



# SUSTAINABLE URBAN PLANNING

COMPETITIVE CITIES | JUST CITIES | GREEN CITIES

2019  
STRATEGIC  
PLAN

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THE GEORGE  
WASHINGTON  
UNIVERSITY

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WASHINGTON, DC

## PREAMBLE

This plan is an update to the Sustainable Urban Planning Program's (SUP's) 2016 strategic plan, **Looking to 2026**, and, as such, it is adopted under the auspices of the existing plan. All revisions (for example, to the mission statement and core values) and initiatives (for example, objectives and strategic actions) supplement and/or supersede those set out in the 2016 plan. As such, the present document is an incorporated, though not merged, extension of **Looking to 2026**, and may be referred to in that manner in relevant SUP documents. What follows are a set of concrete updates that will guide SUP through the next years, keyed to the overarching themes of governance, impact, identity, and the future.

This plan was developed via a series of strategic planning sessions—engaging over 100 individuals, many of whom participated in multiple events—that took place over a nine month long period in 2018, including, but not limited to, a series of public sessions held on April 6th; September 7th, 14th, 21st, and 28th; October 12th; November 30th; and December 7th. Participants included all SUP faculty; current students; all available alumni; SUP Advisory Board members, including several from outside the Washington, DC region; members of the National Capital Area Chapter of the American Planning Association (NCAC-APA); College of Professional Studies (CPS) leadership; the GW Provost's office; and more. The plan also incorporates input from SUP Advisory Board member the Honorable Ronald Sims—former Deputy Secretary of Housing and Urban Development—drawn from an informal visit (dinner) and keynote address he delivered at the annual meeting of NCAC-APA, hosted by SUP on GW's main campus on October 18th. Finally, the plan has been informed by a December 10th workshop, open to the GW community and NCAC-APA, on Interrupting Unconscious Bias, run by GW Vice Provost for Diversity, Equity and Community Engagement, Caroline Laguerre-Brown. Every effort was made to include as many voices as possible and to ensure that this document expresses the consensus of the SUP community.

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# MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Sustainable Urban Planning Program is to train leaders in the field of urban planning. The program makes the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental sustainability the focus of planning in order to promote competitive, just, and green cities. It is founded on the core values of innovation, equity, and ecocentrism—plus the practices of pragmatism, advocacy, democracy, inclusivity, research, and world engagement. The impact of the Sustainable Urban Planning Program is measured by its success in graduating practitioners of planning into positions that enable them to act as agents of change within the urban arena. The program is distinguished by its holistic emphasis on sustainability and planning in an era of anthropogenic climate change.

**CORE VALUES** are the principles that define the culture of SUP—they describe who we are and the kind of professionals we aspire to be:

- **Innovation** challenges the status quo by bringing new ideas, methods, and solutions into the urban planning arena.
- **Equity** demands fair and impartial treatment of individuals, cultures, places, and other entities impacted by planning.
- **Ecocentrism** requires planning from the point of view that people reside within a broader system—the ecosphere—than that created by human beings.

**CORE PRACTICES** are the practices through which we in SUP carry our Core Values:

- **Pragmatism** is a form of knowledge building that occurs through interactive experience, reflective practice, and lifelong learning.
- **Advocacy** involves using the knowledge and language of cities to promote objectively desirable results that further the public good—especially in the public domain and in the face of competing interests.
- **Democracy** is key to planning in order to ensure that activities reflect the interests of the whole and not only those of an individual/s or otherwise narrow constituency.
- **Inclusivity** is fundamental to the planning process because decisions must reflect the plurality of the cultures, landscapes, people, societies, and systems that they impact.
- **Research** is the engine of knowledge creation—the scientific method is responsible for centuries of human progress—and the foundation of evidence-based policy.
- **World Engagement** means proactively looking outward to find opportunities to learn from and collaborate with others from nearby—and around the globe.

