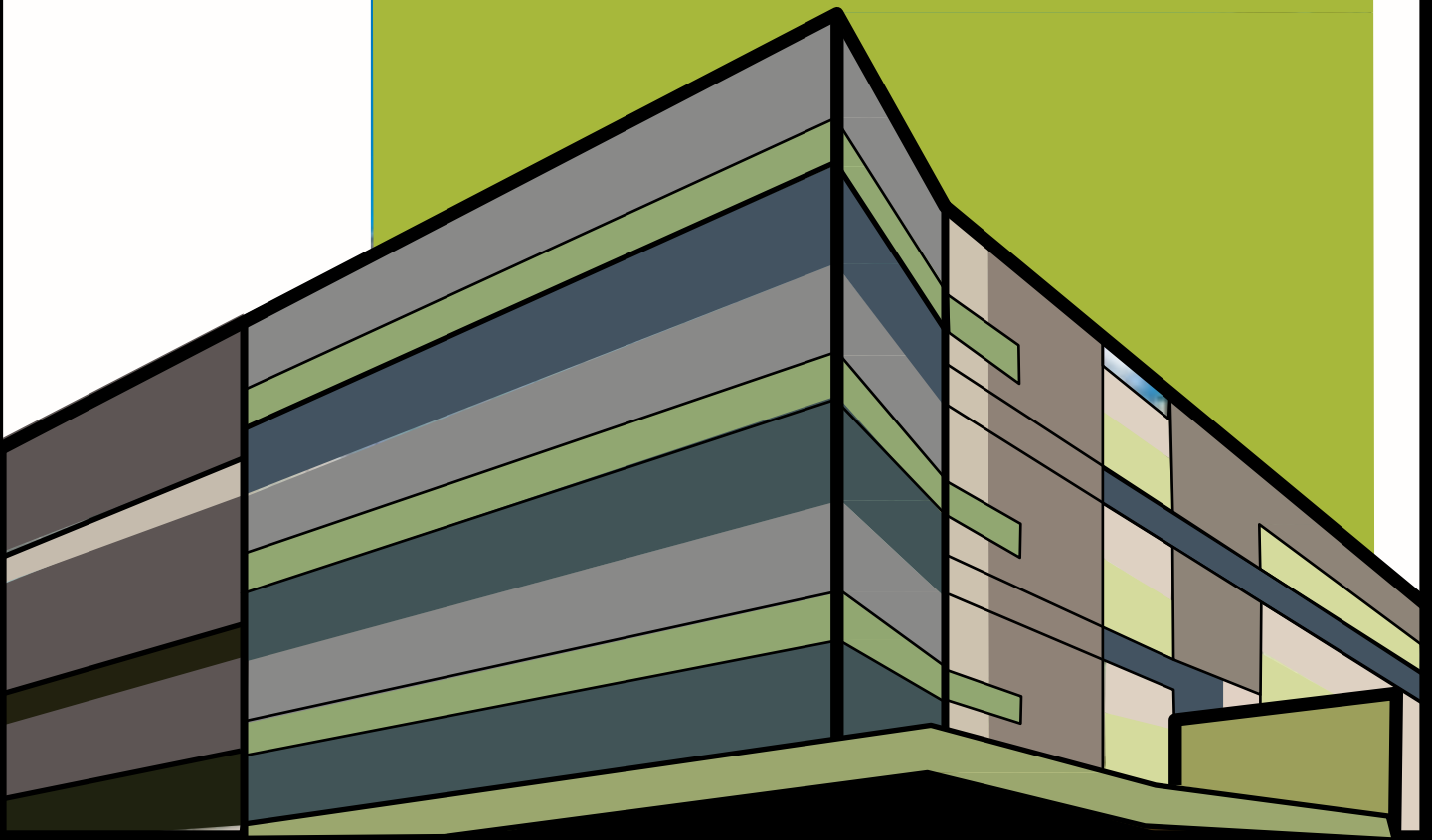


School of Planning

Grad Student Handbook

2026



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

FACULTY OF ENVIRONMENT
SCHOOL OF PLANNING

THINK BIG!

Welcome to Grad School! School of Planning

We are pleased to welcome you to the School of Planning at the University of Waterloo! We hope that your experience here will be filled with many exciting and rewarding opportunities.

This handbook provides you with an overview of where you can find some of the most important information as you set off on your graduate school journey. Most of the content is purposely linked to other sources so that the handbook remains up to date. Please feel free to contact the [School of Planning administration](#) if you have any questions or concerns.

