

Graduate Student Handbook for the Master of Urban and Regional Planning



School of Public Affairs

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA
A PREEMINENT RESEARCH UNIVERSITY



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INTRODUCTION

The University of South Florida's Master of Urban and Regional Planning program is housed in the School of Public Affairs, which is a part of the College of Arts and Sciences. Our PAB-candidacy status program has been operating since 2009 and we serve the urban and regional planning education and research needs of our region and the broader community. This handbook supplements [USF's Graduate Catalog](#).

Program's Mission:

As part of the School of Public Affairs, a group of diverse, interdisciplinary scholars and practitioners, USF's Master of Urban and Regional Planning (MURP) program has a strong commitment to community engaged scholarship and to making differences in the Tampa Bay metropolitan region.

As part of a Research I institution, the MURP program engages in innovative, applied research; delivers quality education to a diverse student population; and provides public service to the surrounding community. We prepare leaders in the field of urban and regional planning to meet community, national, and global needs.

Instruction:

In addition to our core Urban and Regional Planning faculty, the program draws on a rich and diverse pool of seasoned researchers, scholars, and professionals within the School of Public Affairs and from other units at USF, as well as practicing professionals within the wider Tampa Bay region, to deliver interdisciplinary, comparative, and applied knowledge to its students.

PROGRAMS OF STUDY

Master of Urban and Regional Planning:

The [MURP](#) is a 48 credit hour professional degree program that prepares students for careers, or advanced research and academic pursuits, in urban and regional planning. Graduates can expect employment in municipal, regional, state, and federal agencies, as well as across the private and nonprofit sectors. Graduates can additionally opt to embark on work leading to a Ph.D., or other advanced degrees, in this field.

Graduate Certificates:

The School of Public Affairs also offers several graduate-level certificate programs, which can be earned concurrently with our MURP degree.

- The *Graduate Certificate in Community Development* explores urban communities that have suffered from decades of disinvestment and examines the efforts of residents towards revitalization. The approach is interdisciplinary, weaving together a variety of perspectives so that students understand what communities are and how they differ; how communities fit into broader social systems; and what strategies are necessary to develop communities. The certificate is also applied, focusing on the current issues and

efforts of community development in the Tampa Bay region. More information on the program and curriculum can be found [here](#).

- The *Graduate Certificate in Leadership for Coastal Resiliency Planning* trains planners, policy makers, and public and nonprofit managers to address the growing challenges facing coastal communities. Our focus is on the development of resiliency, the ability to bounce back and build adaptive capacity, in our built environment and social institutions. The Tampa Bay area has been identified as one of the most vulnerable to climate change and sea level rise in the U.S., which makes our area a perfect laboratory for those seeking to study adaptation and resiliency in the face of today's coastal environmental challenges. More information on the program and curriculum can be found [here](#).

Additional graduate certificates offered by other departments, such as in Geographic Information Systems, Sustainable Transportation, and other specializations, may be completed in conjunction with the Master's degree with the approval of the MURP Program Director.

ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS

Acceptance into the MURP program is contingent upon satisfaction of the minimum requirements for entry into USF's Office of Graduate Studies. For more information on these requirements, please consult USF's Office of Admissions [webpage](#).

In addition, the program has [specific requirements](#) that the applicant must meet in order to be considered for admission. Several specific standards are employed to evaluate an applicant's admissibility into the program. These standards include the following:

- Bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited University;
- Undergraduate overall GPA of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale;
- Minimum scores of 153 on the verbal, 146 on the quantitative, and 4.0 on the analytical writing portions of the GRE;
- Letter of intent (or statement of purpose) and career goals;
- Resume (or curriculum vitae);
- Two letters of recommendation (minimum); and
- Minimum TOEFL score of 79 or IELTS score of 6.5 (if applicable). ^[1]


Bachelor's Degree:

Students wishing to gain admittance into the MURP program must have a baccalaureate degree from a regionally accredited College or University in the U.S., or an equivalent institution abroad. Holders of all undergraduate fields are welcome to apply.

