

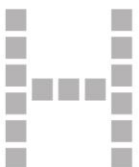
**MASTER IN URBAN PLANNING DEGREE REQUIREMENTS  
2024-2025****I. OVERVIEW**

Urban planners play a central role in fostering a productive, sustainable, and equitable built environment. Encompassing private and public buildings, physical infrastructure, and public spaces, the built environment deeply affects the quality of human experience.

Harvard's accredited two-year Master in Urban Planning, a first professional degree program, prepares students to imagine, examine, and implement productive, sustainable, and equitable built environments. Four key areas of concern animate the learning environment: how planning can manage change in complex environments; dealing with multiple scales and systems; engaging ethically with problems now and in the future; and planning as an active practice where implementation matters. Students learn to understand, analyze, and influence the range of forces—social, economic, environmental, political, cultural, legal, aesthetic, and many others—shaping the built environment. They study the histories and theories of urban planning and urbanism as profession and phenomenon. They develop relevant qualitative, quantitative, and representational skills. They learn to implement through engaging with laws, institutions, and political and economic contexts. A variety of concentrations allow students to specialize.

- Core studio and required lecture courses, along with *methods requirement* courses, provide students with base knowledge and technical skills used by urban planners to generate, evaluate, and implement ideas, plans, and projects.
- *Areas of concentration* are explored through elective courses within several pre-approved topical areas or within an individually crafted area of concentration proposed by a student in consultation with a faculty member.
- Intensive, *project-based learning* experiences engage students in real-world problem-solving and deep exploration of areas of inquiry. Students select one or more of the following:
  - *Option Studios* present domestic and international projects that allow students, individually or as members of collaborative teams, to think creatively and apply interdisciplinary problem-solving methods to planning questions.
  - Writing a *thesis* in the fourth and final term is for students seeking a deeper engagement with research on a specific topic.
  - *Project-based courses (PBC)* offer students the chance to explore studio-type problems in less intensive seminar courses, within a broad range of areas of focus.
- *Elective courses* at the GSD and elsewhere provide a wide range of relevant knowledge and skills for students to sample and master.

At the beginning of each academic year, the program assigns a faculty advisor to each student to assist in thinking through curricular choices. However, students may sign up for the office hours



of any faculty member for advice about topics and issues relevant to planning and their own careers. For very specific queries about requirements students should also consult with the program manager or program director. Concurrent and joint degree program students must consult special rules posted online for information on residency, curriculum, and other program requirements.

## II. CURRICULUM

A student will be approved by the faculty for the MUP degree upon satisfactory completion of 80 units of courses. Students typically take 20 units per term, and four terms of full-time residence are normally required. Lecture and seminar courses are usually 4-units, studios are usually 8-units, and modules are usually 2 units. Thus, a typical term load may be one studio and three lecture or seminar courses or five regular courses. Note that the GSD has school-wide rules for what constitutes full-time residence, how many courses during each term must be taken at the GSD rather than at other schools through cross-registration, what is satisfactory completion of course load, and similar general issues. These policies are posted online at <https://www.gsd.harvard.edu/cross-registration-for-gsd-students/>. Under special circumstances, students may receive permission to reduce their course loads and extend their studies over a period longer than four terms.

Students are required to take 28 units for the core studios and course requirements, 12 units for the methods requirements (analytic methods, economic methods, and legal and institutional methods), 12 units for the area of concentration requirement, and 8 units of project-based coursework (a studio, an independent thesis, or two approved 4 unit project-based courses). The rest of the 80 units may be satisfied through elective courses, including additional studio or project-based options.

The curriculum for the MUP degree has six components:

### 1. Core Studios (16 units)

Students must take the following studios during their first year in residence:

- STU 1121: First Term Core Urban Planning Studio (8 units)
- STU 1122: Second Term Core Urban Planning Studio (8 units)

### 2. Course Requirements (12 units)

Students must take the following course requirements unless they are able to demonstrate sufficient experience to waive the requirement (see below for more information):

- VIS 2127: Representation for Planners (2 units)
- VIS 2128: Spatial Analysis (2 units)
- HIS 4152: Urban Planning Theory and Praxis: Comparative-Historical Origins and Applications (4 units)

- SES 5103A: Public and Private Development (4 units) or SES 5103B: Public and Private Development (4 units)

### 3. Methods Requirements (12 units)

Students must take 4-units of courses within *each* of the three methods requirements for a total of 12-units unless they are able to demonstrate sufficient experience to waive the requirement or pass a waiver exam in the case of the quantitative methods requirement. Please refer to the list of approved courses provided by the program at the start of each academic year.