Here in Planning, we like to think BIG!
Addressing a vast range of interdisciplinary issues. [Watch our intro video here.](#)



Welcome message from the Associate Director



Zhu (Joe) Qian, PhD

Associate Director, Graduate Studies |
Associate Professor

Contact information

z3qian@uwaterloo.ca
519-888-4567 ext. 48426
Location: EV3 3253

Dear new grad students,

I would like to extend a warm welcome as you are about to begin an amazing journey at the School of Planning. You've made the right decision in joining our community, which will pave the way for the success of your future career.

Here at the School, you will be meeting and working with people who share the same passion as you, dedicated to sustainably reshaping our communities. I encourage you to reach out to people with diverse backgrounds and proactively work with your supervisor to extend the breadth and increase the depth of your knowledge.

The School will help you with the "planning" of your academic life while you are here. We are strongly committed to supporting your accomplishments. We will be there to witness and celebrate every achievement you make during this journey. Let's work together to continue to make the visions and aspirations of our School a reality!

My best wishes to you for a wonderful and productive graduate life.

Sincerely,
Joe Qian
Associate Director, School of Planning

This handbook is designed to help you become familiar with our graduate programs and assist you throughout your academic life here. It is strongly recommended you take time to read over the contents within this handbook and refer back to them as needed.

Also, you should explore [the School of Planning Homepage](#) as well as our [University Homepage](#).

THINK BIG!

What is Planning?

With globalization and environmental changes, planners must increasingly deal with urbanization and environmental issues, such as:

- conversion of land from natural habitats to urban land use
- creation, use, and preservation of natural spaces and parks
- development of transportation networks and infrastructure
- water and air quality

The term “planning” refers to the scientific, aesthetic, and orderly disposition of land, resources, facilities and services with a view to securing the physical, economic and social efficiency, health and well-being of urban and rural communities. Responsible planning has always been vital to the sustainability of safe, healthy, and secure communities.

Planners address problems of sparsely populated regions, parks and protected areas, and resource hinterlands. In addition, the profession involves:

- planning social and community services
- managing cultural and heritage resources
- creating economic capacity in local communities
- working internationally, etc.



What is a planner?

A planner is an educated professional who contributes to making better decisions about how the future of our communities will unfold- addressing the look, feel, and function of communities in concert with people and the environment.

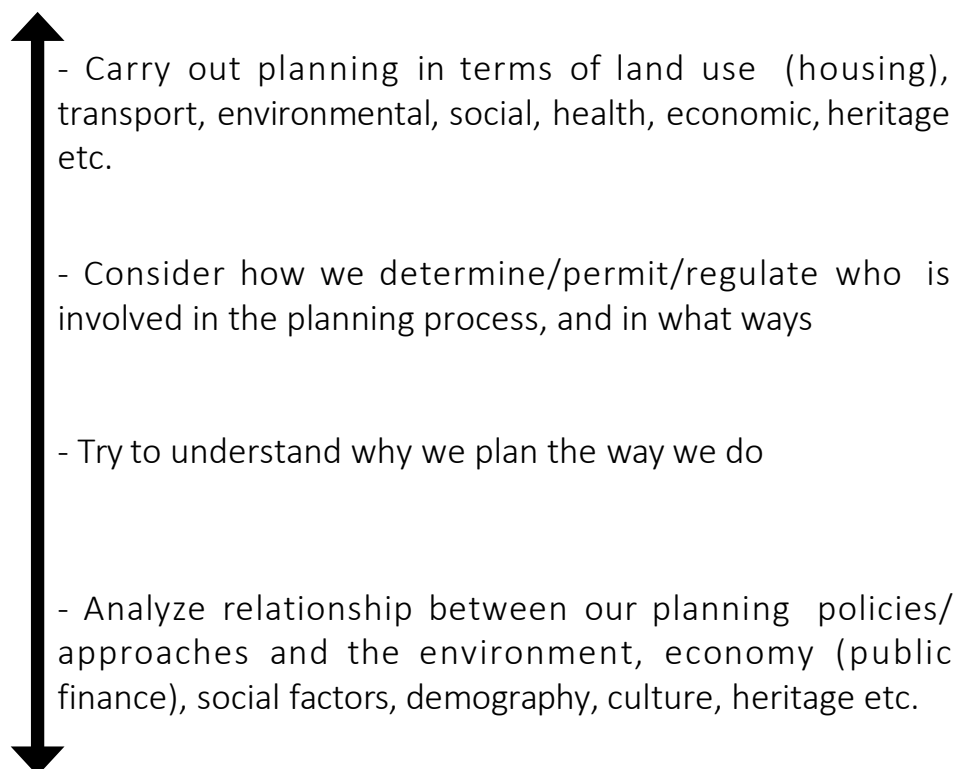
Planners work for government, consulting firms, land developers, builders, community groups, non-government organizations, private industry, universities and colleges.