**CORE COMPETENCIES** are a generalized set of skills that SUP students acquire during their time in the program and continue to grow after entering the planning profession:

- **Critical Thinking** is the ability to ask, research and analyze questions in order to set goals, solve problems, and formulate and implement shared visions of urbanization.
- **Communication** is the ability to convey information and ideas to—plus, solicit and incorporate feedback from—a variety of stakeholders.
- **Collaboration** is the ability to incorporate the views, motivations, interests, and strengths of others in the making and implementation of plans.
- **Intellectual Leadership** is the ability to use knowledge of sustainability to create innovative practices that inform/guide the planning process.

- **Ethical Practice** is the ability to advocate for and make choices that uphold the principles and values of the planning profession, as defined by AICP.
- **Planning Process Methods** is the ability to connect planning theory and practice to other sources of knowledge in the plan visioning, making, implementation, and evaluation processes.

**CORE GOALS** are SUP's desired outcomes, defined according to the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental sustainability:

- **Competitive Cities** are cities that are economically desirable as places to both live and do business.
- **Just Cities** are cities that are socially inclusive and equitable in the experience of those residing in them.
- **Green Cities** are cities that are environmentally sound in the sense that they operate as components of the ecosphere.

**SWOT** is an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that SUP must be cognizant of as it moves forward. While not exhaustive, the most salient of those identified during the strategic planning process are as follows:

- **Strength:** SUP has a unique identity and has advanced a new paradigm for planning education that serves its students very well.
- **Weakness:** SUP is a highly decentralized organization that relies heavily on a small number of key individuals.
- **Opportunity:** SUP has established an outstanding record of success and earned national and international visibility, placing it in a position to attain preeminence in its unique areas of focus.
- **Threat:** SUP is a small, boutique program that must remain ever-attentive to its own scale and the evolving needs of the profession it serves.

**OBJECTIVES** are goals—keyed to the themes of governance, impact, identity, and the future—that SUP considers vital to its future and commits to achieving via its actions and activities over the coming years:

- **Governance:** Strengthen the program's governance processes, by creating a faculty committee overseeing academic integrity, plus formal roles for alumni and the planning profession.
- **Impact:** Enhance the impact that SUP has on the field of urban planning by extending its service to the profession.
- **Identity:** Secure, and build upon, SUP's unique identity through a commitment to continual improvement in academic assessment.
- **Future:** Grow SUP through an additional FTE and a commitment to achieving a steady-state enrollment—and corresponding graduation rate—of 20 students annually.

**STRATEGIC ACTIONS** are specific, interconnected actions that SUP is taking, or will take, in order to fulfill its mission, values and objectives, as set out in preceding sections of this plan:

- **Actions Toward Enhancing Our Governance:**
  - Maintain a rigorous system of self-study, academic assessment, and programmatic tracking, under the direct supervision of BOTH the CPS Dean's office and GW Provost's office, aimed at continual improvement.
  - Immediately establish a biennially rotating Faculty Committee on Student Progress and Capstone Supervision, governed by the core values, activities, competencies, and goals set out above.

- Establish an Alumni Advisory Board; starting in AY 2019, hold alumni reception, once annually; and, starting in AY 2020 conduct an alumni survey, tracking job placement, career satisfaction, and AICP attainment.
- Leverage, starting in AY 2019, the Professional Advisory Board for an annual meeting and use feedback gained from the meeting to inform academic assessment and curricular improvement.

• **Actions Toward Enhancing Our Impact:**

- Seek to establish a leadership in diversity and inclusiveness within GW and the local planning community.
- Hold roundtables, serving the interests of the planning profession at least twice annually, in the fall and spring semesters.
- Hold research symposiums biannually—on even-numbered years—bringing leading scholars together to speak on topics of interest to the planning profession.
- Maintain SUP’s active participation in NCAC-APA; host the NCAC-APA’s annual meeting on GW’s campus, as the program did in 2019, in each odd-numbered year.

• **Actions Toward Enhancing Our Identity:**

- SUP commits to pursuing a diversity plan that includes maintaining and enhancing the diversity of faculty, the student body, and voices studied throughout the curriculum; the ambition of this plan is to establish SUP as a beacon of inclusivity at GW and a leading voice of diversity within the local planning community.
- Starting in AY 2019, applicants will be given a rubric to respond to when they write their statement of purpose; this rubric will consist of SUP’s mission statement; core values; core practices; core competencies; and core goals.
- Once in the program, all students should be required to identify a faculty mentor(s) no later than 30 (out of 48) credits into the curriculum; ideally, closer to 21 credits.
- All capstone projects shall meet a high level of academic standard and be consistent with the mission and core goals of SUP; they shall also reflect the core values and practices of the program and demonstrate its core competencies.

