Planning and Real Estate, Edison Properties

Calvin Brown, Deputy Commissioner, Neighborhood Development Divison, New York City Department of Small Business Service

Vojislava Cordes, Adjunct Professor of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University SIPA

Kate Dunham, Urban Design Consultant

Evan Easterbrook-Dick, Deputy Director, Strada Ventures LLC

Peter Flamm, Principal, P. Flamm Arts Consulting

Adam Freed, Principal, Bloomberg Associates

Ebru Gencer, Founding Executive Director, Center for Urban Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience

David Gilford, Founder and Managing Partner, PolicyAlpha

Maxine Griffith, Former Chief Infrastructure Officer, Trinity Church Wall Street

Amelia Guise, Regional Team Lead, CloudKitchens

Boyeong Hong, Associate Research Scholar, NYU Marron Institute of Urban Management

Joy Huang, Director of Capital Planning and Asset Management, Fujikotsu

Jessica Katz, Former Cheif Housing Officer, City of New York Mayor's office

Javier Lopez, Principal and Founder, Real Time Response, Inc

Peter Marcotullio, Director, CUNY Institute for Sustainable Cities; Professor, Geography, Hunter College

Jonathan Martin, Senior Associate, BFJ Planning; Professor, Urban Planning, Pratt Institute

Marielle Martiney, Founder & CEO, MovementBase & Legislative Llama

Kevin McQueen, Director of Lending, The Leviticus Fund; Partner, BWB Solutions LLC

Kristin Miller, Founder, K Miller Executive Consulting LLC

August Nastasi, Cartographer & Designer, Urban Cartographics

Thaddeus Pawlowski, Managing Director, Center for Resilient Cities and Landscapes, GSAPP

James Piacentini, Senior Map Designer, Mapbox

Clarence Radin, Principal, Hudson Point Partnes

Kaz Sakamoto, Senior Data Scientist, Lander Analytics; Research Affiliate, Civic Data Design Lab, MIT

Howard Slatkin, Executive Director, Citizens Housing and Planning

Tim Yoshimura Small, GIS Climate & Sustainability Fellow, Bloomberg Assoicates

Alex Schwartz, Professor Emeritus, New School for Social Research

Charles Stewart, Vice President, CAMBA Housing Ventures, Inc.

Graham Trelstad, Vice President, WSP USA

Jose Luis Vallejo, Director, Ecosistema Urbano Design and Consulting Co.

Sybil Wa, Principal, Diamond Schmitt Architects

Alex Wallach, Planning Director, Village of Southampton

Rachel Weinberger, Founding Principal, Weinberger & Associates; Senior Fellow for Transportation, Regional Plan Association

Kate Wittels, Partner, HR&A Advisors

Douglas Woodward, UP Associate Director of Professional Development and Practice, GSAPP; Former Chief Planning Officer, Lincoln Center Development Project

Thomas Wright, President & CEO, Regional Plan Association

03

CURRICULUM

PROGRAM OF STUDY

The Master of Science in Urban Planning (MSUP) is accredited by the Planning Accreditation Board. It requires the completion of 60 points in two years (full-time option): 27 points in required courses, and 33 points in electives of students' own choosing (12 points of which must be UP electives). Students may take courses offered in the Urban Planning Program, other programs at GSAPP, or other departments and schools at Columbia to fulfill some or all of your elective requirements. Each student is required to complete a Master's thesis or capstone project during the second year of study.

Curriculum offerings equip students with familiarity with the range of analytic and research techniques used by planners, practical skills through a semester-long studio project and other class projects, and competency in both general and specialized knowledge of planning.

Semester 1 — Fall	**>15 points**
History and Theory of Planning	3 points
Geographic Information Systems	3 points
Planning Methods	3 points
Elective Courses	6 points
Semester 2 — Spring	**>15 points**
Urban Political Economy	3 points
Urban Technologies, Innovations, and Planning Institutions	3 points
Planning Studio	6 points
Elective Courses	3 points
Semester 3 — Fall	**>15 points**
Thesis/Capstone I	3 points
Elective Courses	12 points
Semester 4 — Spring	**>15 points**
Thesis/Capstone II	3 points
Elective Courses	12 points
Total	**>60 points**

PART-TIME OPTION

Columbia GSAPP offers a part-time option allowing students to complete the Master of Science in Urban Planning (MSUP) degree over the course of four years (eight semesters) as an alternative to two years (four semesters) of full-time study. This part-time option is specifically intended for active practitioners in the field who wish to maintain professional positions while completing their degree. To qualify, an applicant must have work experience in planning or a related field for at least two years of full-time or four years of part-time employment prior to application.

The MSUP part-time option is based on the same academic requirements as the full-time option, and successful completion results in the same degree. Students must maintain enrollment with a minimum of 6-9 points per semester to complete the degree requirements within a continuous four-year (eight-semester) period beginning in the Fall semester. Optimal completion is within four years of continuous study, and no more than five years if a leave is granted for extenuating circumstances during the course of studies.

A typical course sequence for part-time students is shown on the next page, and a student may follow a different sequence upon consultation with the Program Director.

Semester 1 — Fall	**6-9 points**
History and Theory of Planning	3 points
Planning Methods	3 points
Elective Courses	3 points
Semester 2 — Spring	**6-9 points**
Urban Political Economy	3 points
Urban Technologies, Innovations, and Planning Institutions	3 points
Elective Courses	3 points
Semester 3 — Fall	**6-9 points**
Geographic Information Systems	3 points
Elective Courses	3-6 points
Semester 4 — Spring	**6-9 points**
Planning Studio	6-9 points
Elective Courses	3 points
Semester 5 — Fall	**6-9 points**
Thesis/Capstone I	3 points
Elective Courses	3-6 points
Semester 6 — Spring	**6-9 points**
Elective Courses	6-9 points
Semester 7 — Fall	**6-9 points**
Elective Courses	6-9 points
Semester 8 — Spring	**6-9 points**
Thesis/Capstone II	3 points
Electives Courses	3-6 points
Total	**>60 points**

REQUIRED COURSES, STUDIO, AND THESIS/CAPSTONE

History and Theory of Planning

This course provides a survey of key historical moments and contemporary theoretical debates that have shaped the field of urban planning. It emphasizes how the profession has been shaped simultaneously by local socio-economic, political, and spatial processes as well as transnational and global circulations of capital, commodities, services, and people. The course has five objectives. First, it introduces students to key paradigms in planning thoughts and provides insights on the struggles and complexities that have shaped the field. It focuses on how planning practices have been implemented, negotiated, transformed across cities of the Global North and Global South. Second, the course enables students an in-depth understanding of how spaces are developed, governed, lived, and contested, by foregrounding debates on spatial justice that have been central to planning practice. Third, it invites students to reflect on the role of the planner-practitioner in different capacities. Fourth, it centers the ethics of planning practice, with semester-long discussions around the ethical implications of planning interventions. Fifth, it enables students to develop their research skills and abilities to communicate ideas in writing.

Geographic Information Systems

Human activity occurs in varied locations. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) are integrated tools that support the collection, storage, transformation, exchange, analysis, and display of geographic data towards understanding the spatial dimensions of human activity on Earth. For planners, they comprise essential decision support systems that inform urban planning and policy processes and projects in relation to natural systems, existing built environments, and communities. Yet as artifacts created through human expertise, GIS maps, data and tools also serve as argument, edict, participation, or protest in service of, or counter to, the exercise of economic, political, or cultural power. This course teaches the knowledge and skills of GIS, alongside critical consideration of its deployment by organizations and actors—including by our future selves. We will primarily use the Esri software ArcGIS Pro, but also learn the basics of online and Python GIS. For the first ten weeks of the semester, each three-hour meeting will consist of a lecture, a discussion or activity, and a lab practice session. Immediately after class a problem set is released on Canvas that is due the following week. The final four weeks consist of your preparation and presentation of an individual final GIS research project.

Planning Methods

This is an introductory course designed to help prepare students for common analysis methods used in planning practice. Common methods of analysis are covered using publicly available data sets and data collected through assignments. Through weekly readings, lectures and lab sessions students will gain a basic understanding of the tools and skills required in planning practice. In addition to the lecture, students attend one of 3 weekly sections, which are assigned at the start of the semester.

Urban Political Economy

This course scans and explores some salient features of social division, inequality, and troubling transformation in a range of metropolitan contexts. Each session will be anchored by major readings, supported by an assortment of books and articles that are discussed and dissected with a view towards identifying the strengths and weaknesses of contending perspectives on urban inequality. As we proceed, we probe the parameters, weigh the concepts, and scope the concerns of contemporary urban studies, asking 1) what is distinctive about it as a form of inquiry and consciousness, 2) what it contributes to our understanding of deeply unequal urban conditions, and 3) what planners might do to contribute to the collective goal of achieving social justice in urban contexts.

Urban Technologies, Innovations, and Planning Institutions

This course examines the interactions between three primary groups–the government (public sector, policymakers, politicians), capital (private sector), and citizens–and related institutions in shaping the built environment through urban planning interventions. At its core, this course will consider how legal systems and institutions affect how designers, developers, landowners, advocates, residents, and other actors negotiate competing claims and, ultimately, realize their vision of "better" urban environments. This class explores how different legal perspectives have shaped negotiations around the policies that control land use and development. We will especially focus on how "innovation" has emerged through these negotiations in various planning contexts. This class simultaneously takes a traditional viewpoint in understanding the legal frameworks and institutional interactions in shaping the built environment and an expansive one in how these practices are (in)adequate in light of technological change. The emergence of new actors through the use of digital technologies has changed how the provisioning of urban infrastructure is realized. This course considers how emerging urban technologies may disrupt traditional urban planning processes. We will identify the opportunities, challenges, and discontents related to these novel practices and shifting institutional relationships.

Studio

In the Urban Planning studio, under faculty direction students work as a team with a client on a real-world project. The ensuing deliverables will reflect stakeholder engagement and analyses of socioeconomic, environmental, and political conditions. We encourage students to engage in critical thinking in order to challenge practices of oppression in planning and beyond. Recognizing the wide-ranging student interests, we offer a variety of projects each year, including community-focused issues that provide opportunities to build relations with clients and partners. Studio takes place in the Spring of the students' first year and aims to integrate classroom learning with practical experience early in the students' education.

Thesis/Capstone

The thesis/capstone requirement is the culmination of the two-year course of study and should demonstrate a synthetic understanding of the professional skills and substantive knowledge bases, which form the content of the curriculum of the Urban Planning Program.

In the fall semester of the second year, each student will write a thesis or capstone proposal. The research design specified by the proposal will be implemented in the spring semester.

The thesis/capstone is an essential part of the urban planning curriculum. It is an individual investigation of the student's own choice that is supervised closely by a faculty member of the Urban Planning Program. Theses are intended to demonstrate the student's ability to structure an argument about an issue or problem significant or clearly relevant to planning practice, planning thought, and/or the planning profession. Structuring an effective argument is the process of organizing and making a compelling and logical case for an idea, theory, testable hypothesis, policy position, or empirical finding. In research, this involves gathering and analyzing evidence in a systematic way.

Capstones, on the other hand, require students to apply knowledge and skills gained from the curriculum to address important planning issues. It provides an opportunity to demonstrate understanding of the dynamics of the issues, constraints, and potential solution(s). It should focus on an applied, real-world project for an actual client; the only exception is a project conducted under close faculty supervision in a research setting.

The topic of a thesis or capstone can come from a wide variety of subject areas. It can be in functional areas of planning, focus on a particular geographic area, or address a particular aspect of planning thought or method.

The research design of a thesis can be a case study, a comparative analysis, a mathematical model, a program evaluation, or a statistical assessment. The student should work closely with his or her advisor, to choose the most appropriate design for their particular topic. In general, a thesis consisting of only a review of existing literature in a certain topical area is unacceptable. Conversely, doing extensive original research is well beyond the acceptable thesis standards at the Master's degree level.

Students deciding to complete a capstone may choose to address a specific challenge faced by a planning organization or community, and are particularly encouraged to consult with their advisor about projects that may involve non-traditional forms of delivery (e.g. app, video ethnography). Below are examples, though not an exclusive list by any means, of professional capstone projects:

§ The (re-)design of an urban neighborhood, including detailed design drawings,

§ A plan for a transit corridor or hub,

§ A client report commissioned by an advocacy organization or government agency,

§ A public health analysis drawing upon data collected on a community,

§ A Geographic Information System (GIS) analytical model, or

§ An app developed to respond to client need.

For topics of theses and capstones in the past 15 years, please go to the theses/capstones section of our website.

CURRICULUM CLUSTERS

We have five distinctive cluster of electives courses: (1) Built Environment, (2) Climate Adaptation, (3) Community and Economic Development, (4) International Planning and Development, and (5) Urban Analytics. They serve as guiding frameworks for students in designing programs of study. You may consult with the Assistant Director or faculty advisor for information.

Built Environment

Planning of the built environment balances competing demands on the land and environment brought about by urban and rural growth. This concentration prepares students to work with stakeholders to guide public and private development processes in ways that ensure an adequate supply of land and resources to meet people's present and future needs, while complying with environmental and fiscal requirements.

Climate Adaptation

To respond to the realities of climate change, we need to change the way we build and develop our cities and communities. This cluster of courses explores potential solutions to adapt to climate change and reduce the impacts of natural hazards, acknowledging and proactively addressing the planning decisions that have disproportionately exacerbated the impacts of climate change on communities of color and low-income residents.

Community and Economic Development

Planning education promotes the redistribution of resources and social justice in cities as much as the creation of wealth. This concentration prepares students to undertake community and neighborhood planning and decision-making, local economic development, and/or housing and redevelopment activities. Students examine resource, institutional and socioeconomic issues at various spatial scales, paying particular attention to disadvantaged population and communities.

International Planning and Development

This concentration prepares students to work with governments, NGOs, consulting firms, and international development agencies around the world. Students receive multidisciplinary training to understand the impact of global flows as well as local conditions on cities and communities in various world regions and to think creatively about planning approaches in developing countries.

Urban Analytics

This concentration prepares students to engage and assess the increasing abundance and availability of data to address urban problems, collaborate on design projects for the built environment, and inform planning efforts within a variety of contexts and practices. Students acquire skills in data science and visualization, spatial and statistical analysis, and research design with stakeholder engagement, in addition to the planning skills taught in the core curriculum.