Planners are professionals who support the creation of vibrant and healthy communities, the connection of people and their environment, the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, and a heightened sense of place and respect for the emerging diversity of our communities.

What do Planners do?

Practice

There are those who



Research

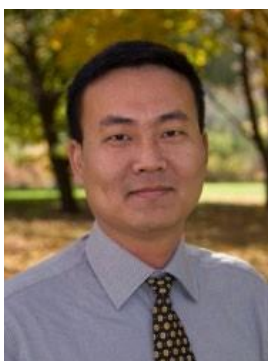
"Very Important Persons"

Our administration is responsible for the operation of graduate programs, including admission, scholarship decisions, internship, degree requirements, comprehensive examination and thesis, and monitoring students progress. Here are some "VIPs" you need to know.



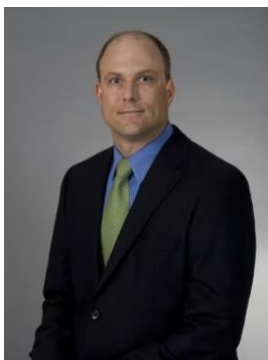
Tracey Beirness

Graduate Program Administrator



Joe Qian

Associate Director, Graduate Studies



Jeff Casello

Director, School of Planning



Ian Rowlands

Associate Dean, Graduate Studies

Role of Graduate Administrator

Tracey Beirness

Manages all aspects of the graduate offerings which include three Master's programs (MA, MES, MPlan), a graduate diploma (GDip), and one Doctoral program (PhD).

Location: EV3 4269

Phone: (519) 888-4567 ext. 48154

Email: tracey.beirness@uwaterloo.ca



Come see me about:

- Forms (e.g., change of supervisor, drop/add form...)
- Program requirements
- Committee
- Defence preparation
- General inquiries
- Funding/payroll
- Scholarship applications
- TA assignments
- Course enrollment
- Internship inquiries and approvals



Program Introduction

The School of Planning uses an interdisciplinary approach to address a range of environmental and planning issues. Our graduate programs focus on planning as a process, which includes policy-making, research, and decision-making. This approach gives equal emphasis to the “how” and “why” of planning, and integrates several disciplines in the social, pure, and applied sciences. A collection of graduate programs are designed for students who seek to enhance their knowledge relating to the planning field.

MA & MES Planning

<https://uwaterloo.ca/planning/graduate-studies/ma-and-mes>

MPLAN & GDip Planning

<https://uwaterloo.ca/planning/graduate-studies/mplan-and-gdip-online>

PhD Planning

<https://uwaterloo.ca/planning/graduate-studies/doctoral-phd>



University Policies

We strongly believe university policies are essential to the success of your academic performance as well as our graduate programs. We encourage you to review the following policies to ensure you are on the right track throughout your grad school.

POLICY 73 – Intellectual Property Rights

<https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policies/policy-73-intellectual-property-rights>

POLICY 33 – Ethical Behaviour

<https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-33>

- *“just and supportive community based on equality and respect for individual differences”*
- *“an environment free from harassment and discrimination”*
- *Human Rights Code – right to equal treatment*

Human Rights, Equity and Inclusion Office

<https://uwaterloo.ca/human-rights-equity-inclusion>

Guidelines on graduate student support

<https://uwaterloo.ca/graduate-studies-academic-calendar/general-information-and-regulations/guidelines-graduate-student-support>

Guide for graduate research and supervision

<https://uwaterloo.ca/graduate-studies-postdoctoral-affairs/faculty-and-staff/guide-graduate-research-and-supervision>



Research Integrity

The School of Planning is committed to maintaining a high standard of integrity in research and scholarship of our community. It is our responsibility to create an academic milieu where integrity is valued and exercised by every individual. We emphasize and advocate students to stick with the best qualities of our community, including honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

We condemn any forms of irresponsible conduct of research, including false recording, manipulation of reporting of information, plagiarism, and unauthorized use of confidential research results of others. We will keep addressing this throughout our graduate programs, and you are welcome to reach out to the [Office of Research Ethics](#) for more detailed information.