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### • Actions Toward Enhancing Our Future:

- SUP seeks to establish an additional FTE by AY 2022; the program expresses a strong desire that this position be filled by a woman and/or a person of color.
- Through this FTE, SUP commits to expanding its “footprint,” by recruiting an individual with expertise in Africa, Latin America, and/or a part of the world / dimension (for example, gender) of sustainable urban planning not already covered by the program.
- SUP commits to a steady-state enrollment—and corresponding graduation rate, with an attrition rate of no more than 1/20—of 20 students annually, which (nominally) means admitting five students (spring admits are considered “early” starts) in the spring semester and 15 in the fall semester.
- SUP seeks to establish a Peace Corps Fellows Program by AY 2022; GW is one of the largest originators of Peace Corps volunteers, and numerous SUP students have been Peace Corps alumni.

## MEASUREMENT

The overarching outcome SUP seeks to establish through the implementation of this plan is straightforward: sustained **growth in quality**, in terms of student learning and achievement. Measurement of this outcome is illustrated in Figure 1, which serves as a map of the program’s way forward. The figure illustrates SUP’s growth path, tracked along three axes—x, y, and z—where x is tuition, measured as dollars/credit hour; y is enrollment, measured as number of people entering SUP MPS program annually; and z is quality. As of AY 2018, SUP is meeting its steady-state enrollment target of admitting 20 students annually; no further growth is possible in this direction. Likewise, as of AY 2018, SUP’s tuition has been brought in line with that of similar programs at GW, including those in the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences, the Elliott School of International Affairs, and the Trachtenberg School of Public Policy; no further growth is possible in this direction. This leaves the axis z, which tracks the quality of the program and has no upper limit.

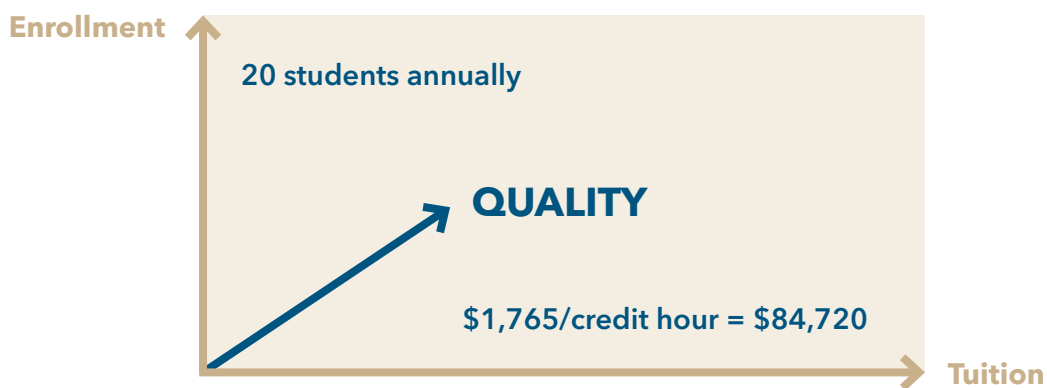


Figure 1. SUP's Growth Path

Like tuition and enrollment, quality is a tangible variable that can be quantified in a variety of ways and tracked over time. The program’s public information page already reports measures of student satisfaction and achievement, plus retention and graduation rates; no MPS graduates have become AICP yet, but that is also being tracked. Beginning in AY 2019—after establishing the Alumni Advisory Board—SUP will begin tracking additional measures of alumni success and satisfaction, to be identified by the Alumni Advisory Board. Under the supervision of the CPS Dean’s Office and the GW Provost’s Office, SUP has also established a series of annual assessment measures aimed at measuring quality in terms of both input and output. A more qualita-

tive assessment is set to be made annually, via the Faculty Committee on Student Progress and Capstone Supervision, formed this spring semester. It is clear from the effort that went into this plan and all other analysis—including that of market conditions—that SUP’s growth path lies along axis z, quality. It is fitting, then, that the bottom line of this update to Looking to 2026, which sets course for the foreseeable future, is to affirm SUP’s commitment to academic and professional quality—and the program’s vision of attaining preeminence in its unique areas of focus: sustainability and urbanization in an era of anthropogenic climate change.

