

# MCP ADMISSIONS

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### APPLICATION PROCESS

#### **What should I include in my Statement of Purpose?**

The goal of the Statement of Purpose is to give us the ability to assess whether our program is a good match for your professional goals. At a minimum, the Statement of Purpose should indicate, with clarity and focus, your purpose for pursuing graduate study in urban planning, your proposed emphasis of study, and any special interest(s) in the field. It should highlight how your academic and other experiences (professional work experience, internship, and/or volunteer opportunities) or activities (research, co-curricular activities, leadership roles, etc.) impacted this decision, and your perspective on how Berkeley's faculty and curriculum would enable you to find an intellectual home here. You should also give us a sense of why you feel that a Berkeley degree will help you reach your long-term career goals.

#### **What should I include in the required Personal History Statement?**

The goal of the Personal History Statement is to give us a better sense of who you are, and how you would contribute to the department's mission to create a community of students with diverse perspectives, life experiences, and intellectual interests. The Personal History Statement should convey who you are: how has the combination of your life experiences (for example, personal background, education, or volunteer or work histories) and role models (for example, family or professional mentors) influenced your decision to apply for a degree in city planning? How have your teaching, research, and professional or public service contributions shaped your thinking about equity, diversity, or sustainability in urban planning? What makes you unique, and how does who you are influence who you want to be as a planner? The Personal History Statement is also a chance to let the committee know about factors that may have influenced your academic or work history, such as barriers to access in higher education.

#### **What should I highlight in my resume?**

In addition to your work experience (including relevant internship and/or volunteer opportunities) and education, please include a comprehensive skills section (e.g., software or language proficiency). If you have any educational, volunteer, and/or employment experience related to the field of planning or urban studies, please make sure to highlight it. We advise students to be detailed and expansive so we can get a better sense of your background, skills, work experience, and accomplishments.

### **Whom should I ask to write me a letter of recommendation?**

Three letters are required for the application by the application deadline. The most helpful and strongest letters of recommendation are from individuals who have supervised the applicant's work in either an academic, employment (including professional work experience and/or internships), or community service capacity, who can evaluate the applicant's intellectual ability, creativity, initiative, leadership potential, and promise in the field of urban planning.

We prefer one of the three letters to come from an academic source (though not required). If you have been out of school for a couple of years, note that professors often keep records of students for years, and are used to receiving requests from alumni for letters of recommendation, so reach out to them and provide them with a copy of the exceptional term paper you had written in their class. If the course had a teaching assistant, consider reaching out to the TA as well, as they may be able to provide more insight and explanation of personal attributes to inform the professor's letter.

In regards to all letters (which can be any combination of academic and/or professional), you will want your strongest letters submitted, from individuals who know you well and can describe specific examples of your work that demonstrate your intellectual ability, creativity, initiative, leadership potential, and promise for graduate study in planning.

### **How much weight do you give to the General Record Examination (GRE)?**

FOR THE FALL 2023 ADMISSIONS CYCLE, THE GRE IS OPTIONAL FOR APPLICANTS TO THE M.C.P. PROGRAM. Though applicants are *not* required to take the GRE, if included, these scores will be considered as part of a comprehensive, holistic admissions review that examines your general academic record, letters of recommendation, statement of purpose, research experience and the context of achievement. It is most important that you therefore take the time to draft an excellent Statement of Purpose that allows the committee to get to know you and your goals, and that you select your recommenders carefully.

### **What GPA calculations are required for the application?**

We only require the calculation of your advanced GPA for all coursework after the first two years of UNDERGRADUATE study (excludes any coursework completed after earning bachelor's degree or recognized equivalent). Applicants are also required to enter their cumulative GPA into the application which is automatically calculated by your undergraduate university and is listed in your undergraduate transcript. You do NOT need to calculate the other GPAs listed in the application: major and courses related to field of graduate study. You may leave these boxes blank. (Link: [AGPA Calculator](#))

For those applicants whose undergraduate university or college does NOT use a 4-point scale, the calculation of an advanced GPA is NOT required. If this applies to you, please enter your

university's GPA into the Other Scale GPA box on the application. For all the other GPA boxes (advanced, major, courses related to field of graduate study), enter "N/A."

### **Am I required to submit a portfolio?**

The portfolio is only required if you are applying for the Master of City Planning with the Urban Design Concentration, or if you are applying for the concurrent degree in City Planning/Master of Architecture (MCP/M.Arch) and City Planning/Landscape Architecture (MCP/MLA-2D or 3D only).