ELECTIVE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

Advanced Research (Independent Study)

The student plans a course of self-study and inquiry, and seeks an advisor who will review and grade the work. The student must submit to the UP office a one-page description of the project, including methodology, goals, and final product, as well as the advisor's name and the number of credits before the end of the add-drop period. Advanced Research may be for 2 or 3 credits, depending on the scope of the work, and this should be determined at the time of application for the Advanced Research. Discuss your interest in working with that faculty member to gain their approval first. Although students will do the research on their own, the advisor will review the final work against the description and goals of the proposal and provide a grade to Weiping Wu as the central on-line grader. Students may not use paid employment within or outside the University as a basis for an Advanced Research project. An e-mail note to the UP Office from the faculty advisor is requested before the end of the add/drop period indicating that the faculty member is advising a student in an Advanced Research project, and approving the proposal submitted by the student. Advanced Research may involve library research, lab work, fieldwork, or other research methods, and the final product could be a paper, or digital design, or map, or something else alternative to a standard paper —whatever the student and advisor agree is the best format for illuminating the results of the research.

Advanced Spatial Analysis

This advanced seminar examines and develops techniques of spatial analysis and representation specific to urban contexts. The course centers around key methodologies—including advanced spatial statistics, spatial decision support systems, feature recognition, and interpolation—interrogating their use and applicability to different contexts in research and practice. Through case studies, we will learn several new methods, comparing distinct approaches to similar questions and considering the implications (ethical and otherwise) of spatial analysis and cartography.

Affordable Housing Development in NYC

This course will guide students through the practical workings of affordable housing, in relation to current local, state and federal policies. As an introduction to affordable housing, the course is accessible to students with a wide range of knowledge level and interest in the topic. The goal is for each student to become well-informed on the policies, politics, and the development process. The course will prepare students for the work environment and even for potential careers in affordable housing. Our goal also is to provide an intellectually engaging classroom where students can explore and learn about the practical and theoretical fundamentals of affordable housing with a strong focus on NYC

AI and the Future of Cities

This course examines how emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, automation, and digital infrastructure, are reshaping cities. Students will study the political economy of urban technology, the spatial and environmental implications of

data centers and AI systems, and the changing relationships between the public sector, private firms, and communities. The course will also explore how tech-driven disruptions are influencing current and future climate, energy, and infrastructure public policy. Additional attention will be given to how AI adoption may alter patterns of work, leisure, and daily life, and what these shifts mean for real estate, public space, mobility, and local economic development. The class will be taught through case studies, guest lectures, and group projects to assess how future AI-driven behaviors could influence the form and function of the urban environment.

Citie at Risk: Climate Adaptation in Global Context

This course introduces the role of urban planners in planning for climate change adaptation and post-disaster recovery. It emphasizes the political and economic dimensions of planning for climate change including the role of government and local communities in the planning process. It includes a review of current debates in resilience theory, climate governance, and climate justice. Last, it provides an overview of international agreements on climate change, federal emergency management laws and frameworks, and local adaptation planning strategies, such as managed retreat in coastal communities.

Cities in Crisis: Planning in Comparative Perspectives

This course focuses on the role of planning in cities facing crises such as hurricanes, earthquakes, explosions, economic crisis, and racial violence. The course will explore the use of the controversial term "crisis," critiques of the term, and what it means to be a "city in crisis." Thinking comparatively across cities in the Global North and South, we will review case studies both recent and historical. We will consider what happened in the event, what planning interventions followed, and what the implications—or repercussions—of those interventions may be. Case studies will include hurricanes and earthquakes in Santiago (Chile), Port-au-Prince (Haiti), Mexico City (Mexico), Zagreb (Croatia), and San Juan (Puerto Rico); explosions in Fukushima (Japan), Maputo (Mozambique), and Beirut (Lebanon); economic crises in Caracas (Venezuela), Buenos Aires (Argentina), Athens (Greece), and Dakar (Senegal); racial violence in Sanford, Florida (USA), Paris (France), and Bogota (Colombia).

Climate Adaptation in Cities

Cities are on the frontlines of climate change – both in terms of experiencing its impacts (e.g., nearly two-thirds of cities are coastal) and responding to it. This course discusses the current and future climate risks facing cities, drivers of major risks, actions cities can take to reduce these risks (including planning, policy, design), and strategies to scale these actions. Case studies will be drawn from cities that are reshaping their streets, buildings, waterfronts, natural systems, and resource sheds to protect their residents and economies from climate risks. A focus will be placed on the inequitable distribution of climate risks and impacts, particularly on communities of color and lower-income residents, and solutions to address this.

Community Development Finance Practicum

This course examines "impact investing" through the lens of community development and real-world projects. It consists of three components: (1) classroom instruction to build technical skills in financial analysis and deal underwriting and structuring, (2) team projects that allow students to work in partnership with community-based organizations and government agencies to complete feasibility studies or business plans for financing their community economic development strategies, and (3) lectures by community development finance experts on specific finance-related issues and techniques.

Data Infrastructure and Management in Context of AI

This course focuses on developing the engine room skills required to design and manage modern data systems. It aims to build foundational capabilities in data infrastructure, pipeline design, and architectural thinking as durable skills that support analytical work and AI-enabled systems across contexts. The course emphasizes infrastructure fundamentals through engagement with a modern technical stack including SQL, Python, APIs, and cloud storage, focusing on how data is orchestrated from raw sources to downstream interfaces. Core topics examine how data moves through systems, how readiness and reliability are established, and how design choices shape system behavior over time. The course further develops literacy by examining how traditional analytical workflows connect to emerging system architectures, including large language model-based interfaces. It culminates in the design of a system-ready data pipeline that demonstrates the ability to translate complex data into a reliable, interpretable interface for end users. Prior knowledge of basic Python programming (pandas, numpy) and APIs is highly desirable.

Digital Urbanisms

The seminar investigates the multiplicity of realities created by digital mediation and the degree to which these technologies and infrastructures are reconfiguring urban environments, processes, and practices, as well as the contested domains of power, governance, and knowledge production that shape this transformation. Utilizing a series of case studies and material explorations, the course analyzes the underlying logics driving these technological and administrative decisions and examines their consequences for both spatial organization and social outcomes. The course investigates practices of quantifying and instrumentalizing urban life—specifically, how cities are increasingly measured, modeled, and governed through data systems that encode specific assumptions, redistribute institutional agency, and create new arenas of agency, governance, and conflict.

Elective Internship

The internship course provides a substantive opportunity for students to apply their skills and expertise in a real-world setting. It allows students to work with practitioners to explore their interests and to expand their knowledge of the planning field. In addition, internships provide students with an inside view of their industry and the chance to develop professional connections. Enrollment is by application and approval of the administrator.

Environmental Data Analysis in Context of Climate Change

Planners are increasingly in need of analyzing environmental data to curb and anticipate the effects that come with climate change for adaptation and mitigation. This course introduces methods of environmental data analysis across varying geographic scales and underlying planning issues in the context of climate change. The structure of the course will be defined through four modules (Global, National, Regional, and City), to introduce students to the variety of environmental data and analyses for different geographies. Each module will underscore planning approaches to climate change, including addressing rising temperatures and urban heatwaves, energy supply vulnerability and the challenge of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions through compact city simulation and planning for urban heat island adaptation. Students master different skills including spatial suitability, data management, scenario development and machine learning to answer scale-specific research questions. The course will use analytics that will propel planners into the world of big data and help model the complexities of climate change related environmental processes.

Environmental Impact Assessment

This course will explore the key procedural elements of NEPA, SEQRA, and CEQR; the key analytic techniques used in impact assessment; and investigate how application of environmental impact assessment affects project outcome. Lectures will introduce students to the statutory requirements of the laws, important judicial decisions interpreting the laws, and standard methodologies for conducting environmental assessments. Case studies will be used to illustrate the effect of the environmental impact assessment on design and implementation of projects or governmental actions. Practical assignments will give students an introduction to the state of practice and the range of analytic techniques used in environmental impact assessment.

Exploring Urban Data with Machine Learning

Urban planning decisions are inherently difficult, as cities comprise systems of immense complexity and increasingly large volumes of data. While planners aren't new to qualitative and quantitative tools to model such decisions, this course will engage the role of technologies in the planning process by focusing on challenges and advantages gained from three new skills in particular: data munging, machine learning, and data visualization. Students will learn to apply the skills in particular: data munging, machine learning, and data visualization. Students will learn to apply the skills and techniques necessary to describe, model, and evaluate their results alongside the history and theory intersecting technocracy and urban planning.

Fundamentals of Urban Digital Design

Using software popular amongst the professional community, students will learn to develop their visual literacy in support of urban planning. This is a hands-on course introducing Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, Premiere Pro, SketchUp, and Miro as tools for enhancing conceptual, spatial and visual communication. Students will be introduced to precedents demonstrating the effectiveness of imagery as a form of communication and classes will teach the concepts and methods of realizing such work

to form visual arguments. This course offers the opportunity to practice and explore softwares, using them to enhance and compose photos, maps, site plans, infographics, diagrams, massing models, published layouts, and video shorts.

Genesis and Development of Zoning

This course will provide a comprehensive introduction to the history, theory, and practice of zoning with a particular emphasis on the use of zoning as a planning and regulatory tool in dense urban environments like New York City. Topics to be addressed include: the early development of Euclidean zoning; the New York City planning process (ULURP, as-of-right development, the framework of the NYC Zoning Resolution); regulatory alternatives to zoning (e.g., master-planning and local development plans); zoning tools in other US and world cities; form-based codes, traditional neighborhood development (TND), transit-oriented development (TOD), transfer of development rights (TDR), and innovative practices and programs like mandatory inclusionary housing and zoning for quality and affordability. The goal of the course will be to provide students with both a thorough grounding in the theory of zoning and the practical tools needed to work with zoning regulations in the urban planning context.

Gentrification and Dispacement: Power, Planning, and Political Action

This course offers students a comprehensive and critical overview of the process of gentrification on a global scale. It provides 1) a guide to the competing theories that have been devised to explain why gentrification happens; 2) a strong sense of the implications of gentrification for people living at the bottom of the urban class structure (in particular, the many forms and complexities of displacement); and 3) informed accounts of how gentrification is resisted in several contexts where the threat of displacement is very real.

Global Best Practices in Public Transportation

This seminar is a survey course covering best practices in building, managing and operating public transport in cities around the world, and examines how American transit agencies could learn from these improvements from abroad. This course examines the organizational structures, operational practices, technological improvements and capital construction techniques necessary to provide high-quality public transport. Case studies will cover both European and Japanese examples, as well as past American examples from the heyday of urban transit in the past century, and ways that global innovations have been put into practice in the American context.

Housing the Unhoused: A Practicum

"Housing the Unhoused" explores the challenges related to providing housing solutions for individuals experiencing homelessness, including recent arrivals from other countries. The course will consider the socioeconomic, political, and cultural factors, and will emphasize practical, site-based approaches to address this issue. Through a multidisciplinary lens, students will analyze the existing New York City regulatory and policy frameworks while examining US and international case studies and best practices and will explore ways to develop comprehensive and sustainable housing solutions that prioritize the needs and dignity of the unhoused population.

Introduction to International Planning

This course discusses the ways in which global development policies and trends converge with national and local contexts to influence planning practices. It draws concepts and examples mostly from the global South to explore shared challenges and new directions. Students are expected to critically discuss the nuanced differences across planning environments and results of planning approaches, through readings, discussions, and case studies.

Introduction to Transportation Planning

This course explores how planners understand transportation by viewing transportation in its historical context. We will examine the theoretical underpinnings of the transportation/land use relationship, how transportation supports or undermines the economy, how it affects health and the environment, and finally how transportation planning is practiced. Topics include travel forecasting, travel behavior and demand management, the auto/highway system, public transit, livery and transportation networked companies, sharing (cars, bikes, scooters), equity and environmental justice, mobility pricing, and freight.

Introduction to Urban Data and Informatics

This course is intended to provide an introduction to the technical, theoretical and practice-based dimensions of urban analytics. It is centered around data acquisition, numerical analysis, spatialization, visualization and interaction, and civic technologies. Students will learn major concepts, software tools, and analytical techniques to extract meaningful information from various data sources. Students also will have an opportunity to develop their project that combines the technical aspects in a final analysis and visualization.

Land Use Planning

This course presents the nuts and bolts of land use planning as practiced in the US today and gives you the opportunity to develop/ design a land use plan for a small hypothetical city. Through lectures and readings, you will be exposed to contemporary land use planning issues (including urbanization and urban growth trends, ethics, quality of life indicators, ecological land use planning, and inner-city revitalization).

Law, Politics, and Planning Practice

A critical context for planning practice, regardless of whether planners are working in a government, nongovernmental, private, or consulting capacity, is the landscape of intersecting local, state, and federal legal jurisdictions and the complex and multilayered political environment. Planners must understand the implications of regulations, procedures, conditions attached to funding streams, and the potential for legal challenges. In addition, equitable planning requires an appreciation of structural political factors that influence outcomes, including the interplay of local and state/federal authority, regional fragmentation of local governance, and political economy of local planning decisions. This class will familiarize students with the legal structure of government authority and planning in American citie as well

as common political dynamics influencing outcomes. Using academic texts, case studies, and role play, we will consider the interplay between government processes and politics, the role of planners in this dynamic, and the implications laws and procedures have for social equity and planning outcomes. In particular, the class will look at traditional and emerging frameworks for the division of planning authority between state and local governments, the political dynamics of localism and regionalism, and recent reform efforts to address pervasive housing shortages in California, New York, and elsewhere.

Metropolitan Planning

This course will explore strategies for planning metropolitan regions, with special focus on the institutions and issues that transcend local political boundaries, including transportation, resilience, housing and governance. Drawing on the experiences of Regional Plan Association's four landmark plans for the New York region and national and international case studies, the course will examine the success and failure of various strategies for protecting open space, addressing the challenges of climate change, supporting economic development and affordable housing, and investing in transportation infrastructure. What models have been most successful in addressing these challenges? What new structures will be need in the face of economic and technological changes? And how will we pay for the investments necessary to create fair, sustainable and prosperous metropolitan regions in the future?

On Spatial Exclusion and Planning

This course investigates the idea of geographies of exclusion through a multi-disciplinary inquiry which locates spatial production and planning practice at its center. The course cross-thinks issues of spatial exclusion and social justice across cities in the Global North and the Global South. What are geographies of exclusion? Who gets excluded, why, by whom, and how? What are some of the legal, spatial, socio-economical, moral, and political apparatuses that get articulated in producing segregated spaces of poverty and lavishness, violence and fear, connectedness and confinement? What are the roles of state agencies and "experts" such as planners, architects, and policy makers in producing such geographies, and how are these practices reproduced in the everyday? To that end, we will examine the mechanisms through which certain populations in our cities are left "outside" (through gated communities, "mean" streets, policing, security barriers, segregated parks, etc.), or kept "inside" (prisoners, refugees in camps, locked-in domestic workers, etc.).