GPA and GRE Scores:

Students must have a minimum overall grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale in their undergraduate studies, and a GRE score of at least 153 on the verbal, 146 on the quantitative,

^[1] USF does not require TOEFL or IELTS scores from applicants in countries where English is the primary language of instruction in schools. The list containing qualifying countries can be accessed [here](#).



and 4.0 on the analytical writing portions of the exam. The GRE must be taken within five years of the desired term of entry. The GRE requirement can be waived in some instances, with the approval of the MURP Program Director, if the applicant meets one of the following four criteria:

- Has an overall GPA of 3.25 or higher in their undergraduate studies;
- Has a Master's degree from a regionally accredited University;
- Has five or more years of professional and relevant planning experience; or
- Has completed one of the two School of Public Affairs' graduate certificate programs with a GPA of 3.50 or higher.

Students seeking financial support should be aware that some applications for funding opportunities require GRE scores, even if a waiver has been earned for admissions.

Letter of Intent:

A letter of intent, also known as a statement of purpose, must be submitted with the online application. The letter of intent must clearly describe the applicant's academic and professional background, as well as articulate their interest in urban and regional planning. Applicants should consider this letter as an opportunity to express the specific academic goals they would like to pursue within the MURP program and beyond.

Resume:

Applicants should include an updated resume, also known as a curriculum vitae, with their application, that indicates relevant professional experience.

Letters of Recommendation:

A minimum of two letters of recommendation must be submitted online as part of the application packet. Prospective students should solicit letters from sources familiar with their academic/work history and performance. At least one of these references should come from an academic instructor.

International Applicant Requirements:

In addition to the program-specific requirements listed above, international applicants from non-English speaking countries must comply with the following requirements:

- **English Proficiency: TOEFL/IELTS**
International applicants from non-English speaking countries must provide a minimum TOEFL score of 79 (internet-based test) or 550 (written test) taken within five years of the desired term of entry -or- a minimum IELTS score of 6.5 taken within two years of the desired term of entry.
- **English Proficiency: Writing Sample**
International applicants from non-English speaking countries need to submit a writing sample along with their graduate application. The writing sample should demonstrate their ability to analyze information and display their communication skills at a graduate-level.

- ***Foreign Transcript Evaluation Services***

All foreign transcripts and documents that are not in English must be accompanied by a certified English translation. The credential evaluation must be submitted directly to USF's Office of Admissions. A list of several credential evaluation services can be found [here](#).

Late applications may be considered, if space is available and time permits, at the discretion of the MURP Program Director. Admissions decisions are ultimately made by the MURP Admissions Committee on a case-by-case basis. The committee reviews the full application packet to determine the applicant's suitability for graduate study.

The entire application packet is designed to be paperless. An application can be completed online [here](#) and the non-refundable \$30 application fee must be paid once the application is submitted. All documents must be uploaded online by the student as PDF files, and applicants can request their recommenders to submit the letters electronically by supplying their email addresses. Documents can be uploaded as they are received. Once the application is complete, it will be released to the department for review.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Advising:

Beginning with those admitted for Fall 2020, we have begun formally assigning new students to faculty mentors/advisors. Students are encouraged to meet with their mentor/advisor at least once per semester, and to regularly rely on them for guidance related to their progression in our program, as well as in their preparations for a professional career. Students will have the ability to change advisors as desired, if/when they find a particular field of planning that interests them and is the specialty of one of our faculty. Programmatic [advising](#)—forms, adherence to the curriculum, etc.—will remain with the MURP Program Director, assisted by the School's Academic Program Specialist.

The MURP Program Director must approve all deviations from the standard curriculum, including all internships and waivers, and any non-SPA electives that have not been pre-approved.

Graduate Assistantships:

The School of Public Affairs offers limited Graduate Assistant positions for full-time students. Please complete an [application](#) online to be considered for one of these highly competitive positions.

Additionally, we urge all students to consult with USF's Office of Graduate Studies to review University-level funding opportunities. For more information, students are advised to contact Graduate Studies by phone at (813) 974-2846, by [email](#), or visit their [webpage](#).