### **Am I required to submit a writing sample?**

Though optional, submitting a sample of your writing that you are proud of can only help your application. You may submit published articles, an undergraduate thesis or portion thereof, papers written for courses, or material written in a professional capacity. The writing sample should give evidence of your ability to think critically and analytically; it should not be purely descriptive.

### **Who reviews my application?**

Your application will be reviewed by two faculty members: one from the MCP Program Committee and one from the primary concentration of interest that you designate on your application. Current MCP students (in the final year of the program) may review your applications as well but DO NOT make final admission decisions.

### **Are admissions decisions made on a rolling basis?**

Admissions decisions are NOT made on a rolling basis. Thus, there is no advantage to submitting your application before or on the day of the deadline. All applications are reviewed after the deadline.

### **Why are faculty members unresponsive to my emails?**

We receive around 400 applications every year and are unable to respond to all individual queries. Instead, we make opportunities to interact with faculty available through webinars and the Open House. Furthermore, incoming students will be paired with an "MCP Buddy"—usually a current student in the same program/concentration or with similar interests—who can answer questions and help with the transition into life at Berkeley.

# FINANCIAL AID

## **Where can I obtain more information on tuition and fees?**

For up-to-date information about tuition and fees, please visit the [UC Berkeley's Registrar's Website: Fee Schedule - Graduate: Professional - College of Environmental Design](#). We also encourage you to view the [Graduate Cost of Attendance](#) and [available financial aid and scholarship opportunities](#).

## **Can I obtain California residency for tuition purposes?**

If a student meets the eligible immigration status and satisfies the residency requirements, the student can apply for a resident classification in the second year and submit a Statement of Legal Residence by the residency determination deadline. More information can be viewed here: [Residency Requirements: Graduate Students](#).

## **On what basis are departmental fellowships offered, and how can I obtain one?**

The number of fellowships offered varies from year to year depending on available funding in the department's budget. Initial fellowships for incoming students are based on merit and diversity (these awards provide financial assistance for entering students whose backgrounds, interests, or goals serve to enhance the level of diversity within the graduate community). You are automatically considered for departmental merit-based fellowships when you submit your online graduate application. There is no separate application for departmental merit-based fellowships. In addition to completion of the appropriate Economic Background of the UC Berkeley Graduate Application, submission of the required application components will automatically qualify you for fellowship eligibility.

Subsequent fellowships are available from DCRP on a competitive basis to those who apply and are based primarily on a need basis. We do our best to allocate fellowship funds equitably, with both student need and merit in mind.

## **What can I do ahead of my first semester to put me in a better position to become a Graduate Student Researcher (GSR)?**

GSR positions with DCRP faculty are limited in number and not all opportunities are broadly advertised. If you are interested in GSR positions with DCRP faculty, you should contact the faculty member you are interested in doing research with, well before the beginning of the semester you are seeking an appointment for, to inquire about the availability of positions and application processes. Send your resume (highlighting previous research experience) to faculty you would like to work with upon receiving your admission letter. Other research centers or departments will send out a broad email asking for applications - it is important to submit your application in advance of the deadline.

GSR positions at 10 hours per week or more (>25% time) are eligible for partial fee remission (which covers tuition, health insurance, and student service and campus fees). These partial fee remission jobs are not easy to get (basic math: paying your tuition and salary costs faculty at least \$80/hour!). So, be sure to let faculty know if you are interested in working just a few hours a week, without fee remission, at least to start. That might be a successful strategy to get your foot in the door for a partial fee remission job! Visit the [Graduate Student Division website](#) for more information on academic appointments.

### **What is the Arcus Social Justice Corps (ASJC) Fellowship?**

The ASJC is a NEW fellowship program at the College of Environmental Design that offers significant debt-relief to select graduate students who intend to do social justice work after graduation. [Details are available here.](#)

## **PROGRAM DETAILS**

### **What is the national ranking of the Department of City and Regional Planning?**

Our program ranks among the top schools in the country, as well as internationally. According to Planetizen, the MCP program at UC Berkeley is currently ranked 2nd in the United States (2020).

### **Is the MCP accredited?**

Yes, it is fully accredited by the [Planning Accreditation Board \(PAB\)](#), a joint undertaking of the [American Institute of Certified Planners \(AICP\)](#) and the [Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning \(ACSP\)](#).