Planning for Justice in a Low Carbon Future

What are the possibilities and limits that communities, broadly conceived, encounter for achieving a low carbon future at the intersection of race, class, and gender? This course will offer the different community engagement frameworks being attempted by New York City municipal agencies who aim to address long standing environmental injustices in specific neighborhoods. Connecting theory with praxis, we explore together a snapshot of the history, challenges, methods, and approaches, and impact of community participation and stakeholder involvement in planning processes. Students will "learn by doing" by working in groups to study a current community engagement process taking place in New York City and will be asked

to develop a "state of the engagement" report. Students will also be encouraged to begin developing their own philosophical orientation and toolkit for community engagement practice(s).

Practicum: Planning the Cultural Space

Drawing on the experience of expert planners, architects, and cultural producers, this practicum will provide the student with a broad perspective of the trends and issues in planning for cultural spaces and the operation of cultural organizations and facilities, including performing arts centers (PACs), museums, libraries, and public spaces. Also offered in the practicum will be an investigation into the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on cultural planning and development and its continuing implications for traditional approaches to the performing and visual arts. In seeking a sustainable balance between live performance and the increasing reliance on personal digital platforms for viewing and listening to popular music and performances, organizations are changing the ways they curate, produce, and define arts and cultural activity, with cultural organizations facing existential questions about their missions, objectives, and organizational sustainability. In a time of increasing civic engagement, the course will also investigate how the cultural space is being shaped by increasing public engagement to achieve enduring social justice and accountability, and how to balance creative planning initiatives with aesthetic innovation and excellence.

Practicum: Residential Planning in Global Cities

As the world's urban population grows towards six and a half billion by 2050, cities all over the world are resorting to the mass- production of residential super-blocks to address new urban housing demands. But is this model appropriate for all cities, regardless of their environmental, social, political and economic differences? This seminar will provide students with a hands-on opportunity to understand how planning code regulations – specifically residential codes – can shape the design and functioning of future urban neighborhoods. Through the lectures, readings and projects students will be exposed to an array of different residential zoning systems from around the world. Students will work in teams to document case studies of existing regulatory systems from a selection of global cities chosen for their distinctive residential developments. Based on what they learn in the seminar, students will also have a chance to explore their own ideas about how regulatory codes can address the new challenges ahead that come with unprecedented urban expansion. Because this seminar integrates topics of planning, design and real estate, students from all GSAPP programs are invited to join if interested.

Practicum: Urban Analytics for Social Good

This practicum course focuses on applying data science methodologies to address real-world urban challenges and promote social good. Through hands-on projects and collaborative problem-solving, students will engage directly with community organizations, public sector agencies, or policy initiatives to analyze urban data and generate actionable insights. The course covers advanced topics in urban analytics, including novel data acquisition methods, machine learning, geospatial analysis, data ethics, and effective communication of results for diverse audiences. Emphasis is placed on the practical implementation of data-driven solutions that foster inclusive,

equitable, and sustainable urban environments. Students will work in teams to design, prototype, and present projects that leverage data science for positive societal impact.

Project Management: From Idea to Execution

This practitioner-led course exposes students to fundamental project management concepts and the behavioral skills necessary to launch, lead, and actualize benefits from projects across sectors. Planners, designers, policy makers, real estate developers, and those working in adjacent industries are often in a position of leading, supporting, or influencing projects and initiatives with multiple moving pieces. Skilled project managers oversee resources, schedules, scope, risks, and both internal and external factors to deliver positive results. In this course, students explore project management with a hands-on, pragmatic approach through case studies, real exercises, and live examples. Students can expect a combination of reading and hands-on work to practice real-life skills and application to advance current and future projects, with exposure to different software programs that are commonly used by today's practitioners. We will give special attention to controversial projects, operating in a resource-constrained environment, and "managing up" as a project manager. As a class, we will review causes of project failure and success, and risk mitigation during early project phases.

Prototyping in Urban Tech: Project, Product + People

The course aims to reframe the practice of urban data reserch and visualization toward a user-centric model. Users (people) generate the need for a tool (product) the derives from and drives forward our resesrch (project). Studnet will design interactive digital product prototypes such as apps, web-based maps, dashboards, or other interactive digital data tools to showcase their analytics and visualizations to the public. Throughtout the course, we will ground our projects in a service-orientated lens, asking who will benefit from our research and how we can put this information in their hands. No prior software knowledge is required and students will learn how to use these in the course.

Real Estate Finance and Development

This course will explore how real estate projects are financed in an urban context. Students will learn the building blocks of finance and apply those fundamentals to both the development of and investment in real estate. Through lectures, financial modeling exercises, problem sets, and case studies, students will build and develop the tools to analyze project-level real estate economics, including: creating operating budgets, sizing debt for construction and permanent operations, building project pro forma, and calculating returns such as Net Present Values and Internal Rates of Return (IRR). These skills can be applied across various real estate asset classes; however, the course will primarily focus on both market-rate and affordable housing. Using New York City as the laboratory, Urban Planners will gain an understanding of how federal, state, and city governments create incentives and policies to facilitate the development and financing of multifamily rental housing.

Site Planning and Support Systems for Development

Human settlements are created and communities structured mostly by private individuals or firms constructing buildings on parcels—as long as the sites are accessible, somehow related to nodes of other urban activity, and equipped with support services. In the United States, this practice has been called "site planning" or "subdivision" and has created millions of houses and thousands of commercial centers around all American metropolitan areas and cities since World War II. The results have been roundly criticized from an urbanistic point of view; however, the public preference is still strongly in favor of this type of development. We should be able to do this job well, and seek methods through which a better environment, at affordable costs, can be built. Within this course, the specific techniques that planners and developers can employ toward achieving good site development are discussed, and a reasonable degree of skill in application is expected to be obtained by the students. To take specific physical actions alone is not enough—they also need to be understood in terms of their effectiveness and sustainability.

Urban Design for Planners

How should urban designers give shape to the city? What urban design methods could they apply? This course helps students acquire the principles that can inform urban design practice. It has three major pedagogical objectives. First, it helps students understand the contemporary city through a series of urban design tools. Second, it covers both historical and modern urban design principles. Finally, it includes all the scales in which urban designers operate, ranging from the fundamentals of social interaction in public space, to environmental sustainability of a region. The course is structured around the most typical problems that urban designers will be asked to solve. Each week, students will apply key urban design readings to research and design exercises that will build a fundamental urban design understanding and skill set.

Urban Political Ecology and the Climate Crisis

This course is forced on a set of analytic perspectives and theories assoiccated with urban political ecology. Topics include political ecology, social-ecological transitions, resilence theory and emerging views on climate urbanism. These topics will be explored through current debates and their application to cases of urban policy and planning practice in a global context. It is a reading-intwnsive exploration of politics, braodly defined, and of natures, as they relate to environmental ideologies and forms of goverence. These theoretical frameworks will allow studnets to synthesize emperical observations in ways that that inform their understanding of the contemporary evolution of climate and enviromental thinking in planning practice. The course reviews the evolution of envirnmental thinking in planning and examines new conceptual paradigms triggered by intensive urbanization, social inequality, conflict, displacement, biodiversity and climate change, and evolution of environmental practice.

Urban Sensing and Data

In this class, students will not only discuss how sensing technologies, as proxies for smart cities technologies, may or may not support larger design and justice objectives, students will also engage in hands-on development and testing of sensor prototypes to support their inquiries into these topics. As such, objectives for this class widely range from hardware development to theoretical understandings of the ethics involved in these technologies within a democratic society. Largely, we can think of the data within the framework of technical (from "technos", meaning "art, skill, the cunning of hand" as it pertains to the science of craft) and theoretical (as a set of knowledge and philosophically-based outcomes).

04

CAREER SERVICES

Career services for MSUP students are coordinated by the Associate Director for Professional Development and Practice, who has over 40 years of experience in the public sector at the NYC Department of City Planning, a large non-profit planning organization, at a large development company, and private consulting on planning. We emphasize direct engagement with students on your career goals, professional development, and potential employment opportunities. A key service is one-on-one consultations, at least once a semester for each student, to explore what types of work you are interested in and what potential places of employment you hope to connect with.

Your involvement with career services should begin at the moment of matriculation, and your career aspirations should also inform the types of courses taken. We are here to help you take advantage of our location in New York City, discover unmatched opportunities for jobs and internships, and interact with the best thinkers and practitioners in the rapidly changing field of planning and beyond.

Other services include cover letter/resume/portfolio feedback, job postings on GSAPP's career services platform (GSAPP Gateway), office visits to select planning organizations in different sectors, meetings with employers at the GSAPP Career Fair together with students from other programs, one-on-one mentoring by UP alumni, career panels and workshops (e.g., for acquiring credentials like AICP and LEED), and weekly announcements about upcoming networking opportunities and the most recent jobs and internships posted on GSAPP Gateway. Each semester we offer workshops on developing resumes and cover letters, where to find jobs and internships, interviewing, and preparing for the AICP exam. Twice a year we connect students and alumni for informal networking events. The American Planning Association (APA) is the professional organization that you should join as a student so you can take advantage of the opportunities there. APA offers numerous membership events (Resources, Events), career support (Career Support), and membership is free to students (Free APA Student Membership). We fund travel to the APA Conference each year (this year's conference is in Minneapolis). To support alums, our office offers one-on-one consultations on resumes, cover letters, and general job search advice up to one year after graduation. Alums enjoy continued access to GSAPP Gateway, where they can explore job opportunities and connect with employers; we also post jobs of all levels to the Columbia University Urban Planners LinkedIn group. In addition, alums can continue to receive communications for upcoming events and opportunities.

GSAPP GATEWAY CAREER PLATFORM

GSAPP Gateway is a career services management and engagement platform for Columbia GSAPP students and alumni. Through this online platform you can explore jobs and internships (updated regularly by UP and the other programs), register for events, share your resume with employers currently recruiting at GSAPP, and network with alumni.

OFFICE VISITS

During each semester, the UP Program organizes tours to agencies and firms within New York City to give you exposure to different careers and opportunities available to urban planners. Students have visited the Regional Plan Association, Karp Strategies, New York City Housing Authority, NYC Emergency Management, NYC Department of CIty Planning, Arup, WSP, HR&A Advisors, and the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development, and WXY.

CAREER FAIR

Each spring semester, you have the opportunity to meet with top employers from the NYC area at our GSAPP Career Fair. Employer representatives from the public and private non-profit sector interview students one-on-one for job and internship opportunities. At the 2025 spring semester Career Fair we hosted representatives from New York City Department of City Planning, AKRF/Philip Habib & Associates, Economic Development Corporation, HR&A Advisors, TYLin/Sam Schwartz, Department of Housing Preservation and Development, U3 Advisor, and BFJ Planning.

MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

The UP program organizes a mentorship program for the duration of the academic year, pairing alumni with graduating students based on their interest and experience. Mentors help you explore your career interests, discuss the transition into the professional world, give feedback on the strategy for your job search, and help make introductions to others in the field. The main goal of mentoring is to help you achieve your potential and discover your strengths. Sign up for the program is generally announced in August and mentorship matches will be arranged by early September.

OUTSIDE FELLOWSHIPS AND STANDING INTERNSHIPS

Each year UP students have received outside funding, fellowships, and internships that are offered annually. We keep a list of these opportunities with up-to-date links to detailed information and how to apply.

CAREER PATHS

On the next page, you will see a table illustrating thirteen of the possible career paths related to urban planning. The second column gives examples of organizations for each career path. The third column gives recommendations for what type of coursework you should consider during your time in the MSUP program to help prepare you for that career.

Career Path	Example Organizations	Consider Coursework in
Municipal government agency in planning or neighboring fields	NYC Dept of City Planning (DCP) NYC Dept of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) NYC Dept of Transportation (DOT) NYC Emergency Management	Built Environment Courses in politcs and policy Climate Adaptation
State or federal government agency in planning or neighboring fields	U.S. Dept of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) U.S. Dept of Transportation (DOT) U.S. Naval Facilities Engineering Command NYS Department of Environmental Conservation	Built Environment Courses in politcs and policy Climate Adaptation
Nonprofit corporation or joint venture	Empire State Development Corporation NYC Economic Development Corporation (EDC) NYC Housing Development Corporation (HDC) Port Authority of New York and New Jersey	Community and Economic Development Courses in Business School
Nonprofit organization or community based organization	Harlem Community Development Corporation Hester Street Collaborative Waterfront Alliance WE ACT	Community and Economic Development Courses in Public Health
Advocacy group	Association of Neighborhood Housing Developers (ANHD) New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) Regional Plan Association (RPA) of New York Urban Justice Center	Community and Economic Development Courses in Public Health Climate Adaptation
Global NGO (non-governmental organization)	CARE International Council for European Urbanism Oxfam Slum Dwellers International	International Planning Climate Adaptation Courses in SIPA Courses in Public Health
International organization	Asian Development Bank Inter-American Development Bank United Nations (UN) World Bank	International Planning Climate Adaptation Courses in SIPA Courses in Public Health
Research organization or think tank	Earth Institute Urban Institute Urban Land Institute World Resource Institute	Courses with more theoretical content Courses with comparative content Courses in research methods
Private consulting firm	AECOM Calthorpe Associates HR&A Advisors WSP	Built Environment Courses in Economic Development Urban Analytics Courses in RED program
Real estate firm	Camber Property Group Compass JLL Savills	Courses in Economic Development Courses in RED Program Courses in Business School
Urban technology firm	CAUPD - Alibaba UrbanX Lab Envelope.City Gridics STDE	Urban Analytics Concentration Courses in Visual Studies Courses in Data Institute
Design firm	Ecosystema Urbana Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates (KPF) One Architecture & Urbanism WXY Architecture and Urban Design	Built Environment Courses in Visual Studies Courses in Architecture
Doctoral studies	Columbia GSAPP MIT UC Berkeley University of Tokyo	Courses with more theoretical content Courses with comparative content Courses in research methods

INTERNSHIPS

Though not required as part of the program, internships provide a substantive opportunity for you to practice applying your expertise and skills in a real world setting. They allow you to work with practitioners and industry experts to explore your interests in more depth and to expand your knowledge of current environments. Additionally, internships provide you with an inside view of planning and the chance to develop connections in your professional network.

You can take PLA4050 UP Internship Course after your first year of study. Through the course, you are able to analyze your progress through bi-weekly write-ups, which provide the opportunity for reflection on your work advancement, progress of skill development, connection to current coursework, and exposure to certain areas within planning.