Scholarships, Grants, Work Study, and Loans:

USF's Office of Graduate Studies houses a Scholarship Library that allows students to access information on sources of funding through computerized databases as well as source books. USF's Office of Financial Aid Services administers the Federal Work Study program as well as several loan programs.

Students interested in loans or work-study should apply as soon as possible each year (after October 1st) for the upcoming academic year, which begins in August. For more information, or to complete an application packet, students are advised to contact Financial Aid Services by phone at (813) 974-4700, stop by the first floor of Student Services (SVC 1102), or visit their [webpage](#).

Project Assistants:

Project Assistants are students who are hired to assist faculty with grant-funded projects. Students hired as Project Assistants will complete, for example, computer analysis, cartography, fieldwork, and/or laboratory analysis related to the project. Students may be hired as salaried or on an hourly basis. The rate of pay varies from project to project. Students are selected for these positions based upon the skills needed for individual projects. Students should discuss their interest in these positions with their advisor.

In addition, several centers on the USF campus sometimes hire graduate students. The Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR) and the Florida Center for Community Design and Research (FCCDR) seek students to work on grant-funded projects from time to time in the areas of transportation, land use, and environmental planning. Students may submit applications for employment at these offices by contacting them directly.

Scholarships and Fellowships:

USF offers a number of financial assistance opportunities, especially to minority students. Preference is given to first-time graduate students in underrepresented disciplines. For more information on financial assistance opportunities, please consult USF's Office of Graduate Studies [webpage](#).

Internships:

Students not currently working in planning-related fields must complete an internship experience. Faculty may suggest placement sites or circulate notices of open internship positions, but ultimately students are responsible for securing an internship, with the approval of the MURP Program Director. The internship requires students to complete a minimum of 180 hours of work over the course of the semester; some internship placements may require more hours. Students who have professional and relevant planning experience may be exempt from the internship requirement, at the discretion of the MURP Program Director.

Transfer of Credits:

With the approval of the MURP Program Director, up to 18 credit hours earned under non-degree seeking status, in a graduate certificate, or at another regionally accredited graduate

school, may count towards fulfilling the MURP degree requirements. Credits are not transferred automatically; the MURP Program Director will review the course description and syllabus of each course to determine which, if any, will be accepted towards the MURP degree. Students may transfer only graduate-level (5000-7999) structured coursework with a grade of “B” (3.00) or better, [per USF policy](#).

Satisfactory Progress:

Students must maintain a 3.0 GPA (“B” grade average) in all graduate coursework. Failure to do so will result in the student being placed on academic probation. A student may remain on probationary status for no longer than three semesters. Any student who fails to improve their grades thereafter can be dismissed from the program.

Also, students are allowed to have (“C”) letter grades in their core courses; (“C+”) letter grades are also allowed, but (“C-”) letter grades are not accepted in a graduate-level program, [per USF policy](#). In accordance with the University’s policies, students must complete their Master’s degree within five years from the initial time of acceptance into the program.

Student Code of Conduct:

USF has a very strict Code of Conduct, which prohibits actions of misconduct, particularly academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty should be taken to include cheating on tests, plagiarism and unlawful “help” on written and other assignments, stealing, buying or referring to an examination before it has been administered, and abating any of the above. Please consult with USF’s Office of Graduate Studies’ documents for a full discussion of [academic policies and procedures](#).

School and Program Communications:

Official communications between the MURP program and its students are carried out through the USF email system. Students are responsible for checking their USF email regularly to ensure that they are receiving program information. All MURP students are also automatically enrolled in the program’s Canvas page. Students should check that site periodically for additional announcements. Our School also uses social media to share information—please follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [YouTube](#).


CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS

Foundational Core Requirements (15 credit hours):

URP 6058	Community Development Planning	3 credit hours
URP 6100	Planning Theory and History	3 credit hours
URP 6115	Planning Policy and Politics	3 credit hours
URP 6316	Land Use Planning	3 credit hours
URP 6549	Urban and Metropolitan Economic Development	3 credit hours

Analytical Methods Core Requirements (6 credit hours):

PAD 6703	Quantitative Analysis*	3 credit hours
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institutions may be granted if a student can demonstrate a compelling need. Credits taken outside of USF cannot exceed the University's limits. These requests must be submitted to the MURP Program Director for approval prior to enrolling in courses outside of USF.