Note, there is a mandatory Academic Integrity Workshop held during the Faculty of Environment Orientation.

More on:

<https://uwaterloo.ca/research/office-research-ethics/research-integrity>



Research Ethics

Research ethics is vital to research carried out in the field of planning. You are encouraged to work with the Office of Research Ethics (ORE) to determine whether your research needs approval through the Waterloo Ethics Process. The ORE offers help on research associated with animals, human participants, and that using a tissue or bodily fluids.

Please be advised to consider the approval times before planning your research schedule. We strongly recommend students reach out to ORE for a better picture of how the research ethics system works for your forthcoming graduate career.

Helpful Links:

<https://uwaterloo.ca/research/office-research-ethics/research-ethics-system-login>

<https://uwaterloo.ca/research/office-research-ethics/research-human-participants/frequently-asked-questions#How long is ethics process>



Administrative Matters

The following items will not apply to all students but it is valuable to review this information regardless. Feel free to contact your Graduate Administrator for any questions you have or further instructions you might need.

TA time form and training

<https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/ta-training-workshops-faculty-environment>

<https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/ta-handbook>

Note, TAships are paid positions that contribute in essential ways to our program delivery. Get in touch with the assigned course instructor as soon as possible. The SoP and the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) offer a wide range of programs that you may find helpful as well.

Fee arrangement

- using promissory note (TA/RA/RS)

<https://uwaterloo.ca/finance/student-financial-services/how-become-fees-arranged/promissory-note/promissory-note-step-step-instructions>

Human resources forms

- Direct deposit, tax forms, address information all need to be completed through Workday
- SIN number and expiration date (if applicable)

Office space

<https://uwaterloo.ca/environment/faculty-staff/policies-procedures-terms-reference/room-and-key-access>



Funding and Scholarships

The Faculty of Environment offers a variety of scholarships, assistantships, and other forms of financial aid for graduate students. In addition, the Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs (GSPA) provides other [opportunities](#) for supporting your graduate studies.

Scholarship webinars

[Webinars](#) will be held that will cover:

- Transcripts, research proposals, contributions, awards, reference letters, key steps
- Tri-Agency master's and doctoral scholarships, OGS/QII-GSST

Scholarship competition resources

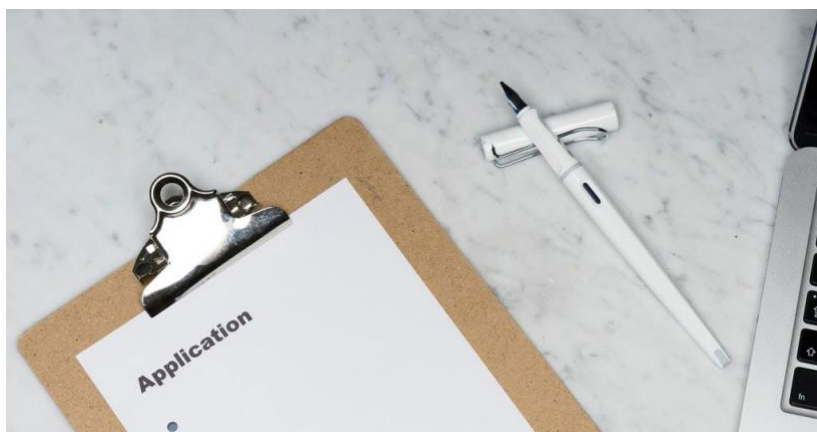
<https://uwaterloo.ca/graduate-studies-postdoctoral-affairs/current-students/scholarship-competition-resources>

Resources are also on LEARN

The School of Planning has a dedicated [LEARN site](#) for our undergraduate and graduate students. We use this site to post important information about upcoming events, announcements, job opportunities and other valuable information!

More on funding packages:

<https://uwaterloo.ca/environment/graduate/funding-packages>



Program of Study

At the School of Planning, we make great efforts to assure student's smooth progress towards the accomplishment of their studies. We provide recommended program sequences for all programs and help students achieve their milestones at all stages, including establishing research committees, arranging comps exams, and finally obtaining degrees.