## DIVERSITY PLAN

Looking to 2026, SUP’s strategic plan, expresses binding commitments to equity, inclusivity, and social justice—it also commits to “maintaining and enhancing the diversity of faculty; the student body; and voices studied throughout the curriculum.” A key component of the program’s diversity plan is its intended addition of an FTE by AY 2022: the planning process affirmed a mandate to diversity, by yielding the strong desire that this position be filled by a woman and/or a person of color. Moreover, additional steps are being taken to proactively fulfill SUP’s commitment to diversity with the goal of establishing a leadership position vis-a-vis inclusivity within GW and in service of the planning community:

- On December 10, 2018, SUP hosted a workshop, open to the GW community and NCAC-APA, aimed at expanding awareness of diversity and inclusivity. The workshop, called Interrupting Unconscious Bias, was run by GW Vice Provost for Diversity, Equity and Community Engagement, Caroline Laguerre-Brown, who asked participants to come prepared having taken two implicit association tests, for race and gender. SUP anticipates hosting this event regularly, once every other year.
- In AY 2019 a sizable amount (\$5,000) of SUP’s marketing and recruitment budget was spent targeting undergraduate students from the four top-tier HBCUs: Morehouse College, Howard University, Spelman College, and Hampton University.
- The program maintains a version of its website implemented in Chinese, with the goal of recruiting Chinese students and making the program welcoming to their parents and other family members. SUP has a strong emphasis on Asia and seeks to serve Asian job markets, by training students to work there.

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*SUP's strategic plan expresses binding commitments to equality, inclusivity, and social justice*

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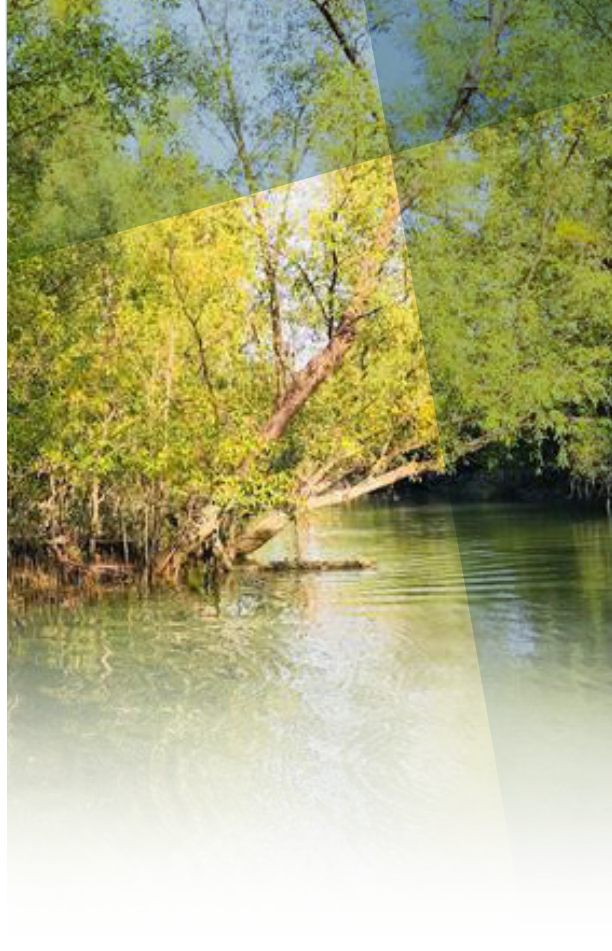


- Through the FTE it aims to create by 2022, SUP commits to expanding its “footprint,” by recruiting an individual with expertise in Africa, Latin America, and/or a part of the world / dimension (for example, gender) of sustainable urban planning not already covered by the program.
- As part of its ongoing effort toward curriculum assessment and improvement, SUP regularly runs a special practicum focused specifically on identifying opportunities for including new and underrepresented voices across the SUP curriculum. Further, SUP has adopted a rubric on intercultural knowledge and competence.