Recommended Curriculum:

Our MURP program does not follow a “cohort” model in which students follow a set order of courses. To accommodate a diverse student population, we assume that students will take between 3 to 12 credit hours each semester, completing the program at a pace that suits their personal circumstances. There are, however, some guidelines we urge all students to follow:

- All Foundational and Analytical Methods core courses are offered at least once per year (approximately half during the Fall semesters and the other half during the Spring semesters). It is strongly recommended, but not required, that students take URP 6100: Planning Theory and History during their first semester in the program, if possible.
- Students should aim to complete all of their core courses as soon as their schedule allows, and if possible, avoid taking Foundational and Analytical Methods core courses during the semester they intend to take the Comprehensive Exam.
- The Internship requirement (URP 6940) can be completed during any semester, in consultation with the MURP Program Director.
- Summer offerings are generally limited and seldom include core courses. Students continuing their studies over the Summer should consider taking elective courses. Summer is also a good time for fulfilling the internship requirement.

Thesis Option:

Students approved to pursue the thesis-track are exempt from taking the Comprehensive Exam. Students pursuing a thesis must complete all 27 core credit hours, 15 elective credit hours, and a minimum of 6 thesis credit hours (URP 6971), while writing and defending a comprehensive research-based thesis. Students pursuing this option must [meet all requirements](#) and [deadlines](#) set by USF's Office of Graduate Studies.

Students interested in pursuing this option should meet with the MURP Program Director before the end of their first year of study to begin the process. This option is strongly recommended for any student intending to pursue a doctoral degree upon completion of the MURP program.

THESIS GUIDELINES

Things to Consider:

- A thesis is a two-semester commitment, minimum. Students are expected to complete all work for a thesis within two semesters. Failure to meet deadlines or requirements may result in termination of the thesis-track, in which case a student will be directed to take the comprehensive exam as the exit requirement for the MURP degree.
- The thesis must follow the registration, submission, and formatting requirements established by USF. More information is available [here](#).

- Students should peruse [examples of approved graduate theses at USF](#) to get a sense of the kinds of work produced. Students may also request copies of MURP theses from the MURP Program Director.

Prior to Enrollment in the Thesis Course:

- If you are interested in doing a thesis, use your first year in the program to narrow down a **research topic** and read broadly about that topic.
- In the semester prior to enrolling in thesis credit hours, you must formulate a **draft research proposal** (see guidelines in this document). This helps you “hit the ground running” when you start your thesis credit hours, and helps you identify committee members with appropriate areas of expertise. It also helps committee members make an informed decision about whether to participate in your committee.
- In the semester before enrolling in thesis credit hours, identify a **three-person faculty committee**. At least two committee members must be faculty of the School of Public Affairs, and the committee chair must be a MURP faculty member. Students are responsible for selecting and confirming the participation of each committee member.
- The committee members must approve the thesis proposal in writing prior to the student starting credit-earning thesis hours. The process of identifying a committee should be iterative with that of developing a draft proposal. Committee members should consider whether the draft proposal is indicative of student success for a two-semester thesis when committee formation is underway.

Thesis Enrollment – First Semester:

- USF requires that thesis students complete the ETD workshop. This should be done early in the first semester of credit-earning thesis hours. More information is available [here](#).
- Students are encouraged to complete all of their research during the first semester. Students should also plan to conduct and write their **literature review** as early as possible in the first semester.
- Establish a work schedule for the next two semesters and stick to it. Keep in mind that, in your second semester, you must submit your completed thesis to your advisor no less than six weeks prior to the anticipated defense date. *Productivity in the first semester is essential.*

Thesis Enrollment – Second Semester:

- Students are required to submit a copy of their thesis to the MURP Program Director no less than six weeks before the anticipated defense date.
- After the advisor has approved the thesis and thinks the student is ready for the defense, the student should submit the thesis to the faculty committee members and USF’s Office of Graduate Studies no less than three weeks before the anticipated defense date.
- After the thesis has been submitted to the faculty committee, the student should set a date and time for the defense.
- Students should adhere to USF’s Office of Graduate Studies [thesis submission requirements](#) and any required notifications for the defense.