Committee and roles

<https://uwaterloo.ca/planning/graduate-studies/current-student-resources/ma-and-mes-committee>

[https://uwaterloo.ca/graduate-studies-academic-calendar/general-information-and-regulations/minimum-requirements-phd-degree#Comprehensive examination](https://uwaterloo.ca/graduate-studies-academic-calendar/general-information-and-regulations/minimum-requirements-phd-degree#Comprehensive%20examination)

Degree requirements

<https://uwaterloo.ca/planning/graduate-studies>

Term-by-term

<https://uwaterloo.ca/planning/graduate-studies/ma-and-mes>

<https://uwaterloo.ca/planning/graduate-studies/doctoral-phd>

PhD comprehensive exams

<https://uwaterloo.ca/planning/graduate-studies/current-student-resources/doctoral-comprehensive-exam-procedures-school-planning-0>



Internship

Students without prior work experience in planning are required to complete an experience during term 3 (spring). Students are responsible for locating suitable employment on their own. However, the Partnership Coordinator and the Associate Director, Graduate Studies, will connect with students regularly to help identify opportunities and provide guidance throughout the work experience process.

Required for students without prior work experience in planning

<https://uwaterloo.ca/planning/graduate-studies/current-student-resources/work-experienceinternships>

Prior experience approved by grad officer

- Resume (with job duration, job descriptions)

Completed during Term 3 (Spring)

Students responsible for finding work

School's role

- Help create network of employers/jobs
- Post job opportunities on LEARN
- Help prepare for job search/resume
- All of the internship resources are on LEARN (internship page)



OPPI/CIP - Professional Path

Like architecture, engineering, and law, planning is a professional program. People who have: a university degree, usually in planning or a related area, a minimum of two years of planning experience, passed the examinations set by the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP), can use the professional designation MCIP (Member of the Canadian Institute of Planners) and RPP (Registered Professional Planner) after their names.

Graduates and students are encouraged to join professional associations such as the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) and Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) to keep in touch with new developments within the profession by meeting practicing planners and receiving journals and newsletters.

Ontario Professional Planners Institute

Student membership encouraged
OPPI Scholarships – open only to members
OPPI Journal
<https://ontarioplanners.ca/home>

Canadian Institute of Planners

Plan Canada
National voice on planning
<http://cip-icu.ca/>

Professional Standards Board

Certification of RPP status
Accreditation of university programs
<https://psb-planningcanada.ca/>



Life in the School of Planning

Life in the School of Planning will definitely be a rewarding and unforgettable experience for you!

The Association of Graduate Planners (AGP) organizes social and academic enrichment events for Master's and PhD students in the School. You can follow AGP on [Facebook](#) and [twitter](#)!



What life at SoP will be like:

- Work hard, expect to be challenged
- Expectations of quantity and quality of work likely higher than in your UG or MA program
- Guest lectures, social events
- AGP events
- Open-door policy, collegial, mutual respect, honesty, professionalism

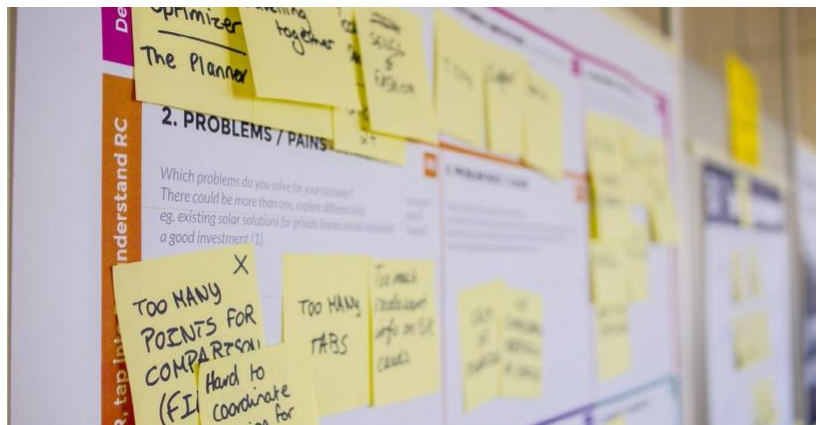
More: <https://uwaterloo.ca/planning/student-life>

New things can make us feel uncomfortable at times. Don't worry:

"If you're not uncomfortable, you're not learning"

-- Margo Fryer, UBC Learning Exchange

However, should you experience challenges or feelings of great discomfort, do not be afraid to reach out to your supervisor, the program administrator, the Associate Director or [counselling services](#).



Life in the School of Planning

We are dedicated to improving your experience and life at and beyond SoP. The following resources are useful for your new life in the City of Waterloo, when the time to relocate comes.