- **Analytic Methods** (4 units)
  - Quantitative Methods (2 units)
  - Qualitative Methods (2 units)
- **Economic Methods** (4 units)
- **Legal and Institutional Methods** (4 units)

**Required Course Waivers and Substitutions:** Students with prior academic experience are offered the opportunity to pursue waivers and substitutions for various required courses. It is a student's responsibility to pursue them in a timely manner. A waiver exam for Quantitative Methods is offered once per year in August. New students are expected to submit any petition related to a required course in August before their first semester and the start of course enrollment. Petitions should be submitted following the process outlined by your program manager, along with all required supporting documentation. It is important to note that course waivers do not reduce the total number of units required for graduation.

Information about waivers and substitutions can be found on the MUP Program resource page: <https://www.gsd.harvard.edu/resources/mup-waivers-and-substitutions/>

### 4. Area of Concentration Requirement (12 units)

Students must complete 12 units of coursework in an area of concentration as part of their degree requirements. By grouping together 12-units of elective courses, it provides a deeper engagement with a specific subject area of urban planning. Core studios, required courses, methods requirements courses, independent thesis, and option studios (except for Urban Design\*; see below) may not be used to satisfy the area of concentration requirement.

Students occasionally seek to complete two areas of concentration. This is permissible if courses are not double-counted within the two areas. Students should be aware that only one concentration is tracked as part of their program requirements. Concentrations do not appear on a student's final transcript or diploma.

Students must submit the form entitled [Declaration of Area of Concentration](#) to the UPD office at the beginning of their third term and no later than the course selection deadline during add/drop. Once you have declared your concentration, its progress will be tracked on your advising report within [my.harvard.edu](https://my.harvard.edu).

Students may choose one of the below-listed [areas of concentration](#) or design their own special area of concentration (with approval). The current areas of concentration include the following:

- Environment, Climate, and Health
- Housing, Community, and Economic Development
- International and Comparative Planning
- Real Estate and Urban Development
- Transportation and Infrastructure
- Urban Analytics
- Urban Design\*

Students wishing to pursue a special area of concentration instead of selecting one of the established areas of concentration must prepare a description of their proposed special area, secure the agreement of a faculty member to serve as the student's special area of concentration advisor and obtain the approval of the MUP program director. Students are advised to speak to the MUP program director as a first step.

**\*Note:** Only option studios offered by the UPD department (STU 15XX) count towards the satisfaction of the Urban Design area of concentration.

## 5. Project-Based Learning Requirement (a minimum of 8 units)

MUP students must fulfill a minimum of 8-units through intensive, project-based learning experiences. These can take the form of an option studio (8-units), an independent thesis (8-units plus a 4-unit thesis prep course. ADV 9204), or a total of 8-units in approved project-based classes. A project-based course has a substantial amount of the assignment load (40% or more) comprising an applied, real-world, project for an external client. Those interested in more theoretical or conceptual projects should do a thesis.

All students must submit the form entitled [Binding Declaration Form: Thesis, Option Studio, or Project-Based Courses](#) to the UPD office no later than the first Monday in April of their second term. **Please note that if this form is not submitted by the deadline, the student will be presumed to have decided to take a studio option in their third term only.** Changes to a declaration form are not possible after the department-wide deadline.

### Option Studios (up to 16 units)

In addition to the two first-year core urban planning studios, MUP students may take an option studio in their third and/or fourth term(s). These option studios may be chosen from those offered by any department at the GSD, except for certain studios which require specific backgrounds in other disciplines. The Urban Planning and Design department always offers a selection of studios explicitly intended to be welcoming to planning students.

### Project-based Courses

Project-based courses may be completed at the GSD, other schools at Harvard, or MIT. The specific courses are approved by the MUP Program Director with the concurrence of the UPD

Department Chair and are reviewed on an annual basis. Students may nominate courses to add to the pre-approved list, but such courses must be approved in advance and before the end of the add/drop period in the semester the course runs. A minimum of 8-units of project-based courses must be taken if this option is being used to fulfill the project-based learning requirement. There is no restriction on the total number of project-based courses students may take as electives. Project-based courses may count toward areas of concentration. Courses approved to meet the Project-Based Course requirement are found on the [MUP Curriculum Details](#) page.