- On the appointed date, the student will defend the thesis by conducting a short presentation of their work before their committee and any additional guests/audience who choose to attend. After the presentation, the student will engage in a discussion (for approximately 1 to 1.5 hours) with the three members of the committee, who will determine if the thesis is acceptable as-is, needs revisions, or is not acceptable.

Thesis Research Proposal:

Guidelines adapted from [NYU Gallatin](#).

1. Thesis Statement

- Following an optional introduction section, the basic function of this section is to articulate a phenomenon that the student proposes to investigate (whether a social event, process, literary work, an intellectual idea, or something else), and the question(s), issue(s), or problem(s) related to that phenomenon that the student plans to address in the thesis. The core of the statement may take the form of a hypothesis that the student will test; of a proposition or argument that the student intends to support; or of a general problem or question the student will explore.
- In this section, the student will put that basic problem statement in a larger context by explaining its historical origins (where did it come from?) and its intellectual, social, and/or artistic context (what conversation, debate, or line of inquiry does it participate in?). The student will also describe the sub-questions or themes that constitute the general problem. The student will cite appropriate scholarly, professional, and other sources for the ideas, questions, and background information contained in the section.

2. Research Methods

- In this section, the student will identify (a) the kinds of information that are needed to answer the question(s) raised in the Thesis Statement; (b) the methods the student will use to gather that information; and (c) the strategies by which the student will organize and analyze the information, in such a way, as to reach and support a conclusion, to construct a sound argument. If the central problem has several facets, the student may need an array of different methods for collecting and analyzing the information.
- The student should be as precise as possible in each stage of the methods statement: Is information needed about the stylistic techniques in a novel, about changes in the poverty rates in Kenya since independence, or about the ways children think about nature? Will the student pull out the metaphors in a text, find government reports on household income, or interview kids about their experiences in the woods? Will the student deploy statistical forms of content analysis, correlate poverty rates with political changes, or interpret themes in children's stories?
- The student should reflect on the broad methodological approaches that they propose to use, and cite sources from which they derive their methods and tools. A student's central goal is to demonstrate that they know how to go about answering the questions that have been raised.

- Please note that if a student intends to conduct research on living people, they will need to get the approval of USF's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Before they apply for that approval, the student will need to view a tutorial and pass a test on the various regulations.

3. Justification and Limitations

- This section of the proposal should explain the rationale for the thesis and the importance of the topic. It should indicate the reasons why this study is important to conduct, whom it will benefit, and what contribution it will make to the discipline. It should also identify the limitations of the research. For instance, if a student is writing on a historical subject, they need to explain the relevance or context of the time period they will be exploring.

4. Conclusion

- This section should summarize the nature and intention of the student's work, conclude the discussion, and mention any pertinent information which may not have already been included above.

STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

There are over 600 registered student organizations at USF. Information about student organizations can be found on USF's Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement [webpage](#).

There are student organizations that may be of special interest to MURP students specifically:

- **Student Planning Organization (SPO):** The SPO provides professional support, advising, and networking opportunities for MURP students.
- **Transportation and Livability Student Group (LiveMove):** This organization provides students interested in multimodal transportation with opportunities to attend professional conferences, engage in community outreach, and network with professionals.
- **Intellectual Decisions for Environmental Awareness Solutions (IDEAS):** This organization's mission is to educate, engage, and empower people of all ages with sustainable solutions through research, action, and awareness. The group provides opportunities for direct action and for contacts with sustainability professionals.
- **Robert R. Green International City/County Management Association (ICMA) Student Chapter:** The USF ICMA student chapter introduces and integrates students to local government and provides professional, social, and networking opportunities to MURP students interested in local government.
- **American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) Student Chapter:** The USF ASPA student chapter strives to connect theory and practice by putting an emphasis on value systems such as professionalism, social equity, and code of ethics.

Enrolled MURP students can log onto [BullsConnect](#), using their USF NetID and password, to join a student organization.