Housing

On-campus Residences

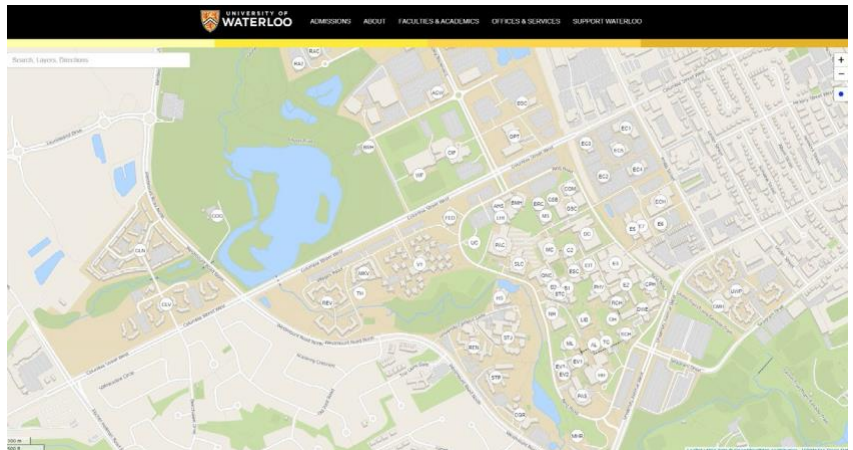
<https://uwaterloo.ca/housing/residences>

Off-campus Residences

<https://uwaterloo.ca/off-campus-housing/>

Navigate yourself on campus

<https://uwaterloo.ca/map/>



Health Services

<https://uwaterloo.ca/campus-wellness/health-services>

- Student Medical Clinic
- Family Health Clinic
- Verification of Illness Services
- Off-campus after-hours clinics



Writing Resources

Writing is one of the most important skills of your career. Writing is essential to future success in your career path. It will significantly contribute to your thesis writing, job application, and all sorts of writing assignments alongside your planning career. While it is not your supervisor's primary role to assist you with writing, we have specialists from the Writing and Communication Centre (WCC) who can support you to build communication excellence at the University of Waterloo. A variety of workshops, boot camps, writing activities, drop-in sessions, and online resources can help your writings tasks of all forms.

To cope with the uncertainty induced by Covid-19, WCC has applied a virtual environment to continue providing students with dedicated and devoted assistances on writing.

For more information, visit:

Writing and Communication Centre

<https://uwaterloo.ca/writing-and-communication-centre>

Improve your writing: write, read, listen, resources

<https://uwaterloo.ca/writing-and-communication-centre/online-resources/wcc-resources>



AccessAbility Services

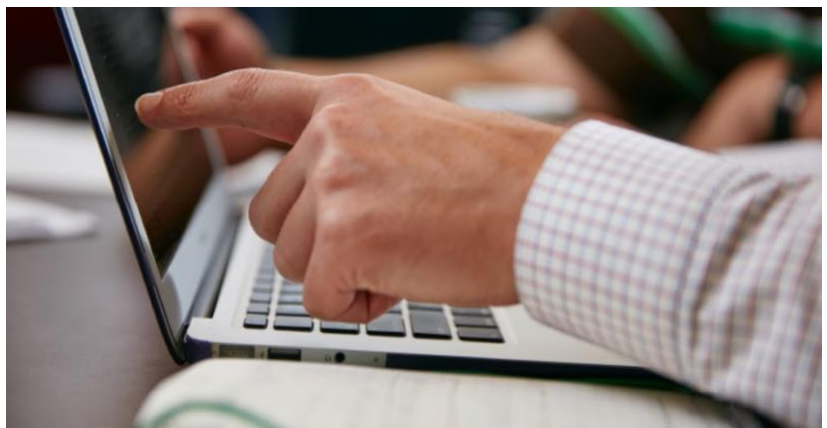
We are committed to ensuring every student with a known or unknown disability, illness, or condition will be accommodated with an individualized plan for their academic career at SoP. You are encouraged to reach out to our administrative team or your supervisor for support.

AccessAbility Services office at the University of Waterloo helps students to develop a personalized academic accommodation plan who are under the following conditions:

- Full-time or part-time undergraduate and graduate students taking on-campus or online courses
- Graduate students completing non-course degree requirements or milestones
- Domestic and international students
- Regular and co-op students

More information on:

<https://uwaterloo.ca/accessability-services/>



Other Resources

These listed resources will enrich your life at SoP as well as in Waterloo Region. Please spend some time to explore! You are not alone here!