In a November 2017 survey, 97% of SUP students agreed with the statement that “my classmates are diverse.” In January, there were at least 40 students enrolled in SUP, 10 of whom were men and 30 of whom were women; the student body is racially diverse and includes people from across the world. The plan articulated here is intended to proactively ensure that SUP remains a beacon for inclusivity for years to come.

## SUCCESSION PLAN

Like all organizations, SUP aspires to recruit fresh leadership—and simultaneously grow the size of its full-time faculty—over time, so it has developed a plan for doing so. As noted in the SWOT analysis, SUP is presently a decentralized organization, with most faculty based external to GW, that relies heavily on a small number of key individuals. The program relies particularly heavily on the program director who acts as the keystone to the organization and is the only faculty member employed full time by GW. (It is important to note that the SUP program director is supported by members of the CPS leadership, who are highly operational, including the Associate Dean for Faculty Development, the Associate Dean for Academic Excellence, and the Assistant Dean for Student Services; each of these individuals, and their teams, are engaged in the day-to-day operations of SUP. That said, all of SUP’s faculty are attached to the program long term, with (by 2019) most having contributed more than five years of service and some having contributed eight. Still, it is the expressed desire of the SUP community to add an additional FTE, resources permitting, as early as 2022.



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Toward this end, SUP's strategic plan, Looking to 2026, sets out the following specific goals for program succession:

- SUP seeks to establish an additional FTE by AY 2022; the program expresses a strong desire that this position be filled by a woman and/or a person of color.
- Through this FTE, SUP commits to expanding its "footprint," by recruiting an individual with expertise in Africa, Latin America, and/or a part of the world / dimension of sustainable urban planning (for example, race or gender) not already covered by the program.

Recent steps—namely establishing a consistent enrollment target of 20 new MPS students annually, and raising tuition—were taken for the expressed purpose of placing SUP in a position to support an additional FTE. It is intended that this FTE be a teaching position that would facilitate a transition to program leadership by retaining the incumbent director, while, at the same time, bringing in fresh leadership. Resources permitting, the initial step on this path will be taken in AY 2021 with the creation of half an FTE, stepping up to a full FTE in 2022. This progression would enable the current director to mentor the potential successor for a year, before the successor takes over all duties the following year. This period of transition is important because care will be taken to ensure the new director receives appropriate mentoring on the workings of SUP. As the transition occurs, the new director will have a reduced teaching load—again, the envisioned FTE is to be a teaching position—in order to free their time for administrative duties.

Throughout the strategic planning process, dating to 2016 and earlier, concern has been voiced over SUP's heavy reliance on an individual. Two interrelated counterpoints (among others) are relevant to this concern. First, SUP is no longer a young, fledgling organization: as of this writing, the program is set to close out its eighth year of operation. Over the past eight years, numerous procedures, processes, and safeguards have been established to ensure the stability and longevity of the program, no matter who serves as program director. Moreover, as already noted, SUP's faculty is well-established, with some having served since the very beginning of the program, so institutional knowledge is well-developed and well-distributed. Second, SUP's present director has served since the program's founding and, while that individual played a vast role at the beginning, as the organization has evolved and strengthened so, too, has the role of the director. In particular, the program director's portfolio is no longer that of a

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“founder” but, instead of an interlocutor who facilitates operations in a manner typical of a department chair. In these two ways, it is recognized that SUP is no more (or less) vulnerable to a change in leadership than any other academic unit—at GW or elsewhere.

When SUP recruits its next program director, it will follow standard GW hiring processes. While the CPS leadership, and, ultimately, the GW Provost, will be responsible for the hiring action, the search committee led by a CPS Associate Dean will include the incumbent program director, SUP faculty, students, and at least one of our alumni. Overall succession—and all other recruitment for full-time employment in SUP—will be covered by procedures maintained by GW’s Office of Faculty Recruitment and Personnel Relations.

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