UP students compete successfully for prestigious internships in New York City and beyond. Students have recently interned at the following places:

Public Sector

Department of Defense U.S. Special Operations Command – Africa
Manhattan Community Board
Mayor's Office of Capital Project Development
Mayor's Office of Chief Technology Officer
Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)
NYC City Council
NYC Department of City Planning
NYC Emergency Management
NYC Department of Environmental Protection
NYC Department of Health
NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development
NYC Department of Parks & Recreation
NYC Department of Small Business Services
NYC Department of Transportation
NYC Department of Youth and Community Development
NYC Economic Development Corporation (EDC)
NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA)
NYC Housing Development Corporation (HDC)
Port Authority of New York and New Jersey

Private Sector

AECOM
AKRF
ArchDaily
Arup
BFJ Planning
BJH
BRT Planning International
BuroHappold
CallisonRTKL
Camber Property Group
Carthage Advisors
Federal Home Loan Bank
Greenland USA
GWW Planning + Development
HNTB
HR&A
International WELL Building Institute
Karp Strategies
Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates PC
Marble Fairbanks Architects
Midwood Investment and Development
Monadnock Development
One Architecture & Urbanism
Philip Habib & Associates
Public Works Partners
Real Estate Board of New York
Real Takk, inc.
Robert A.M. Stern Architects
Savills Studley
SCG America
Suzuki Capital
Urban Cartographics
WXY

Non-Profit Sector

100 Resilient Cities
Alliance for Downtown New York
Ascendant Neighborhood Development
Center for Active Design
Center for Urban Disaster Risk Reduction & Resilience
Citizens Housing & Planning Council
Community League of the Heights
Community Preservation Corporation
Downtown Brooklyn Partnership
Fulton Avenue BID (Brooklyn)
Fund for the City of New York
Garment District Alliance
Ideation Worldwide
Lincoln Center
Meatpacking District Management Association
New City Parks Foundation
Soho/Noho Partnership
Municipal Art Society of New York
New Destiny Housing Corporation
New York League of Conservation Voters
New York State Association for Affordable Housing
New Yorkers for Parks
Northern Manhattan Improvement Association
PolicyLink
Project for Public Spaces
Public Space Partners
Regional Plan Association
RiseBoro Community Partnership
Street Lab
Street Vendor Project
Sustainable Urbanism International
The Mega-Cities Project, Inc.
Waterfront Alliance

Higher Education Sector

Center for Spatial Research, Columbia University
Center For Urban Development, Columbia Earth Institute
City University of New York
Climate School, Columbia University
Data Science Institute, Columbia University
Digital Social Science Center, Columbia University
Earth Institute, Columbia University
Heyman Center for the Humanities, Columbia University
Moelis Institute for Affordable Housing Policy, NYU Furman Center
National Center for Disaster Preparedness, Columbia University

International Organizations

UN DESA
UN Habitat
UN SDSN
UNDP

Other U.S. Locations

Calthorpe Associates, Berkeley, CA
California LULAC, Los Angeles, CA
Katerra, Menlo Park, CA
DAHLIN, Pleasanton, CA
MKThink, San Francisco, CA
Modus, San Francisco, CA
San Francisco Planning Department, San Francisco, CA
IntelliPro Group, Santa Clara, CA
Gensler, Washington, DC
Inter-American Development Bank, Washington, DC
The Stimson Center, Washington, DC
Save Ellis Island, Ellis Island, NJ
New Jersey Transit, Newark, NJ
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA
Earthship Biotecture, Taos, NM
Bergmann Associates, Rochester, NY
Dept. of Real Estate, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA
Memphis/Shelby County Office of Planning and Development, Memphis, TN

International (Select)

Chinese Academy of Urban Planning & Design, Beijing, China
Harvest Fund Management, Beijing, China
Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, Beijing, China
Tsinghua Tongheng Planning and Design Institute, Beijing, China
World Resources Institute, Beijing, China
Arup, Hong Kong
Capgemini, Shanghai, China
Cushman & Wakefield , Shanghai, China
East China Architectural Design & Research Institute, Shanghai, China
FA Design and Consulting, Shanghai, China

Schindler, Shanghai, China
Urban Planning & Design Institute of Shenzhen, Shenzhen, China
Nikken Sekkei, Tokyo, Japan
Beirut Urban Lab, Beirut, Lebanon
Bin Majid, LLC, United Arab Emirates
Riwaq Centre for Architectural Conservation, Ramallah, West Bank

GRADUATE PLACEMENT

UP graduates work in critical and leading roles in government, private firms, nonprofit organizations, advocacy groups, multilateral institutions, and international NGOs in New York City and Beyond. Here are examples of where MSUP alumni graduating in 2015-2024 have worked:

Public Sector

Bank of China
Bronx Borough President's Office
Manhattan Borough President's Office
Metropolitan Transportation Authority
Northeast Corridor Commission
NYC DCAS Energy Management
NYC Department of City Planning
NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development
NYC Department of Parks & Recreation
NYC Department of Transportation
NYC Emergency Management
NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA)
NYC Housing Development Corporation
NYC Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment
Roosevelt Island Operating Company
UN Women

Private Sector

AECOM
Agile Group
AKRF
Apple
Arcadis
Atelier Ten
ATZL, NASHER & ZIGLER P.C.
BDI Plus
BFJ Planning
BizFree Global
Bronx Pro Group, LLC
Brookfield Property Partners
Brookfield Renewable
Buro Happold
CallisonRTKL
Camber Property Group
CARTO
CB&I
Century Construction Group Corp.
China Overseas America, Inc
Codecademy
Compass
Conquest Advisors
David Baker Architects
Denham Wolf Real Estate Services, Inc.
Eastone Equities
Eileen Fisher, Inc
EnTech Engineering PC
EPIC Commercial Realty
Equity Environmental Engineering
ERG Property Advisors
Essar Capital Americas
Ferzan Company
Fleet Financial Group
FLO Living
Forsyth Street Advisors
Gehl
Gensler
Gowanus Bay Terminal (GBX)
Gridics
Hagerty Consulting
Hatch
HR&A Advisors
Hudson Housing Capital, LLC
Intelligent City
Jamaica Center Business Improvement District
Karp Strategies
L&M
Largo NYC
Latham and Watkins
Localize.city
MapBox
Melissa Johnson Associates
MHANY Management Inc.
Midwood Investment & Development
NASAFUN Corp
Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates
Neural Propulsion Systems
New City Parks Foundation
New York Times
Real Estate Board of New York
Sasaki
SCG America
Shorewood Real Estate Group
SIMCO Engineering, P.C.
Stae
Stantec

Starr Whitehouse Landscape Architects and Planners
StudioPOD
STV
Theory
Thornton Tomasetti
Trinity Real Estate
TYLin
Upstatement
Urban Builders Collaborative
Urbane Development
Vanke
VHB
WB Property Group
Wide
Yihai Group North America

Non-Profit Sector

Asain-American Legal Defense Fund (AALDEF)
Bloomberg Associates
Center for Active Design
Center for Urban and Racial Equity
Center for Urban Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience
Clinton Housing Development Company
Community Preservation Corporation
Downtown Brooklyn Partnership
Environmental Defense Fund
Global Alliance for a Sustainable Planet
Guidehouse
Lincoln Center
Municipal Art Society
New City Parks Foundation
New Destiny Housing
Resilient Communities, New America Foundation
South Bronx Unite
St. Nicks Alliance
Street Vendor Project
Streetlab
The Mega-Cities Project, Inc.
The Nature Conservancy
Two Bridges Neighborhood Council
Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation
World Monuments Fund

Higher Education (U.S Locations)

Center for Spatial Research, Columbia University
Earth Institute, Columbia University
Emory University
GSAPP, Columbia University
Harvard Graduate School of Design
Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai
John Glenn School of Public Affairs, Ohio State University
Kansas State University
Knowledge Center, Columbia Irving Medical Center
Rutgers University
SUNY Empire State
Texas A&M University
University of California, Berkeley
University of California, Los Angeles
University of North Carolina
University of Southern California, Price School
University of Virginia, School of Architecture

Other US Locations

Pando, Encino, CA
BioMed Realty, Long Beach, CA
Beifang Education Group, Northern Investment Group Co., Los Angeles, CA
Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, Los Angeles, CA
Manatt, Phelps, and Phillips, Los Angeles, CA
Walt Disney Imagineering, Los Angeles, CA
Dyett & Bhatia, Oakland, CA
HDR, Orange County, CA
Good City Company, San Carlos, CA
Circlepoint, San Diego, CA
NV5, San Diego, CA
Partnership for the advancement of New Americans, San Diego, CA
Transportation Management and Design, San Diego, CA
Panoramic Interests, San Francisco, CA
Alum Rock School District, San Jose, CA
City of Santa Clara, Santa Clara, CA
City of Sausalito, Sausalito, CA
AvantStay, West Hollywood, CA
Democratic National Redistricting Committee, Washington, DC
FILLAT+ Architecture, Washington, DC
Inter-American Development Bank, Washington, DC
World Resources Institute, Ross Center for Sustainable Cities, Washington, DC
Florida Department of Transportation, Miami, FL
The Miami Foundation, Miami, FL
The Gellman Team, St. Louis, MO
Fort Point Associates, Boston, MA

Center for International Development at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
The Nature Conservancy, Brunswick, NJ
WSP, Lawrenceville, NJ
Town of Addison, Infrastructure and Development Services, Addison, NY
AECOM, Rochester, NY
HDR, Portland, OR
Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation, Philadelphia, PA
Global Agility Solutions, Austin, TX
Triad Electric & Controls, Houston, TX
City of Pflugerville, Pflugerville, TX
Buildsol, Ashburn, VA
Microsoft, Seattle, WA
Mithun, Seattle, WA

International

University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia
Bahrain Urban Planning Authority, Bahrain
Gabinete da Deputada federal Tabata do Amaral, Sao Paulo, Brazil
Golfour Property Services, Inc., Ontario, Canada
Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, U of Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Municipalidad de Las Condes, Las Condes, Chile
AECOM, Beijing, China
China Sustainable Transportation Center, Beijing, China
China Unicom Research Institute, Beijing, China
Chinese Academy of Urban Planning and Design, Beijing, China
Deloitte, Beijing, China
Huatai Securities Co., Beijing, China
ICBC International, Beijing, China
Institute of Comprehensive Transportation, NDRC, Beijing, China
Macquarie Infrastructure and Real Estate, Beijing, China
People's Insurance Company of China, Beijing, China
Savills, Beijing, China
Three Gorges Group (Sanxia Jituan), Beijing, China
Tsinghua Tongheng Planning and Design Institute, Beijing, China
China Southern Power Grid, Guangzhou, China
China Merchants Group, Hong Kong
University of Hong Kong, Dept of Urban Planning, Hong Kong
Boe Technology Group, Shanghai, China
Capitaland, Shanghai, China

Center for International Development at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
The Nature Conservancy, Brunswick, NJ
WSP, Lawrenceville, NJ
Town of Addison, Infrastructure and Development Services, Addison, NY
AECOM, Rochester, NY
HDR, Portland, OR
Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation, Philadelphia, PA
Global Agility Solutions, Austin, TX
Triad Electric & Controls, Houston, TX
City of Pflugerville, Pflugerville, TX
Buildsol, Ashburn, VA
Microsoft, Seattle, WA
Mithun, Seattle, WA

International

University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia
Bahrain Urban Planning Authority, Bahrain
Gabinete da Deputada federal Tabata do Amaral, Sao Paulo, Brazil
Golfour Property Services, Inc., Ontario, Canada
Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, U of Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Municipalidad de Las Condes, Las Condes, Chile
AECOM, Beijing, China
China Sustainable Transportation Center, Beijing, China
China Unicom Research Institute, Beijing, China
Chinese Academy of Urban Planning and Design, Beijing, China
Deloitte, Beijing, China
Huatai Securities Co., Beijing, China
ICBC International, Beijing, China
Institute of Comprehensive Transportation, NDRC, Beijing, China
Macquarie Infrastructure and Real Estate, Beijing, China
People's Insurance Company of China, Beijing, China
Savills, Beijing, China
Three Gorges Group (Sanxia Jituan), Beijing, China
Tsinghua Tongheng Planning and Design Institute, Beijing, China
China Southern Power Grid, Guangzhou, China
China Merchants Group, Hong Kong
University of Hong Kong, Dept of Urban Planning, Hong Kong
Boe Technology Group, Shanghai, China
Capitaland, Shanghai, China

05

STUDENT
LIFE

LECTURES IN PLANNING SERIES

FALL 2026

September 15th
Urban Solidarity: Gender, Mobility, and the Unfinished Politics of Buen Vivir in Quito, Ecuador

Julie Gamble
Vanderbilt University

October 13th
AI in Planning: Trajectories from Practice

Moderated by Professor Anthony Vanky with a panel of practitioners

October 27th
Oral Histories as a Space for Public Historical Thinking: 9/11 and the Covid Pandemic in NYC

Amy Starecheski
Columbia University

November 10th
A Manhattan Bargain in Indiana: Asset Recycling as Economic Development in the New Contract State

Deepa Mehta
Columbia University

December 8th
Choreography and the Terrain of Urban Popular Intelligence

AbdouMaliq Simone
Sheffield Univeristy

1:30-2:45PM

WOOD AUDITORIUM

STUDENT ASSISTANTSHIPS

Columbia GSAPP offers a limited number of teaching and research assistantships to all students enrolled in full-time degree programs (registered for 12 or more points per semester). Selected candidates will be granted monthly stipends.

Twice a year you will receive information about available assistantship positions along with application instructions. All applications should be addressed to the Dean's office via the online form, which then distributes them to the program offices or appropriate faculty for selection. You should not apply directly to the faculty contact. The assignment of assistantships will be made on the basis of qualifications for each position. There are also hourly administrative positions available for students at the School via the casual payroll.

LECTURES IN PLANNING SERIES (LIPS)

Lectures in Planning Series (LiPS) is a regular lecture and discussion that brings scholars and practitioners to GSAPP to discuss current ideas and issues in planning research and practice. The Series is organized by the Urban Planning Ph.D. students and is free and open to the public. Master's students are welcome to submit ideas for speakers and topics for the upcoming year.

Learn about and register for upcoming lectures on GSAPP Events

Watch past lectures on our Youtube Playlist

GSAPP AND UP SOCIAL MEDIA

GSAPP YouTube channel

GSAPP Instagram columbiagsapp

GSAPP Twitter @ColumbiaGSAPP

UP Instagram @columbia_urbanplanning

UP Twitter @gsapp_planning

STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

Formal education is supplemented with varied extracurricular activities, which you are encouraged to attend. Evening guest lectures, the Lectures in Planning Series (LiPS), the student magazine URBAN, and student program council meetings are some of the activities that enrich the graduate school experience and create a dynamic educational setting. As part of an accredited planning program, students enjoy the benefits of the American Planning Association (APA), specifically networking events and educational opportunities through the New York Metro Chapter of APA.

There are several student organizations across GSAPP. A selection of relevant groups are listed below.