Center for Teaching Excellence

<https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/support-graduate-students>

Fundamentals of University Teaching

<https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/support-graduate-students/fundamentals-university-teaching-program>

Graduate professional skills

<https://uwaterloo.ca/graduate-studies-postdoctoral-affairs/current-students/professional-skills-foundations>
<https://www.mygradskills.ca/>

Explore Waterloo Region

<https://www.explorewaterlooregion.com/>

- Attractions & Entertainment
- Culture & Heritage
- Events and Festivals
- Farmer's Market
- Food & Drink
- Museums and Galleries
- Outdoor & Recreation
- Shopping
- Sports

"KEEP CALM and finish GRAD SCHOOL"



Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

prepared by the Association of Graduate Planners

Note: Many required forms and explanations of program processes are available on the School's website, under [current student resources](#). Please make sure you review this site to get a sense of its contents.

Question 1: The School of Planning has a [recommended course sequence](#). Do I need to follow this?

A: Generally, yes. However, we understand that individual circumstances vary. Therefore, it is important to speak with your supervisor about your goals during your time in the program, when your ideal graduation date is, and any contingencies you can already plan for. While some courses are obligatory, your electives can be designed to fit with your interests and suit your schedule. We also encourage you to speak to fellow students about why they choose certain course loads.

Question 2: What about funding? Do I have to apply for Provincial/Federal Scholarships? What scholarships should I apply for?

A: The University of Waterloo offers funding packages that you should have been notified of when you received your Letter of Acceptance. Whether through grants, bursaries, TA or RA positions, there are a number of ways that the School can help meet your financial needs. However, there are also Provincial and Federal Scholarships such as OGS or SSHRC that can provide additional resources to students. If you meet the minimum criteria, we strongly recommend you apply (and get moving on these early). Speak with your supervisor about preparing an application as well as AGP Executive Members who have applied for these scholarships previously.

Please refer to [page 13](#) of the Graduate Student Handbook for Funding and Scholarships.

Question 3: How/when is the funding provided by the School distributed?

A: Funding from the School will usually be provided as a direct deposit into your bank account of choice. However, you also have the option to apply that funding to tuition costs and other fees with a promissory note. Different awards and scholarships may have different starting dates and timespans.

Question 4: How often should I be meeting with my supervisor?

A: There are several factors that go into when and how often you should meet with your supervisor. For some students, this may be their first instance of working with a research supervisor, so they are unsure what to expect. It is important to remember that feelings of anxiety around meeting the expectations of your supervisor and developing a collaborative relationship are normal. Ultimately, supervisors want to see you succeed. If you have not reached out to your supervisor after acceptance into the program, we recommend you do so during the Orientation Week. This will give you an opportunity to learn more about your supervisor, their experience with urban planning, their interests, and what they expect from their students. This is a good opportunity to ask questions that have not been answered yet and to get a feeling for what the program will be like. At this time, you may even begin to discuss where some of your research interests lie in broad terms.

From there, your supervisor may suggest setting up meetings during the terms, and the frequency of these meetings will vary based on need and stage during your program (e.g., you likely will have more meetings when working on your thesis than when you first enter the program). Usually, it is the student's responsibility to initiate meetings with their supervisors. Much like any professional relationship, communication is key. Checking in with your supervisor is always beneficial and can help to strengthen your working relationship. Your supervisor may share research opportunities, internship opportunities, or other notes of interest. Finally, if you have interest in applying to any of the Federal or Provincial scholarships, it is important to share that with your supervisor as well as what research you may want to pursue. Please refer to [page 9](#) of the Graduate Student Handbook for more information.

Question 5: Do I have to find my own internship? What resources are available to help with this?

A: For the MA/MES program, the internship represents a required component (usually completed during your third term). Finding, applying, and interviewing for an appropriate internship is the student's responsibility. However, the AGP, your research supervisor, and other faculty members have a number of resources and networks at their disposal in order to aid students in their efforts. We encourage students to start thinking and preparing for the internship early. This can include preparing an appropriate resume and cover letter as well as attending online interview workshops or other career-focused events.

The Internship LEARN site is the best source of information for students. If you click on the CONTENT tab, you will find a very detailed checklist/timeline of the entire internship process. Students should check this site first and foremost for all internship inquiries. This site (also under the CONTENT tab) also has the required forms that students have to submit to Tracey Beirness, the Graduate Program Administrator and Scholarship Coordinator, prior to beginning their internship.

Every year, the AGP holds an internship event with students and faculty. This event will provide more details on how the internship component will operate for incoming students, resources provided by faculty, as well as returning students' experiences and tips.