## Independent Thesis

ADV 9204 (4 units): Preparation for Independent Thesis Proposal, plus ADV 9302 (8 units) Independent Design Thesis equals 12 units in total in a student's second year. Students may write an independent thesis during their fourth and final term. A prerequisite to writing an independent thesis in the final term is successful previous completion of ADV 9204: Preparation for Independent Thesis Proposal, as well as agreement by a faculty member to serve as independent thesis advisor, and approval of the program director.

## 6. Elective Courses

Students may take elective courses offered by the GSD, other Harvard schools, MIT, and the Tufts Fletcher School to advance their specific intellectual interests. Core studios and course requirements, methods requirement courses, option studios, and independent thesis, and the thesis preparation seminar are not considered elective courses. Elective courses complete the minimum 80 units of the total credit required for the MUP degree.

**Note:** No more than fifty percent of units may be taken outside the GSD in each term.

### III. SCHEDULE

The following schedule must be observed during a student's two years in the program. **Students are strongly advised to complete all methods requirements in their first year:**

#### First Term

0 units	STU 1121	Pre-Term Workshop (August)
8 units	STU 1121	First Term Core Urban Planning Studio
2 units	VIS 2127	Representation for Planners
2 units	VIS 2128	Spatial Analysis
4 units	Analytic Methods Requirement*	
4 units	Methods Requirements*, Area of Concentration Requirement**, Project-Based Learning Requirement*** and/or general electives****	

#### Second Term

8 units	STU 1122	Second Term Core Urban Planning Studio
4 units	HIS 4152	Urban Planning Theory and Praxis: Comparative-Historical Origins and Applications

4 units SES 5103A Public and Private Development (A) or SES 5104 Public and Private Development (B)

4 units Methods Requirements\*, Area of Concentration Requirement\*\*, Project-Based Learning Requirement\*\*\* and/or general electives\*\*\*\*

**Third Term**

20 units Methods Requirements\*, Area of Concentration Requirement\*\*, Project-Based Learning Requirement\*\*\* and/or general electives\*\*\*\*

**Fourth Term**

20 units Methods Requirements\*, Area of Concentration Requirement\*\*, Project-Based Learning Requirement\*\*\* and/or general electives\*\*\*\*

*Footnotes:*

\* Methods Requirements: Students must take 4 units in each of three methods requirements: Analytical Methods, Economic Methods, and Legal and Institutional Methods. Students must fulfill the Analytical Methods requirement in the first year and must obtain advance approval to not satisfy it in the first semester. Students who demonstrate sufficient experience may be able to waive some methods requirements or pass a waiver exam.

\*\* Area of Concentration Requirement: Students must take at least 12 units of preapproved courses in one area of concentration. Core studios, required courses, methods requirements courses, independent thesis, and option studios may not be used to satisfy the Area of Concentration requirement. Only students declaring the Urban Design Area of Concentration may apply a UPD option studio to their concentration requirement.

\*\*\* Project-Based Learning Requirement: Students must take a minimum of 8 units of Project-Based Learning, which may be met in one of three ways: an 8 unit option studio, an 8 unit independent thesis, or a total of 8 units in preapproved project-based courses that have a substantial amount of the assignment load (40% or more) comprised of an applied, real-world, project for an external client. Only students who receive a grade of pass or higher in both required core studios may meet their Project-Based Learning requirement by declaring thesis. Candidates pursuing a thesis must take 9204, Preparation of MUP Design Thesis, in the fall term of their second year.

\*\*\*\* No more than fifty percent of units may be taken outside the GSD in each term

*Residence:* Four terms of full-time study in residence are normally required for the award of the degree. Under special circumstances, students may receive permission to reduce their course loads and extend their studies over a longer period. Concurrent and joint degree candidates must consult the rules governing concurrent and joint degrees for information on residency requirements.

#### **IV. FORMS**

To make administration of the MUP degree program requirements easier and more transparent for students, faculty, and staff, students must use the following forms, and are responsible for completing them accurately and submitting them in a timely fashion:

- Binding declaration form to fulfill the Project-Based Course Requirement (Declaration Form: Studio, Thesis, or Project-Based Courses)
- Declaration Form: Area of Concentration
- UPD Secondary Thesis Petition

Approved course memos and program forms are available on the department website: <https://www.gsd.harvard.edu/urban-planning-design/master-in-urban-planning/mup-curriculum-details/>