More information: https://www.arch.columbia.edu/student-organizations

APA Student Representative Committee New York Metro Chapter

The Student Representatives Council (SRC) of the American Planning Association New York Metro Chapter provides a means for students' interests to be represented within APA and promote student participation in the organization. Events include 1-2 networking events per semester (i.e. happy hour, something casual and social), an educational tour (i.e. Newtown Creek, Freshkills), and a day of volunteering / community service.

Program Council

Program Council Representatives represent their peers and advocate for students' needs, acting as the official liaison between students and faculty/administrators. There are three positions: Communications Manager is responsible for managing all student-facing messaging and organizing and facilitating Program Council meetings; Faculty and Staff Liaison is responsible for maintaining strong communication with faculty, UP administrators, and the Dean's office, and liaising with those parties to keep them connected to and involved in students' events and initiatives; and Student Groups Coordinator is responsible for coordinating the efforts and activities of the various student groups at UP.

Urban China Network

UCN brings students, scholars and practitioners from different disciplines into the discussion of China's urbanization. UCN holds an annual Urban China Forum in the fall.

Contact email: urbanchinanetwork@gmail.com

WeChat: ColumbiaUrbanism
https://medium.com/urbanchinanetwork

URBAN Magazine

URBAN is a magazine created, edited, and published by students of the Urban Planning Program. As a forum for discussion among the students, faculty, and alumni of the program, each semester's publication opens its pages to all realms of

urban planning. URBAN is published and printed twice a year as Spring and Fall issues.

Black Students Alliance (BSA+GSAPP)

The purpose/mission of BSA+GSAPP is to support the advancement of students who self-identify as members of the African diaspora, to succeed both academically and socially during their tenure at GSAPP and beyond; enabling them to ultimately become a valuable network resource to current and future students after graduation, as alumni. The goal is to provide a community and source of collegial support mechanisms at GSAPP that actively promote the interest of the black students, alumni, and future students. It is also the aim of the organization to provide a platform for the promotion of scholarship and creativity in writing, architecture, design, real estate, finance, urban planning, historic preservation and the allied arts. The organization will also seek to foster dialog and collaboration among black designers both within and beyond Columbia University.

Contact email: bsagsapp@gmail.com

Instagram @bsa_gsapp

Twitter @bsa_gsapp

Latin GSAPP Association

LatinGSAPP is an interdisciplinary student organization dedicated to the promotion, discussion and reflection of contemporary issues and ideas in Latin America. We recognize the importance and timeliness of thoughtful practice and research in the region of Latin America and by Latin Americans across the globe. Our primary objective is to raise awareness of this work and encourage cooperative involvement.

Contact email: latin.gsapp@gmail.com

QSAPP

QSAPP (Queer Students of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation) is a student organization that seeks to foster both conversation and community among LGBTQ students, their allies, faculty, and alumni of GSAPP. We actively explore contempo-rary queer topics and their relationships to the built environment through an engage-ment with theory and practice. Most recently, QSAPP explored the problem of LGBTQ homeless youth and its inter-section with design which resulted in a publication. All interested students, faculty, and staff are invited to attend meetings and events and reach out to our organizers for more information.

Contact email: qsapp.gsapp@gmail.com

Urban Observation Society

Taking advantage of this diverse city that we are in, we hope to bring together curious individuals from across the GSAPP community to explore different areas of NYC in organized walking trips guided by predetermined themes. During these trips, participants will be encouraged to produce photos, videos, audio recordings, sketches, or other creative outputs. We hope this student organization can be a space that transcends academic disciplinary boundaries and encourages creative dialogue amongst students from different backgrounds.

Contact email: urbanobservation.gsapp@gmail.com
Instagram @columbia.uos

Women Afforable Housing Network

The mission of state Women's Affordable Housing Network (WAHN) chapters is to empower and develop women with the intention of working in the affordable housing sector through partnership, networking, allyship, advocacy, mentorship, and community engagement. We foster a supportive environment where individuals can bring their authentic selves, enabling the exchange of the brightest ideas. Driven by our collective goals, WAHN chapters work towards the establishment of a state-wide organization that brings together women from all sectors of the affordable housing industry. By uniting our expertise, passion, and resources, we aim to transform the affordable housing landscape, ensuring equitable access to secure and sustainable housing for all.

website: https://wahnetwork.org/chapters/wahnu-columbia-university/

MSUP STUDENTS FEATURED IN COLUMBIA NEWS

Recent Columbia University News shows how Urban Planning students are making an impact.



Meet 12 Columbia Graduates Taking on the Climate Crisis

April 15, 2021

These students are serious about Earth Day, and doing their part to protect the environment. They are committed to thinking and acting more sustainably.

Hayes Buchanan, Master of Science in Urban Planning 2021, discusses what he hopes to do with his degree.

Read the article here.

Three Degrees Later, This Graduate Is Ready to Move On

May 11, 2020



Tola Oniyangi has been a part of the Columbia community for a long time: She did her undergraduate work at Barnard and will receive a dual degree—Master of Architecture and Urban Planning—from the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP).

Read the full feature here.

Army Veteran Earns Degrees from Two Columbia Schools

May 16, 2019



Tara Heidger wears many hats—graduate student, urban planning scholar, policy researcher, soldier and mother of three. From rural Wisconsin to New York City, with stops in Iraq and Germany, she has navigated many different worlds.

Read the full feature here.

06

ALUMNI
PROFILES



Pauline Claramunt Torche, AICP

(M.S. UP '19)
Senior Urban Planner & Outreach Specialist at HNTB

Where are you from and what is your background?

I'm from Santiago, Chile, where I obtained my bachelor and professional degree in Architecture and Urbanism at Universidad de Chile.

Please describe your current job and its rewards/challenges.

I'm currently working at AECOM as an Outreach Specialist and Urban Planner in New York, leading community outreach processes for design and construction projects in addition to work on transportation-related analysis. In my role, I have the opportunity to work with interdisciplinary teams and engage with multiple projects and tasks, from stakeholder analysis and outreach, to data collection and analysis, to developing technical graphics and mapping products, and even leading workshops to inform design processes or reduce the community impact of construction projects. I enjoy the fast-paced urban planning industry in New York and the opportunity for consultants to wear multiple hats. One recurring challenge is how to communicate complex information to different stakeholders, including community members, elected officials, and agencies. That said, one of the rewards is to getting to work on high-profile projects that will positively impact communities. I also get to be part of a great group of professionals at AECOM.

How did you get to your current position?

I went through a very typical selection process, including interviews and reviewing writing samples and my portfolio. I think that my Urban Planning degree, in addition to my architecture degrees and previous experience working in consulting with the private sector, public, non-profit, and community sectors both locally and abroad were vital in making me a fit for the position. I also took some other steps in my job search, including attending industry events, connecting and having the support from my urban planning mentor, and proactively reaching out to firms and practices I was interested in. I also connected with both alumni and colleagues to share our experiences, struggles, and accomplishments as well as circulate postings that we thought fit one another's' interests. One of my GSAPP UP colleagues recommended that I reach out and apply to my current position, as she thought I would be a good fit. Even today, we continue to support each other by sharing career development opportunities and always focusing on collaboration, not competition.

How did your education at Columbia's Urban Planning program prepare you for this job and your career in general?

Studying at Columbia was a great experience; it redirected my profession and enriched my way of understanding urban planning and practices around it. I gained valuable skills that I use in practice today as well as exposure to high-level academics, cultural diversity, and projects in different areas of the globe that have allowed me to understand diverse local and global perspectives. At GSAPP, I had the opportunity to master urban analytics skills and develop a solid theoretical background focusing on resilience, international and equitable development, and community planning.

The New York-based studio project fostered meaningful conversations with my peers and professors and exposed me to the complexity of working with an interdisciplinary team toward a common goal. I also gained a better understanding of city agencies' roles and functions. I'm also grateful that I spent the summer in between my first and second years in an internship at the Inter-American Development Bank and worked during the semester as a research assistant during my time at GSAPP; this was critical to further exploring my interests and future decisions.

Do you have any advice to offer to current UP students?

I would advise current and prospective students to take advantage of the variety of courses and lectures provided at GSAPP and across Columbia, as well as events in the city, to explore areas of interest and different niches with the urban planning practice. And don't forget to enjoy the program! Spend time with your classmates and colleagues, collaborate, participate in student groups, and build meaningful relationships; this will allow you to grow and enjoy this great learning opportunity.



Ali Estefam

(M. S. UP '20)
Assoicate, Grain

(Former Vice President at Melissa Johnson Assoicates)

Where are you from and what is your background?

I am from Sao Paulo, Brazil. I have a background in Architecture and Urbanism from the University of Sao Paulo and worked for the City of Sao Paulo for nearly a decade before coming to the US (8 years to be specific). I worked at the departments of Urbanism & Buildings, Information & Technology, and Landmarks. I also hold a certificate from the University of Castilla La Mancha in City Management & Revitalization.

Please describe your current job and its rewards/challenges.

I am the Vice President of Planning and Design at Melissa Johnson Associates. As a team leader, I search for Requests for Proposals, work in business development, and lead community engagement projects in New York and New Jersey, most of which are related to resilience. Because our work is so community focused, it is challenging because we have to learn how to deal with different forms of conflict. We often have to manage situations in which community members and stakeholders come into meetings with different opinions and emotions. Even if this is hard, working in community inclusion is rewarding in itself. People should be able to communicate feedback so that the services and housing they get can continue to improve. Our job is, in part, to provide a platform that people can use to voice their opinions. That feels really good!

How did you get to your current position?

I had a difficult path after I graduated. It was at the beginning of the pandemic. We didn't know what was going to happen and we were trying to find jobs when many people were getting fired. As an international student, it was especially difficult because I only had 2 months to find work. I started by getting two internship positions at design firms for only one month each since that is all they had the capacity for.

After that, I worked at a nonprofit in community engagement, but it wasn't exactly what I wanted to do. That's when I applied for a position at Melissa and Associates design firm. I was initially told that I was overqualified for the position I applied to, but within a couple of months, I was offered a promotion. I have now been there for almost two years.

How did your education at Columbia's Urban Planning program prepare you for this job, and your career in general?

When I got to Columbia, I knew exactly what I wanted to do: to work with communities. I made sure to take as many courses about community engagement and, in classes that were not focused on it, I would include community. I also took classes in real estate to get a diverse education experience and I would try to fit community engagement into those classes as well. Of all my planning courses, Planning for Resiliency is one that stands out. It gave me my first experience working with communities and gave me qualitative data tools that still inform projects that I do today. Columbia also gave me a great network. My professors knew me well, reviewed my resume and found relevant connections for me.

Do you have any advice to offer to current UP students?

It's very important to get involved. Even if you still have a lot of work or exams, I recommend at least going to community board meetings. This is important in helping you discover what you want to do after you graduate, and you can always bring it back to your research and your projects. You should also definitely look for connections with professors. They can open doors that you didn't even know existed.



Eri Furusawa

(M.S. UP '18)
Principal, HR&A

Please describe your current job and its rewards/challenges.

I'm a Director in HR&A's Inclusive Cities Practice. We are a group of analysts, planners, and policy experts who care deeply about centering racial equity and economic justice in economic development, policy, and planning. The rewards: I wake up every day feeling lucky to have clients - primarily in local government or the advocacy space - who are mission-aligned and whom I feel proud about being able to support. I'm also grateful to be working alongside brilliant thinkers and passionate urbanists. The challenges: as with many consulting roles, the hours and travel can be quite demanding depending on your projects, so it took some time for me to adjust to the pace. Overall, I've been appreciating my six years so far at the firm and recommend HR&A to anyone who is interested in bringing their analytical and policy chops to support visionary clients.

How did you get to your current position?

I was introduced to HR&A multiple times during my two years at GSAPP. In my first year at MSUP, I joined an office visit to HR&A and learned about the firm and about consulting as a profession for planners.

Then, in Year 2, I took a class called "Urban Economic Development Practicum: Achieving Outcomes for Inclusive Growth" taught by former HR&A partner Jamie Torres-Springer (now President of Construction & Development at the MTA) and Andrea Batista Schlesinger, current HR&A partner who created the Inclusive Cities Practice at the firm. This class, despite it being a half-semester course, was foundational to my understanding of power in cities and trained me to apply a critical lens to "traditional" economic development practices. By the end of this course I was really interested in working at HR&A and was lucky enough to be hired in the Fall of 2018.

How did your education at Columbia's Urban Planning program prepare you for this job, and your career in general?

The UP program equipped me with both practical knowledge and the ability to ask critical questions about the impact of my work. I'm grateful for the courses that introduced me to the concrete skills – including GIS, writing a compelling argument, knowledge of land use tools, coding and data visualization – and have been able to apply them from day 1 in my role. I also appreciated the courses - in particular, "Economic Development Practicum" taught by the two HR&A partners and "Digital Restructuring of Urban Space" taught by Prof. Leah Meisterlin - that trained us to ask the tough questions and think critically about the forces shaping cities today and our role in deploying/disrupting them. These are the courses in particular that stuck with me and continue to shape my thinking to this day.

I also made some close friends at MSUP whom I've kept in touch with. Few are in consulting, but having this network of practitioners who are active in their respective roles has been inspiring and encouraging.

Do you have any advice to offer to current UP students?

As an international student with no work experience in the US, finding a job here after graduation was quite challenging. I've had two jobs since graduation and both were made possible through keeping in touch with my professors and other guest lecturers who came to speak at GSAPP. My advice to current students: classes are a great way to meet practitioners in the field whose work resonates with you and to form relationships that last longer than you might imagine. I recommend treating your classes as opportunities to meet future colleagues, bosses, clients, and collaborators.



James Garland

(MSUP '02)
Director, Office of Railroad Planning and Engineering
Federal Railroad Administration

(Former Assistant Director, Houston/Galveston Aera Council)

Please describe your current job and its rewards/challenges.

I am an assistant director at the Houston/Galveston Area Council, the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Greater Houston Area, one of the biggest regions in the United States with over 7 million people. Our population is expected to grow to 11 million residents by 2045. The Houston/Galveston Area Council's job is to think about what we want our region's growth to look like and to lay out a vision for its future. We have to consider all aspects of a developing metro region, such as our rapid population growth, the freight and the movement of goods, transportation, traffic management, economic development, and environmental stewardship. I am responsible for establishing our team's strategic plan and evaluating its effectiveness and function.

One of the biggest challenges in my job is having to work through the different administrative structures in this region. Houston is the anchor point and center of our metropolitan area, and it does not have any zoning. The communities around Houston, however, do. They are all a part of one big region, so having to navigate these differences can be very difficult. All this said, I enjoy my job here. I am from the South and enjoy getting to have a hand in the development of this broader region. I think it is incredibly rewarding to be able to take part in helping develop so many aspects of a major city's future.