Question 6: What is the AGP? How can I get involved?

A: The University of Waterloo Association of Graduate Planners is the student led body providing representation for all planning graduate students at UW. We are responsible for the planning of student social events, coordinating the internship program, advocating for planning graduate students, dialoguing with the Graduate Student Association, and collaborating with the School of Planning and the Faculty of Environment to help deliver an enjoyable and inclusive student experience. Most importantly, we are a group of students that you can come to with issues and concerns.

In terms of getting involved, the AGP does hold elections in the Fall term for all positions. If you have experience or interest in running student associations, you should contact the appropriate AGP Executive Members and speak with them on their experiences in their role. We can answer questions about level of commitment, experience needed, or any other concerns. You can also check the AGP's website for more information on roles and responsibilities.

Question 7: I'm not entirely sure what I want to write my thesis on, what do I do?

A: While this question has several answers, we want to ensure incoming students that feelings like this are completely normal. All students enter their programs at different points in their professional and/or academic life and some may have more experience with conducting research than others. Your supervisor, peers, colleagues, and other faculty members can help you develop your research.

It is also important to consider what you want out of your research experience. Are you looking to enter the planning profession after you complete the program? Are you looking to continue your research into a PhD or postdoc? Is there an area of research that is of personal interest or relevance? These questions can begin to shape the topic of your thesis. Furthermore, it is important to speak to your supervisor. They can help you move from an area of planning interest towards a more refined topic and research question.

Question 8: What is the AGP doing to ensure consistent and effective communication and support to graduate planning students?

A: The AGP has created a number of channels to keep graduate planning students informed on events occurring both within the School of Planning and in the wider Waterloo community. This is something that the AGP is continuing to improve upon, so we are always appreciative of suggestions and/or feedback. The AGP created a Slack channel where students can directly communicate with the AGP executive and other members. The AGP has continued to expand upon its monthly newsletters that students can find in their email inbox and on the AGP website. Finally, the AGP continues to hold a monthly general meeting for all members.

Question 9: What is the best way to contact the AGP?

A: The best way to contact the AGP is to either reach out directly, via Slack, to the Executive Members you want to direct your query to or to post in the appropriate Slack channel. Here is an invitation to our channel: https://join.slack.com/t/uwaterlooscho-zrc3662/shared_invite/zt-fdhe96sk-mCxAKd6B0KtUhtzG~wxZw

As well, you can also e-mail the AGP at env-agp@uwaterloo.ca. Or, you can reach our various other social media here: Facebook: [@AGPuw](#), Twitter: [@UWAGP](#), Instagram: [uwagp](#)

Question 10: What is the general process and timeline for putting together a committee? Are there online resources we should be aware of? Are there particular requirements I should be aware of with respect to the committee's composition?

A: Please refer to [page 14](#) of the Graduate Student Handbook. Also, Tracey Beirness, the Graduate Program Administrator and Scholarship Co-ordinator, has made a document which shows the timeline of how/when a committee is formed for a comprehensive exam for PhD students. This information will be made available to students via Slack. Speak to an AGP Executive Member if you are having trouble finding it. Please note, this document contains 3 tabs which outline very useful and important information.

THINK BIG!

SOCIAL JUSTICE



INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY



TRANSPORTATION



LAND USE PLANNING



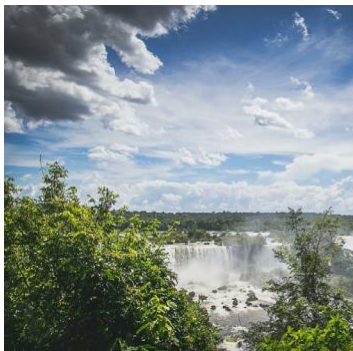
PLANNING POLICY



HEALTH



ENVIRONMENT



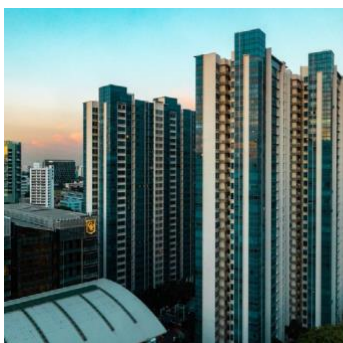
URBAN MODELLING



URBAN DESIGN



HOUSING



CLIMATE CHANGE



URBAN FORM





UNIVERSITY OF
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FACULTY OF ENVIRONMENT
SCHOOL OF PLANNING