### **Is the MCP a STEM-designated program?**

Yes, it is an approved field of study within the U.S. government's official STEM fields list. Practical work experience in your field of study, typically after completion of a degree for a maximum of 36 months (12 months of "regular" OPT with a 24-month extension possible). For further details regarding [STEM extensions](#), contact the [Berkeley International Office \(BIO\)](#).

### **What is the duration of the MCP?**

The MCP is a two-year program. If a student is completing a [concurrent degree](#), the program duration is extended.

### **Can I complete more than one concentration?**

We encourage students to specialize in two concentrations in order to “break down the silos.” We thus provide the flexibility to do this. Students can choose two or more concentrations in Environmental Planning and Healthy Cities (EPHC), Housing, Community, and Economic Development (HCED), Transportation Policy and Planning, and Urban Design. We have had students specialize in every possible combination of concentrations!

### **What is the benefit of completing a thesis, Client Report (CR), or Professional Report (PR)?**

Students in the MCP program must complete a thesis or capstone project (the CR or PR), usually in their final year. The goal of the thesis/capstone project is to support a student’s professional development by completing a significant body of work representing advanced subject and methodological expertise.

We are one of the few programs in the nation that offer the opportunity for students to complete a research or capstone project that encourages them to explore planning topics at a much deeper level. Through internships and research, students work on their capstone projects while forming relationships with organizations they might seek employment with after graduation.

### **What kind of internships can I get?**

Students typically complete their internship requirement in between their first and second year, and the organization where they complete their internships may sponsor their client report. Students seek out opportunities according to individual academic and professional interests. Internship employers can range from agencies, nonprofits, firm and consulting agencies. Previous internship sites have included BRIDGE Housing, City of Berkeley, Greenbelt Alliance, the National Park Service, San Francisco Planning Department, San Francisco Metropolitan Transportation Agency, and the US Environmental Protection Agency.

## **JOB PLACEMENT**

### **What kind of jobs can I get after completing the program?**

Our graduates secure employment in the nonprofit, public, and private sectors, including consulting agencies and local and regional government agencies or departments. Sample job titles of alumni include Project Manager at City of Oakland, Senior Associate at PolicyLink, Senior Planner at San Francisco Planning Department, Transportation Planner at Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, Associate at BAE Urban Economics, and Project Developer at Mercy Housing.

# DECIDING ON BERKELEY

## How do I find housing?

Most graduate students live in off-campus rental housing in Berkeley or one of the surrounding communities. The Department of City and Regional Planning has strong internal networks, including listservs for current and incoming graduate students, to help you find housing. The University also offers a free-to-use service called Cal Rentals, which provides rental listings, information and advising for students looking for off-campus housing.

## Why Berkeley?

First, we have the smartest and most interesting and dedicated graduate students of any university in the country. You will make friends for life here. Second, we have one of the most diverse and flexible curriculum in the country, with the widest set of course choices. Third, our faculty teach and conduct cutting-edge research in many different areas. The product of this year's research is in next year's classes. We have opportunities for graduate students to work on research projects. This includes work in Bay Area communities, but also in international cities such as Bogotá and Lagos. Fourth, Berkeley is the greatest public graduate university in the world, with more interesting courses, students, faculty and research projects than anywhere else. Fifth, the Bay Area is home to some of the most interesting innovations in urban planning, from affordable housing to climate change adaptation and mitigation to health in all policies and transit oriented development. And, the food, coffee, and weather aren't bad either! Sixth, we have the best and friendliest staff in our departments. You will never go hungry at Berkeley — for food, friends, or knowledge.

## Why MCP @ Berkeley?

First, you will be supported by active student groups such as [College of Environmental Design Students of Color \(CEDSOC\)](#), Low Income First Generation (LIFgen), and [Planning Student Association \(PSA\)](#). Second, there are more opportunities for learning through concurrent graduate programs with other schools and colleges, such as in Public Health, Law, New Media, and Engineering. Other multidisciplinary programs include [Global Metropolitan Studies \(GMS\)](#), as well as [graduate certificates](#) in Global Urban Humanities, Geographic Information Science and Technology, and Real Estate. Third, the hands-on studios give students a real-world experience with city planning by carrying out fieldwork and developing proposals. Fourth, DCRP has an excellent lecture series, and students have access to other lectures, exhibits, and special events hosted by other departments in the College of Environmental Design, as well as campus-wide events featuring academics and professionals from a broader range of fields.