Community Engagement:

MURP students have numerous opportunities to engage with local governments throughout the Tampa Bay region. Students may network by attending public meetings attended by elected and appointed officials, as well as events through the American Planning Association (APA) Florida Chapter ([Sun Coast](#) and [Heart of Florida](#) Sections) and other professional organizations:

- [Hillsborough County Government](#)
- [City of Tampa](#)
- [City of Temple Terrace](#)
- [Pinellas County Government](#)
- [City of St. Petersburg](#)

USF's Office of Community Engagement and Partnerships (OCEP) offers service learning and applied research opportunities for MURP students seeking relevant, real-world experience in community engagement. For more information, students are advised to contact OCEP by phone at (813) 974-4829, by [email](#), or visit their [webpage](#).

Mentor A Planning Student (MAPS) Program:

MAPS is a program conducted each academic year in collaboration with the Sun Coast Section of APA Florida. All MURP students are eligible to participate. The program matches MURP students with local planning professionals who provide shadowing opportunities, career advice, resume critiques, and valuable opportunities to network. A call for student participants goes out each Fall semester and the program runs through the Spring term. All MURP students are highly encouraged to participate.

STUDENT SUPPORT AND SERVICES

International Students:

International Services at USF World is the advising office for international students. Prospective or current MPA students can access information regarding employment, career planning, immigration compliance, and their visa status. For more information, students are advised to contact USF's International Services by phone at (813) 974-5102, by [email](#), or visit their [webpage](#).

Writing Center:

USF's Writing Studio is a free resource for undergraduate and graduate students. At the writing studio, a trained writing consultant will work individually with you on anything you're writing (in or out of class), at any point in the writing process—from brainstorming to editing. Appointments are recommended, but not required. For more information, or to make an appointment, students are advised to contact the Writing Studio by phone at (813) 974-8293, stop by the second floor of the Library (LIB 233), or visit their [webpage](#).

- **SMARTHINKING:** MURP students that are unable to make it to the writing studio may utilize SMARTHINKING, an online tutoring service that offers remote assistance on research papers by trained writing consultants. For more information on how to access this service, please consult USF's Academic Success Center's [webpage](#).

Subject Librarians:

Research librarians are available to MURP students through USF's Library services. The assigned subject research librarian offers expert advice in finding resources for course-relevant research projects. To get in contact with the research librarian subject expert and to view library subject guides for starting points in urban and regional planning research topics, click [here](#).

- To view online guides to learning the library, including navigating their webpage, accessing and searching databases, and much more, click [here](#).
- To view the library's instructional tutorial videos, click [here](#).

Student Services:

USF's Office of Student Success (formerly known as Student Affairs) coordinates education and support services for enrolled students. For more information on seeking career services, housing resources, veteran services, counseling, victim's assistance and advocacy, and student health services, please consult the Student Success [webpage](#).

Student Accessibility Services (SAS):

USF's Office of Student Accessibility Services (formerly known as Student with Disabilities Services) has numerous resources for MPA students with documented disabilities. For more information, students are advised to contact SAS by phone at (813) 974-4309, by [email](#), or visit their [webpage](#).

Important Resources for USF Students:

- Canvas Navigation [Student Guides](#)
- Canvas Navigation [Video Tutorials](#)
- [Campus Resources](#)
- [USF Bookstore](#)
- [Housing and Dining](#)
- [Technology Resources](#)
- [Financial Resources](#)
- [Health and Safety](#)
- [Internships and Student Employment](#)
- [Activities and Programs](#)
- [Arts and Culture](#)
- [Athletics and Fitness](#)
- [Graduation Preparation](#)



STUDENT-TO-STUDENT MESSAGE

The purpose of this handbook is to help you succeed in your graduate studies and to prepare you for a career in planning. Our MURP students have offered some of their own recommendations for success in the program:

- Become active in one of the School of Public Affairs' student organizations;
- Monitor your Canvas and USF email accounts frequently;
- Get to know the faculty and staff members, and consult with them often;
- Attend regional and national conferences if/when possible; and
- Take advantage of our mentorship and internship opportunities.