How did you get to your current position?

My plan going into graduate school was to get my Masters in Planning and then follow up with a law degree. I went in seeking to be an advocate for poor disenfranchised communities. 9/11 happened while I was in grad school at Columbia, which shook to my core despite being out of harm's way. Watching things unfold from the ground made me want to go out into the workforce as soon as possible to try to help our communities and make a difference however I could. I did not initially set out to work for the federal government. There was a slight downturn in jobs after 9/11, making it hard to find something full-time immediately. I opted instead for an internship with the Department of Transportation that summer in community planning and then that eventually turned into a full-time job.

After I graduated in 2002, I spent about 19 years in the US DOT. My initial role there was as a community planner with the Federal Highway Administration, and I then moved to a different project based in Atlanta, where I worked as a community planner focused on environmental and transit-oriented planning issues. In both of these projects I was fortunate enough to gain a robust national perspective on federal transportation projects. After Atlanta, I moved to Washington DC for about 12 years and worked on what is now the USDOT Capital Investments Grants Program. After leaving USDOT, my portfolio had a diverse range of projects, including work in cities like Los Angeles, Portland, San Diego, and many more. With this experience in my pocket, I wanted to work in the development region and found my way to the Houston/Galveston Area Council.

How did your education at Columbia's Urban Planning program prepare you for this job, and your career in general?

It helped prepare me with a variety of skills and experiences. Technical skills, like data analytics are the first that come to mind. At that time, we were working with an early version of GIS. I learned much more than just mapping and data analysis while at Columbia, though. In most of our work, we got to decide what kind of path we wanted to take as planners, whether working behind the scenes, on the ground, or in a leadership role. I also remember our Studio fondly and being able explore our skills in a more practical context. Some of the more difficult courses, especially the ones focused on design, were personally some of my favorites and the ones in which I learned the most in.

In general, I think there's also something special to being able to study planning New York City. It's a huge place where part of the learning experience involves having to get out of your comfort zone. As someone from the South, it was also a great learning experience to learn in such a different environment. This helped develop my interpersonal and communication skills, which have helped me in all aspects of my work.

Do you have any advice to offer to current UP students?

Yes! Take advantage of travel opportunities. I wish I had done more of this. New York is huge and there is a lot to learn all over the city. There is also so much to learn from places outside of city limits that all students should experience.

Don't forget to network with alumni. There are so many new ways of communicating with people today, and I think most alumni would be really happy to get to know you. You should also stay involved with organizations like APA to help meet and learn from people even after you graduate.

Take advantage of going to a school with so many students from so many different places. Learn from your other classmates who are from other parts of the country and all around the world. This diversity means that there are so many new ideas that we can develop together. You should also share your own ideas. I was the only black person in the program, and I had a unique perspective that I think many other students were able to learn from.

Be adaptable to change and have an open mind. None of us know it all and we need each other to complete projects.



Sahra Mirbabaee Phillips

(MSUP '18)
Assoicate, Latham & Watkins
Harvard Law School, JD

(Former Land Use Planner Manatt, Phelps, & Phillips LLP)

Please describe your current job and its rewards/challenges.

I work as a Land Use Planner at Manatt, Phelps, & Phillips LLP, a national law firm with practices in health, government, real estate, and land use, to name a few. I am based in Los Angeles, where the City is heavily charged with solving issues of housing, transportation, and growth management. Working as a planner among attorneys is fascinating, fast-paced, and rewarding. Each day I am confronted with a new land use issue that requires a unique strategic approach. For example, one day I could be demonstrating why a rezone of a client's property is appropriate given the current context and another I could be helping devise a project that complies with the California Coastal Act. The intersection of planning and law has fascinated me and I love the space I work in.

How did you get to your current position?

After graduation from Columbia in 2017, I immediately moved to Los Angeles -- a city that has had massive media coverage on its attention to a progressive and livable urban environment. I did extensive research on how the City of Los Angeles operates and thought of the type of role I wanted to take in this environment. Before graduate school I had never thought of the possibility of a planner working at a law firm, but it wasn't until I was seeking guidance from Professor Doug Woodward that I learned of the working relationship between land use attorneys and urban planners.

How did your education at Columbia's Urban Planning program prepare you for this job, and your career in general?

I believe Columbia's program really taught me the fundamental principles of land use and bureaucracy needed for any role as a planner. The understanding of good urban planning has helped me connect with other planners and also knowledgeably present projects to decision-making bodies at the City. Columbia also afforded me the opportunity to work in a startup environment under two internationally renowned transit experts who are at the forefront of their field. The responsibilities that came with working in that environment such as preparing proposals, conducting feasibility studies, and delivering a high-quality work product for a client have been vital to my successes in my job at Manatt.

Do you have any advice to offer to current UP students?

Become involved with many professional organizations such as APA, WTS, ULI, and form relationships with those who are in positions that you would like to see yourself in one day. If you can demonstrate your capabilities and knowledge, you will be able to find someone in the field who can advocate for you. My internship experience was exemplary to that where my mentors supported me in scholarship applications and letters of recommendation needed for other opportunities I came across. Understanding the importance of relationships and staying connected with professors, internship contacts, and mentors is key.



Michael Montilla

(M. S. UP '20)
Assistant Professor
University of Flordia, (Formerly PhD student at Unversity of Berekeley)

Please describe your current job and its rewards/challenges.

I am a PhD student at the University of California, Berkeley and the recipient of the Chancellor's Fellowship. As a PhD student at Berkeley, I am able to more deeply explore concepts that I first learned about at Columbia. My research is currently focused around emerging transportation technologies as well equity and sustainability in transportation. Moving to California from New York was a big challenge that required me to continue to grow in my adaptability. Not only are Berkeley and Columbia in different states with different policies, transportation resources, and histories, but moving across the country is also a difficult and expensive endeavor, especially during the pandemic. That said, I know I am in a great location to be researching transportation technologies. As a PhD student, I am also learning to love teaching and my experience here has been fueling a desire to teach after I graduate.

How did you get to your current position?

I initially applied to Columbia with an interest in transportation knowing that I wanted to eventually pursue a PhD as well. Columbia is a school that generally does not specialize much in transportation, even outside of GSAPP, so I knew that if I wanted to pursue a PhD focused on transportation, I had to do a little more work. First, I reached out to faculty here who I thought would also be interested in transportation equity. The professors I identified were Malo Hutson and Dan Chapman. Once at GSAPP, the rest of the faculty were incredibly supportive and helpful in helping me network and gain experiences that proved useful in the Berkeley application process. After I graduated from the MSUP program, I worked as the Urban Planning Program Manager at GSAPP for a year and just focused on my application materials for my current position at Berkeley.

How did your education at Columbia's Urban Planning program prepare you for this job, and your career in general?

The theoretical and collaborative aspects of planning really shone through the MSUP program. When I applied to GSAPP, I had an idea of what planning was, but it was a narrow idea. Our core History and Theory course as well as other courses that also include history and theory in the curriculum helped expand this idea. It helped me see a less technical and more critical side of planning beyond zoning and maps. Planning has historically been a tool to replicate power structures that we recognize today as being detrimental to communities of color and low-income communities especially. It made me happy that I chose this as my field of study. What I loved the most about the planning program at Columbia is how collaborative it is. Planning is a field that relies heavily on help from other people. I knew this when enrolling but truly seeing it manifested gave me an appreciation for planning. Our GIS course, which has become a sort of rite of passage for GSAPP students and alumni, is a great example of a course that highlights the value of critical thinking and self-reflection while also encouraging collaboration. GIS is an absolutely invaluable tool for me today, especially in researching things that are more quantitative and data driven like transportation.

Do you have any advice to offer to current UP students?

Cherish these relationships and strive to build them. If GSAPP still does 6-on-6, definitely go to those. This is a time where, once a week, all of GSAPP were invited to a bar in the area or the basement cafe and the school would pay for two drinks. It wasn't about the drinks but about getting to know each other better. It's good just to meet and hang out. This is networking and working on our communication skills. Planning is very collaborative. Despite being in the architecture school, planning is deeply rooted in politics and planning jobs are often about relationships. One of the strengths of the program is how well the program fostered connections between students and with professors. It's difficult with Covid-19, but students should strive to find time to meet outside of the classroom.



Yashesh Panchal

(M. S. UP '18)
Senior Manager for Planning and Strategy
Recity (India)

Please describe your current job and its rewards/challenges.

I am the Senior Manager for Planning and Strategy at a resource management company called Recity where our goal is to create circular cities focused on waste as a resource. I head a team to implement the primary project outcomes of (i) diverting waste from the landfills, (ii) processing the waste in a sustainable manner, and (iii) creating better life chances for the waste workers. It gives me tremendous pleasure to be working on solving real grass-root challenges with a 360 degree understanding of creating sustainable businesses and systems that are operational long after we are gone. While the absence of precedence is one of the biggest challenges to gain confidence and alignment with the citizens, they are being overcome by demonstrating huge and immediate impacts that can be felt in real-time.

How did you get to your current position?

While studying at Columbia, I was certain about going back to my home country, India, and working towards fixing large-scale challenges caused by rampant ad-hoc infrastructure development. The founder of Recity has been one of my long-term mentors, and also the one to encourage me to take up city planning back in 2015. He founded Recity in 2017 with the focus on bringing about a collective change from the ground up. Recity had access to data that had to be analyzed from a fresh perspective of using geographic information systems. The insights that I was able to offer were instrumental in building better systems and improving the effectiveness of service delivery.

How did your education at Columbia's Urban Planning program prepare you for this job, and your career in general?

Even while at Columbia, I constantly tried to apply the principles taught in class to my context back at home. The courses helped build the capacity in me for arriving at the right problem statement and finding the most equitable solution to achieve it. For example, a thorough knowledge of GIS helped me unlock the true potential of the datasets collected by Recity to understand how efficiency could be achieved through data-guided decisions. The exercise also got me the job at Recity.

Do you have any advice to offer to current UP students?

Climate change is real and happening much faster than we can imagine, and the effects can be felt more so in areas of the Global South. I would encourage the current UP students to evaluate options to take up challenging opportunities of working across the world, especially in cities and countries that are paralyzed by ineffective planning, to then create planned, circular, and equitable cities.



James Piacentini

(MSUP + M.Arch '20)
Senior Map Designer
Mapbox

(Former Cartographer at Apple)

Please describe your current job and its rewards/challenges.

I am currently a Cartographic Curator and Data Analyst at Apple. I work primarily on the Transit mode of Apple Maps, alongside cartographers and operations engineers in curating the display of transit systems and data on the map. My main responsibilities include curating and visualizing customer-facing transit systems designs for existing and new markets, researching and managing global transit systems data for current and future product features, and coordinating the curation of styles, iconography, colors, density, POI and other UI elements to ensure a legible and easy-to-use experience.

This job has a number of exciting rewards. It is very rewarding to work on a product where my efforts manifest so directly on the map. My role as a curator is to ensure the data systems we have set up display properly on the map, and it is exciting to see the results of my work appearing on the map for customers. It is also a niche role between data and design, a space that is only continuing to grow and mature over time. The gray area between 'tech', 'planning', 'design', and 'data' leads to a lot of ambiguity and uncertainty in the more 'proper' sectors of these industries. Yet, they continue to migrate closer to one another, and their intersection has led to a new wave of exciting new jobs, new tools, and new areas of exploration. As a designer, I am fascinated by the growth of digital tools and technologies as modalities for creative expression and problem solving. Working within this niche now has been a rewarding experience, and I can only imagine what new and emerging opportunities will appear in the coming years as these worlds continue to collide.

My role does not come without its challenges. There are many steps in the process to building a fully-realized live map, and one of my challenges has been to develop improvements in how different teams communicate and hand-off materials. Another challenge is that my role is not inherently analytical in the same way many other planning and cartographic roles might be. I am analyzing and curating with specific goals in mind, and our tool does not allow me to investigate certain social complexities in urban spaces that other mapping tools can. Our goal is to provide a strong product that helps people more enjoyably and easily utilize public transit. In this sense, we are advocates for increasing the use of public transit, and in turn improving the quality of transit. However, our map, fundamentally, is not an active tool for advocacy. It can be challenging, so soon out of school, to maintain focus on the firm's larger goals rather than my own.

How did you get to your current position?

After four years at GSAPP, I knew I wanted to work in data visualization and technology in some capacity. Graduating into the height of the pandemic meant that there were practically no jobs available for designers and planners. I workshopped my portfolio and resume for a few months, and began to realize that while traditional architecture and planning jobs were almost entirely absent, there were a number of opportunities in adjacent fields, such as logistics and technology. I was fortunate to have stayed in contact with a former UP professor who works as a Cartographer at Apple, and she was kind enough to talk to me about my career goals and challenges. She ultimately encouraged me to apply for the role.

How did your education at Columbia's Urban Planning program prepare you for this job, and your career in general?

I joined GSAPP as a dual-UP/Arch student, and from the start I was interested in the intersection of design, space, and planning. In my planning courses, I always tried to embed design values in my work. In my architecture courses, I always tried to embed planning analytics and critical thinking in my work. My interests in data visualization, cartography, and emerging technologies began in the Urban Planning program, particularly in my studio and GIS courses. This continued to develop during my architectural design courses, but really became a true interest of mine during the Urban Planning Capstone process. The resources offered by the Urban Planning program, particularly in data visualization and design electives shared with the architecture program, and in the structure of the Capstone allowed me to more deeply dive into these passions. The Urban Planning program both provided the foundation for me to discover these interests, but also the coursework and support needed to develop the skills to execute on those interests.

Do you have any advice to offer to current UP students?

One piece of advice I have for all planners is to take at least one class focusing on design. Urban Planning is an extremely horizontal field of study; it connects to a wide variety of other disciplines both directly and indirectly. As such, planners have a broad range of potential interests and focus areas, from housing policy to transit engineering to migrant advocacy. Regardless of your academic or professional interests, one thing that will always be valuable is the ability to effectively communicate ideas. Learning design fundamentals, both in terms of basic software, as well as techniques for diagramming and visualizing ideas is extremely beneficial, and unlocks new opportunities across the board.

Another piece of advice I have is to give yourself as many opportunities as you can to maximize your two years at Columbia. If you have the time and ability to do so, max out your credits every semester. Go out and explore the city as often as possible. Get active in organizations or hobbies. Get to know your professors. As I mentioned above, one challenge in my current role is maintaining focus on the firm's larger goals rather than my own. However, use your time in GSAPP to understand your passions, and also learn how you can continue to prioritize them outside of school and work. Two years goes by incredibly quickly, and if you can, take full advantage.



Xiaomin (Shermie) Qian

(M.S. UP '15)
Opericational and Program Management,
Engineering
Compass

Please describe your current job and its rewards/challenges.

I am with the Research Team at Compass Development, the new development marketing and sales division of a technology-driven real estate brokerage. My team is responsible for doing research for existing clients, potential projects and residential market performance in major U.S. cities. We are a team of four covering national new developments including New York City, Boston, D.C., Chicago, Nashville, Miami, Aspen, San Diego, Los Angles, San Francisco, and Seattle. The challenges I have experienced were mostly cross-regional communication, inter-departmental coordination and team bandwidth. For instance, the production of Compass Quarterly Market Reports involves all above challenges, and we often have other time-sensitive project-related assignments at the same time. Therefore, prioritization and teamwork are critical. Luckily, I have turned those challenges into rewards as my professional knowledge, skills and leadership develop along with the hyper-growth of our company.

How did you get to your current position?

I would love to give full credit to the Speed Networking Events our Urban Planning program organized. I attended the events twice while I was at Columbia. During the second year event, I met one of our program alumni who worked at Compass ("Urban Compass" back then). I interviewed for the internship program at his team, but later he asked me "What do you want to be in 5 years?" My confident and direct answer was "a real estate consultant." Then he kindly led me to my current Managing Director, and I had an exciting conversation with the entire team. I started as an intern, and became a full-time employee two months later.

How did your education at Columbia's Urban Planning program prepare you for this job, and your career in general?

I was very clear about my specialty and career interest while I was in our program. The courses I selected were all about housing and real estate. Academically, I loved the comprehensiveness and flexibility that our program and Columbia University provided us. Besides the fundamental and practical classes in our Urban Planning program, I was also able to select certain specialty-relevant courses in other schools that expanded my horizon and network. In terms of career development, I appreciate the job information from the program when I just started my first semester. I turned one opportunity into my first internship even though that was my second month in this brand new country. The resource at Columbia and Urban Planning program fully supported and guided me towards my career path.

Do you have any advice to offer to current UP students?

The most important take-away from my past 5-year experience is: walk out of your comfort zone to execute each and every piece of your plan. Taking actions will bring you significant differences, as well as surprises.



Ramon Munez-Raskin

(M.S. UP '06)
Program Leader for Infrastruture and Sustainable Development
World Bank (Western Balkans Region)

Please describe your current job and its rewards/challenges.

I am a Senior Urban Transport Specialist working with the World Bank (currently based in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania). I work with local and national governments on urban mobility planning and projects in Latin America and Africa, and provide global cross-support to other regions. Some of my areas of focus include walking and cycling, public space, urban mobility planning, bus rapid transit, urban rail, integrated public transport systems, and national urban transport programs. I also work with the rail and road sectors. Working with the World Bank in sophisticated dialogues to assist governments with policies and projects can be very challenging due to the lack of capacity, knowledge, and management skills of my counterparts. However, knowing that I do it to reduce poverty and that I can actually make a difference is a genuinely rewarding experience.

How did you get to your current position?

This is my second time working with the World Bank. I got my first job there in 2006 when a World Bank official found my master's thesis work interesting and followed up with me, indicating that I should apply to the World Bank.

How did your education at Columbia's Urban Planning program prepare you for this job, and your career in general?

My M.S. Urban Planning degree complemented my engineering knowledge with an understanding of the multiple dimensions that are involved in policy and decision making. I took courses in other critical skills within GSAPP (e.g. econometrics, GIS, planning theory, etc.) and elective courses in other Columbia schools such as SIPA (e.g. public management, international development, etc.) and the Business School (e.g. negotiations). I also got a lot of support from the school with grants to conduct summer research and a lot of motivation and empowerment about what I could do to make a change in my career. I still maintain friendships from the program and frequently interact with Columbia faculty.

Do you have any advice to offer to current UP students?

From my perspective, the M.S. Urban Planning program will give you tools and solid knowledge, but your success will be dependent on your own motivation and dedication to building the foundation for a solid profession. In my case, I placed a lot of emphasis on improving my non-technical soft skills (writing, public presentation, negotiations, etc.) and pursued topics that I had not been exposed to before. Also, reaching out to the Columbia alumni and professor network is not only a temporary opportunity, but even better, an investment for your future career.



Heather Roiter

(M. S. UP '07)
Deputy Commissioner of Planning and Resilence
NYC Emergency Management

Please describe your current job and its rewards/challenges.

I am the Deputy Commissioner of Planning and Resilence at NYC Emergency Management, and I have been at NYCEM for over 14 years. At NYCEM, we are in charge of coordinating the response to all kinds of emergencies throughout New York City, from climate change to the pandemic. Our role is also to collaborate with our regional partners at the state and national level because disasters don't stop at borders. What I find most rewarding about my position is that, despite having been here for so long, I'm still constantly learning. Disaster management is still a young and evolving field. As climate change continues to get worse, our field also needs to change to stay on top of it. With improvement of technology, data management, and our community outreach methods, I never feel like I'm doing the same thing all the time. One of the challenges is that this is a hard job. We are always on our toes, prepared to respond to any kind of emergency, from terrorism threats to climate-related disaster, to the pandemic. We are constantly working hard in real-time on real-life solutions to keep people safe.

How did you get to your current position?

I got into Emergency Management directly through the UP Program. I originally went to grad school for affordable housing, but then Katrina happened. Hurricane Katrina made me reevaluate how I thought about Planning, and I began to take courses related to disaster planning and the environment. When I was not taking a course related to the field of emergency management, I would lean into it in my more policy or GIS-oriented projects. After graduate school, I faced the option of either working for NYCHA, my original plan, or as a transportation planner for NYCEM – back then it was called OEM. I chose the position in Emergency Management. In my first couple of years, my role involved creating emergency mitigation plans, which was a great fit for my urban planning background. When Hurricane Sandy hit New York, our office made a major shift towards emergency mitigation and prevention. With this shift, I was also promoted to Director of Hazard Mitigation and eventually Assistant Commissioner which is my current position. I was the first urban planner working at the OEM. Fourteen years later, now knowing how well urban planning skills lend themselves to Emergency Management, there are many of us on the team.

How did your education at Columbia's Urban Planning program prepare you for this job, and your career in general?

Columbia GSAPP prepared me for a professional life of teamwork and facing challenging problems under pressure. It also helped me develop my writing skills, which are incredibly important in my work, especially while working on my thesis or studio. My studio, which was focused on hurricane planning in the Rockaways, also helped me foster an interest in the world of disaster planning. Furthermore, I don't always use GIS and other technical skills that I learned during the program, having these skills in my pocket has still been very helpful. In our office, GIS is its own unit separate from mine, but having these skills allows me to more effectively communicate with the GIS team. Knowing GIS helps me better understand what they do and allows me to think more critically about spatial information.

Do you have any advice to offer to current UP students?

Definitely do an internship. Internships are the best way to get your foot in the door for most careers. They are also the best way to learn the language of the field, to gain relevant experience and to network. Going into the job market without an internship can make it more difficult to find a meaningful job. Now is a good time to gain experiences and learn about aspects of Urban Planning you may not have been exposed to before. Once you enter your planning career, things are a little different so it might be harder to get a job or change jobs. While you are working towards your Planning degree, take advantage of all the opportunities that the program has to offer. I also want to remind students how amazing of an institution Columbia is, even outside of Urban Planning. I loved that our program was very flexible, and we had access to courses outside of Urban Planning. Because of this, I was able to create my own path, combining my UP courses with courses at SIPA and other Columbia schools. One of the best things about GSAPP is that it gives us the freedom to explore beyond your department.



Justin Romeo

(MSUP '18)
Managing Director, Urban Analytics
Center for Neighborhood Technology

(Former Director of Special Projects, NYC DOT)

Please describe your current job and its rewards/challenges.

I am currently the Director of Special Projects in the Transportation Planning and Management Division of the New York City Department of Transportation (NYC DOT). In my role, I work with groups around the agency to collect and operationalize mobility data (counts, trips, speeds). We also implement programs that encourage more sustainable travel and that use the agency's mobility data to evaluate New York City policies and programs. I like that my position allows me to spend time on both data analysis and policy analysis. For example, in a workweek, I will explore the spatial distribution of speeds in parts of Brooklyn, and also work on a public ad campaign to encourage more subway ridership. For me, this variety makes work more exciting and forces me to continually learn new things.

How did you get to your current position?

There were multiple steps to my job search and selection process. The first involved the American Planning Association. I met contacts from a few City agencies at an APA resume review event. Through those contacts, I was able to set up informational interviews with groups at both New York City Economic Development Corporation and NYC DOT. While neither had open positions at the time, it was a great way to learn more about their projects and operations. One of those groups was the division of NYC DOT that I currently work in. After attending the informational interview I continued to stay in contact with the agency members. A few months later I attended a career fair at NYC DOT. I met my boss there, went through the interview process, and started a few months after graduation. This was in no way a direct process.

There were many other applications and conversations that did not result in a job or an informational interview, but I think I learned something from all the other applications as well.

How did your education at Columbia's Urban Planning program prepare you for this job, and your career in general?

Columbia helped to reinforce the value of interdisciplinary work and learning. In the real world, you don't often work exclusively with people who have the same training and ideals as you. It is valuable to bring people together who have different skills and viewpoints. Also, I gained skills critically engaging with the analysis of spatial and other types of data. I use these skills in my job often as I assess my data and analysis and the conclusions from others. Lastly, I learned a lot about the history and theory of planning. This greatly informs my perspective on my work and the goals I hope to accomplish through it.

Do you have any advice to offer to current UP students?

Take advantage of courses with students from multiple programs. Some of these are UP classes, some are listed under other programs. This is a great way to learn more about the world of urban design, real estate, and architecture. This knowledge will come in handy in the work world. Also attend as many lectures as you can – LiPS, GSAPP lectures and conferences. These are great opportunities to learn about work that is going on in the field and to enhance your time at GSAPP. I still try to attend a lecture or two each semester. And lastly, get to know New York City – even if you don't plan to work in New York after GSAPP. The city has a storied planning history as well as an interesting planning and political structure. Knowledge of that system will provide perspective for any other city you go to. So, attend a Community Board meeting or read about the New York City charter history and development. At the very least, it will be additional knowledge you can bring to a job interview about your ability to research and understand structures.



Josh Saal

(M. S. UP '13)
Former Deputy Secretary of Commerce for Housing
State of Rhode Island

Please describe your current job and its rewards/challenges.

As the Deputy Secretary of Commerce for Housing for the State of Rhode Island, my job is to oversee most housing-related concerns in the state, from affordable housing to homelessness. This is a position that was only recently created and, as a result, my role continues to evolve as we identify housing needs in our communities. The most rewarding part of my job is seeing our work come to life and knowing that the work that we do matters. This is also what makes it challenging, however. Balancing the needs of larger areas and individual communities is difficult, since we can't meet the needs for everyone all the time. It's important to understand, also, that we have to work within a political landscape which can sometimes make our jobs even more difficult. Despite the difficulties, it's worth knowing that, if I'm doing my job right, more people will have access to homes.

How did you get to your current position?

I graduated from GSAPP in 2013 at the age of 25. I then worked in the city of New York for a few years, first for Christine Quinn's unsuccessful mayoral race and later as a planner in New York's Board of Standards and Appeals. My last position in New York was in HPD, which is where I really gained experience on the intersection of finance, community development, health, and housing. While in HPD, I worked in the Predevelopment Unit which issued proposals for land for housing and, as a result, worked with NYCHA on big high profile projects, from Bronx Point to Brownsville. It's so much easier to find a position in government if you've had a position in government already. Because I had previous experience in Rhode Island from college and because of the experience I had gotten at HPD, I got a call from a recruiter about my current position. I've only been here for a few months, and my first job has been to build a team to help find solutions to housing needs in the state.

How did your education at Columbia's Urban Planning program prepare you for this job, and your career in general?

I appreciated that GSAPP did not try to fit me into a vocation. You don't go to GSAPP just to get the basic set of skills to do a job. You go to GSAPP to challenge yourself and to prepare yourself for many kinds of challenges. At GSAPP, we learned different perspectives on different topics and tried to understand all of these different parts, from real estate to planning or preservation to sustainability perspectives. Planning does not happen in a vacuum. I appreciated the international perspectives GSAPP brought together. People who graduate from GSAPP don't seem to be as narrowly focused on zoning in the United States, but instead look at different fields, countries, and take this to make creative decisions as planners.

Do you have any advice to offer to current UP students?

Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good. In Planning, we will not always agree with each other or other people that work in our firms or governments.



Matt Schwartz

(M.S. UP '09)
Director, Strategic Planning Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command (NAVFAC) Headquarters

Please describe your current job and its rewards/challenges.

I started working for the United States Navy after graduating from Columbia in 2009 and have been working for them since then. In April 2018, I accepted a new position at Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) Headquarters as the Lead Investment Strategic Planner. My work mainly entails ensuring that bases around the world have all of the infrastructure in place to support the operations of airplanes, ships, submarines, and weapons when they are built and ready to be deployed. This can range anywhere from planning administrative facilities, housing, new roads, schools for military children, etc. I find being able to influence and inform military decision makers on how their strategic decisions may impact the built environment and recommending solutions to them incredibly rewarding and challenging.

How did you get to your current position?

Shortly after submitting my resume at the Navy booth at the APA Conference in 2009, I began working as a Community Planner with the NAVFAC Washington National Capital Region Office. I was responsible for writing RFPs and overseeing the preparation of master plans, sea-level rise plans, small area planning studies, and encroachment plans (solutions to mitigate any proposed or current activity outside of a Navy base that impacts operations, such as private high-rise condos or wind turbines). These plans and studies helped create resilient, livable and walkable communities for Navy and Marine Corps installations. Two years later, I was promoted to the Lead Planner position where I led the planning division on an integrated team of architecture and engineering professionals. I supported negotiations frequently involving unique constituencies and controversial planning and environmental and historic preservation problems that required development of custom strategies. Notably, I helped plan the renovation and proposed expansion of the Vice President's Residence, which is a historic building located at the Naval Observatory in the District of Columbia.

From 2016 to early 2018, I moved into a Program Manager role at NAVFAC Washington where I managed a $60M land acquisition program for a new 300,000 square-foot National Museum of the U.S. Navy. I led the site planning and museum facility concept design; coordinated real estate agreements, environmental review; and conducted briefings and negotiations with multiple Department of Defense commands, congressional committees, real estate developers, community members, and federal and local regulatory agencies in the District of Columbia.

All of these experiences helped me establish and grow a reputation for smart and effective urban planning, project management, and rapport with internal and public stakeholders to successfully get projects approved, ultimately paving the way to my current position.

How did your education at Columbia's Urban Planning program prepare you for this job, and your career in general?

I believe that one of the most important skills you need to be a successful urban planner is project management. Whether you work in the private or public sector, you will need to work with team members who have different personalities and strengths, set project goals and objectives, and keep track of milestones. I found my studio experience (shout out to Floyd Lapp and the Stamford team) to be the most useful and applicable project management experience provided by the UP program in my career today. Working with a real world client to solve their planning problems was an incredible experience. I helped coordinate and allocate the workload responsibilities amongst team members and keep track of everyone's progress to ensure that all of our milestones were met. This experience helped lay the foundation for me to learn how to be an effective project manager.

Additionally, I found the diverse coursework provided by the UP program and the electives in the Real Estate program to be very beneficial throughout my career. They gave me a broad understanding on theory and the many issues that impact our field today. Further, the coursework helped me prepare for the AICP exam which was instrumental in the advancement of my career.

Do you have any advice to offer to current UP students?

First, take advantage of the GSAPP program by taking as many classes as you can without stressing yourself too much on getting the highest grades. When you're getting a Master's Degree, coursework and work experiences are more important to employers than your grades. Get out of your comfort zone and take elective classes in the Real Estate and Historic Preservation programs. You will most likely have to work with these people one day and it is a great opportunity to learn their perspectives on development and design.

Second, don't expect a job to fall into your lap when you graduate. You need to be proactive and seek out multiple, diverse internship opportunities beginning as early as your first semester. There's a chance it could lead to a permanent job after graduation, but even if it doesn't, it expands your network and makes you more marketable for other jobs you may apply to in the future. I wouldn't have my job today if it weren't for my internships while I attended Columbia.

Third, get involved with the local NYC American Planning Association chapter. Volunteer for roles or just attend monthly board meetings. It's a great way to network with senior professionals and learn more about current planning issues. Additionally, go to the American Planning Association's National Planning Conference. Again, it's another great way to network and I got my job by dropping my resume off at the Navy booth.

Finally, stay in touch with your professors and classmates. We are our best network and can learn so much from each other.



Sonal Shah

(M. S. UP '08)
Founder at The Urban Catalysts and Independent Urban Planning Consultant

Please describe your current job and its rewards/challenges.

I have worked for over fourteen years with multiple organizations such as the World Resources Institute (WRI), Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP), Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS). Most recently I led the ITDP India programme in New Delhi. A big part of my work has involved conducting research and advising governments on implementing sustainable transportation solutions with a focus on walking, cycling, use of public transport, and land-use and transport integration. Since September 2018, I decided to consult independently to continue the work I was doing, but with a stronger focus on streets, land-use and transport integration, inclusive transport and gender.

How did you get to your current position?

After graduating from the urban planning program in 2008, I returned to India to get on-the-ground experience. I found that the program's reputation gave me a foot in the door and allowed me to prove myself. I developed an entrepreneurial outlook working with action-oriented non-governmental organizations and each gave me an opportunity to hone different skills – from technical to participatory and strategic. I enjoyed the process of conducting research, advocacy and advising government stakeholders, learning how to work with bureaucratic processes and the value of the phrase "the devil is in the details."

How did your education at Columbia's Urban Planning program prepare you for this job, and your career in general?

The Urban Planning program instilled a research rigor. Coming from an architecture background and transitioning into an urban planning program, I appreciated the emphasis on research methodology. I valued the studios because they allowed me to use my skills as an urban planner to support communities. For example, a studio with Professor Lance Freeman on affordable housing in Brooklyn combined rezoning and economic development proposals to negotiate the challenges of affordable housing and jobs between the Hasidic and Hispanic community in the Broadway Triangle. It was a real project that would impact people's lives.

The program taught us how to recognize and negotiate differences between individuals in the course of group work. We were made aware of disciplinary boundaries and learned how to work with economists, anthropologists, transportation, urban design, architecture and real estate professionals. I also appreciated that the program trained us to be aware of inequities within communities. While facilitating a group discussion, how do you recognize who is silent? How do you get more people to participate? These are very practical tools and something that I have used a lot in my work.

The urban planning program was also structured in a way that gave me a lot of flexibility to take courses from different departments at Columbia. I took courses in SIPA, Barnard, Anthropology and MESAAS. I was offered a very wide range of multidisciplinary courses in labour, gender, politics and development. These have been invaluable in my current work on gender and sustainable transport.

As an International student, what attracted you to Columbia's MSUP program?

Before entering the urban planning program, I had worked on urban redevelopment policies and street design projects. I came to Columbia to understand my context better, and I let my interests guide me. When I started the program in 2006, there was a lot of debate on globalization, labour, feminization of the work force and the informal working class. One of the reasons I decided to come to Columbia was that it has historically had a strong subaltern studies group. Some of the biggest thinkers around orientalism, colonialism and post-colonialism were at Columbia University. I was excited to be able to take courses with some of these faculty. My thesis on how street venders negotiate public spaces in Mumbai was largely influenced by taking these courses.

Do you have any advice to offer to current UP students?

I would advise current and prospective students to take a mix of courses: theoretical, quantitative and qualitative research methods, and how to build consensus. Urban planners are not only technical professionals, but also consensus builders and recognizing power, silence, and absence within and across communities are extremely critical skills. Graduate school is a great opportunity to give a concrete shape to your career goals; and Columbia University offers a wide variety of courses to choose from. Take advantage of it!



Shruti Shubham

(M. S. UP '18)
Senior G.I.S. Analyst and Urban Planner
Gridics

Please describe your current job and its rewards/challenges.

Currently, I work as a GIS analyst and urban planner at Gridics, a tech company that provides a platform for zoning services to city planning agencies. I help visualize zoning codes and perform analyses to understand the development potential of the city. The company is active in jurisdictions across the US and beyond and one of the rewards is getting to delve into different types of land use codes. It provides a unique opportunity to understand varied zoning codes rooted in the local context and digitize them through our platform to expedite land-use-related decision-making.

How did you get to your current position?

During my undergraduate education in India, I had the opportunity to explore different typologies of the built environment. My research included analyses of formal as well as informal settlements. Interested in how context, policy, and socio-economic conditions contribute to the fabric of the city and urban growth, I decided to pursue an advanced degree in planning. At Columbia, I got exposure to technology-based research methods and inculcated the ability to seamlessly use technology as a way of design thinking. After my first year at grad school, I interned at tech startups based in Silicon Valley and New York City. To diversify my skill-set, I took courses offered by other departments within GSAPP. I also got exposure to the different types of planning practices at the National Planning Conference which also provided me a platform to meet my current employers.

How did your education at Columbia's Urban Planning program prepare you for this job, and your career in general?

I took a lot of intro classes provided by the planning program, to identify my interest areas. Columbia also provides a platform to get involved in the local chapters of the American Planning Association focused on tech, economic development, sustainability, etc. I took the opportunity to network with alumni through these chapter committees and connected with them based on mutual interests. Being in New York City provided a unique location advantage where I could connect with local tech entrepreneurs and professionals in the planning space to understand my niche interest.

Do you have any advice to offer to current UP students?

Use all the opportunities! It is easy to get confused when you are starting the program, but use all your chances—courses, internships, lectures, etc.—to discover your strengths. You can take a course to learn that it's not what you're interested in—that's still good to know! All of your experiences, ultimately factor into your career-related decisions. Try to establish your "personal board of directors" a small group of people that can include alums, professors, and peers that you go to for support and advice on advancing your career. Having good mentorship is the key to having sustained growth and deters you from getting siloed in one way of thinking.



Howard Slatkin

(M. S. UP '00)
Executive Diretor, Citizens Housing and Planning Council

(Former Deputy Executive Director for Strategic Planning
NYC Department of City Planning)

Please describe your current job and its rewards/challenges.

I am Deputy Executive Director for Strategic Planning at the Department of City Planning, where I oversee the divisions responsible for citywide and long-term planning and policy analysis. We supply data and analysis to inform planning and decision making, lead citywide zoning and land use initiatives, and coordinate with our borough planning offices and other agencies to support specific initiatives. I find it rewarding to be able to shape and guide planning policies with data and analysis, and with an understanding of big-picture priorities, rather than solely short-term or parochial perspectives. This is something I see as of particular importance in the present national political environment - to base public policy on sound data and reasoned evaluation, rather than on received wisdom, group affinity, or disingenuous argument.

How did you get to your current position?

My first job at DCP was in our Brooklyn borough planning office. And I was fortunate that my first major assignment was one that enabled me to work on so many deep and interesting areas of planning policy, including affordable housing, waterfront redevelopment and open space planning, economic development in former industrial areas, and community planning. My experience on this project gave me the opportunity to shape the City's evolving approach to these subjects. I moved over to the Strategic Planning division In 2007, where I led the development of new policies on these and other topics including sustainability, flood resilience, and shared mobility.

How did your education at Columbia's Urban Planning program prepare you for this job, and your career in general?

The most valuable parts of my Columbia experience in preparing me as a practitioner, perhaps surprisingly, were the most theoretical. It is possible to learn a great deal, and rather quickly, about the practice of planning through on-the-job experience. But the grounding I was able to receive in economic thinking, organizational theory, planning theory, and more is something that has complemented professional experience, and provided me tools that enable a kind of critical insight that I have found invaluable.

Do you have any advice to offer to current UP students?

The ability to communicate complex ideas in an intelligible, even intuitive way is one of the greatest assets you can have as a planner, and a particularly timely one. Effective communication with decision makers, clients, and the public is a prerequisite for turning a good idea into a workable proposal. Today, there is a tremendous quantity of misinformation and disinformation out there, with voices from all quarters insisting that up is down, and the authority that expertise has traditionally carried has in many respects collapsed. This makes communication - the telling of a factual and compelling story that explains the shaping of plans and policies - a greater and more important challenge today than perhaps it has ever been.



Emily Tolbert

(M.S. UP & M.S. HP '20)
Urban Planner
BFJ

Please describe your current job and its rewards/challenges.

I currently work as a Planner at BFJ Planning, a consulting firm based in New York City. The most rewarding aspects of my job are the wonderful team of people who I get to work with, learning new things about different places every day, the diversity of projects I'm involved with, and working in the communities that I grew up in or nearby. The most challenging aspects are accepting that not everyone will be satisfied by a plan or solution and ceding some of the best recommendations to politics.

How did you get to your current position?

Planning is a broad discipline with many different career paths which can be confusing and overwhelming. To narrow down the options, I thought about the classes I enjoyed the most as a student and the work experiences I'd had thus far. I realized I wanted a job that allowed me to apply my creativity, explore, do research, and write. Furthermore, being from the NYC region, I knew I wanted to work here. I reached out to BFJ Planning for an informational interview to learn more about their work. Ultimately, I was called in for an interview for the Planner position I have now.

How did your education at Columbia's Urban Planning program prepare you for this job and your career in general?

Columbia's Urban Planning program helped me to focus my interests by giving me a breadth of experiences—from urban economics to a studio in Hong Kong. Those experiences, along with the people I met, redirected my interests and energies towards the path I am on today. What I thought I wanted to do for a career when I entered the program is different than what I came out wanting to do. Working primarily in land use planning in New York City and its suburbs, I have found myself returning to course notes from land use law, land use planning, metropolitan planning, and GIS. Working in teams in studios to develop a final reports and presentations mirrored the planning process in professional practice.

Do you have any advice to offer to current UP students?

If I had known I wanted to work in NYC as a consultant, I may have taken courses in environmental planning, site planning, zoning, and local government. However, graduate school is not just about preparing for a specific job: It is a golden opportunity to converse on theory, meet people from around the world, explore ideas and places, and be surprised. My advice is to have an open mind, try different things, make friends, and enjoy the flexibility of being a student before returning to the post-graduation work-life grind.



Thomas Wright

(M. S. UP '95)
President
Regional Plan Association

Please describe your current job and its rewards/challenges.

I am the president of the Regional Plan Association (RPA), a twenty-five-person non-profit civic group that works on long range metropolitan planning issues for the New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut metropolitan area. While I have worked at RPA for twenty-six years, in my current position as president, I am responsible for overseeing our staff, managing our board, representing RPA to public officials, fundraising, and staying involved in key policy issues. Our recent work deals with large transportation projects, affordable housing and resilience planning.

For example, one of our current projects is promoting the Gateway Project construction of a new rail tunnel under the Hudson River to serve Penn Station in New York. RPA just put out a report revealing the impacts of what would happen if one of the two rail tracks currently under the Hudson River were closed. We are thinking about how to increase capacity at Penn Station, which was only designed to serve a few hundred thousand, but serves over six-hundred-thousand, and is projected to serve over one-million travelers and commuters on a daily basis. How can we build a true gateway for New York and the rest of the world and what will it take to do that?

How did you get to your current position?

Twenty-six years ago, as a Columbia Urban Planning student, I needed to get a job to help cover my rent. I took a course on new patterns of metropolitan development with Robert Yaro, who was the prior president of RPA. I then interned at RPA over the summer and after graduation came on full time. I worked on the Third Regional Plan that came out in 1996. I took a break from RPA to work at the New Jersey Office of State Planning, where I was the Deputy Executive Director and coordinated the adoption of the 2001 New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan. In 2011, I returned to RPA as the executive director, and after Robert Yaro retired in 2014, I was recommended to become the president.

Do you have any advice to offer to current UP students?

One advantage that Columbia has is its location in New York City. While you are at Columbia participate in and take advantage of relevant events in the city such as free lectures at the AIA and the Architectural League. I always encourage folks to participate in events outside of the university.

In your career it is important to spend time in public and private sectors. The way I have thought of our field of planning, there are four main sectors: the public, private non-profit, private for-profit, and academia. Having first-hand experience in all four of those fields will give you an understanding of where people you work with are coming from.

What future challenges should planners and planning students be thinking about?

Climate change, resilience, planning for sea level rise—these are all important as the trends will probably come faster than the models predict. Technology is changing the nature of work and brings with it both opportunities and threats. We have to do a better job of providing housing and providing prosperity. The success we are currently seeing in New York City could turn to failure one day. Those of us New Yorkers who lived through times when the subway was falling apart and it was not safe to walk through the park at night fear that fiscal mismanagement could happen and this would happen again. We need to be investing in capital assets while we have the ability to do it—housing, transit, energy—to ensure that we have laid down the infrastructure to rebuild.



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Above: first-year students visited Pedra do Sal during day and night to study placemaking in Rio de Janeiro.



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"Columbia's UP program is an intensive analysis of what it means to be a planner. It incorporates so many aspects of social, economic, international and environmental planning and then puts them all into practice with some amazing studio opportunities. Having the program within the architecture school has also pleasantly surprised me as many of my classes are made up of unique perspectives and backgrounds. On top of the great dialogues in class, we have a close cohort of fellow UP students and an amazing city to go out and explore together."

M.S. UP Alum