

URBAN AND REGIONAL STUDIES, BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (B.S.)

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The Bachelor of Science in Urban and Regional Studies requires 120 credits, including 40 credits within the major. The program is designed so that students may enter as late as their junior year and provides a solid foundation for professional work or advanced study aimed at addressing some of the most important challenges and issues facing the U.S. and other world regions, such as urban sprawl, economic marginalization, ethnic and racial conflict and environmental degradation. The program covers a wide range of topics related to these issues, including transportation, housing, land use, environmental management, regional and international development, human-environment interaction, globalization and socioeconomic change. Students can focus on the subject matter of their interest by choosing to concentrate in either urban planning and policy or regional analysis and development; alternatively they may opt for a generalized course of study. Nine core courses and a lab (28 credits total) are required for all majors. These courses provide fundamental background knowledge in an array of disciplines that form the foundations of urban and regional studies, such as urban planning and design, human and physical geography, economics, environmental management, urban and public policy, and geographic information systems. Students complete their remaining 12 credits within one of the two concentrations or through a generalized course of study.

The program helps develop a theoretical and methodological background as well as analytical skills that can be used to address a wide range of issues and problems. Students acquire marketable skills in qualitative and quantitative analysis, computer usage, problem solving and communication — as well as a broad perspective on environment and society — that are essential for many occupations.

The generalized course of study option is designed for those students who have a broad interest in urban and regional studies. They can tailor this course of study to match not only intellectual interests but anticipated career goals. Students complete the core courses and then select the remaining 12 credits from any of the non-core courses listed below.

Student learning outcomes

Upon completing this program, students will have acquired the following.

A multidisciplinary understanding of urban and regional dynamics and planning

Students will develop a multidisciplinary understanding of the characteristics of cities and other regions, the factors that shape them over time and the role of planning in influencing socioeconomic and environmental conditions therein. Among the key topics covered are:

- The urbanization process in the United States
- Urbanization and regional change in other cultures and historically
- Urban design and the built environment
- Economic geography
- Urban and regional demographics and sociology
- The relationship between the natural environment and urbanization and other land use change
- Local and regional politics

- The role of planning tools and strategies in addressing urban and regional problems, such as poverty, congestion and environmental degradation

Mastery of general and major-specific skills

Students will acquire the skills needed to function as well-rounded, educated citizens, including those required for careers or advanced study in urban and regional analysis, planning and community development. These include:

- Oral, written and graphic communication
- Social science and planning methods, including quantitative and qualitative analysis
- Research using government documents and other library sources
- Cause and effect reasoning
- Organized presentation of ideas
- Critical and independent thinking
- Computer proficiency
- The ability to work in groups
- Analysis of maps and other spatial data

Ethics and a sense of social and personal responsibility

Students will develop a strong ethical foundation and a sense of social and personal responsibility rooted in an understanding of and sensitivity to:

- The complex notions of the public good
- The potential social costs and other externalities of regional and economic change
- Human needs and requirements for becoming a more humane and egalitarian society
- The ethical dimensions of social conflict and ways in which it can be addressed
- Diverse cultural and class perspectives
- The ethical standards of professional behavior

Special requirements

Proof of competency with Excel software is a prerequisite for URSP 306; URSP 116 is a prerequisite for URSP 310; URSP 204 (or permission of instructor) is a prerequisite for URSP 332/ENVS 332; URSP 310 is a prerequisite for URSP 428; URSP 310, URSP 313 and senior standing are prerequisites for URSP 440; and URSP 102 and URSP 306 are prerequisites for URSP 502.

Degree requirements for Urban and Regional Studies, Bachelor of Science (B.S.)

Course	Title	Hours
General education (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/undergraduate/undergraduate-study/general-education-curriculum/)		
Select 30 credits of general education courses in consultation with an adviser.		30
Major requirements		
• Major core requirements		
URSP 102	Introduction to Human Geography	3
URSP 116	Introduction to the City	3
URSP 204 & URSZ 204	Physical Geography and Physical Geography Laboratory	4
URSP 306	Economic Geography	3

URSP 310	Introduction to Urban and Regional Planning	3
URSP 313	Research and Field Methods in Urban and Regional Studies	3
URSP/ENVS 332	Environmental Management	3
URSP 360	Community and Regional Analysis and GIS	3
URSP 428	Land Use and Infrastructure Planning	3
URSP 440	Senior Capstone Seminar in Urban and Regional Studies	3

• Major electives
 Select additional credits from any URSP courses. 9

Ancillary requirements

GVPA 100	Making Policy Real: Social Problems and Policy Solutions	3
STAT 208	Statistical Thinking (satisfies general education quantitative foundations)	3

Open electives
 Select any course. 47

Total Hours 120

The minimum number of credit hours required for this degree is 120.

What follows is a sample plan that meets the prescribed requirements within a four-year course of study at VCU. Please contact your adviser before beginning course work toward a degree.

Freshman year

Fall semester Hours

MATH 131	Introduction to Contemporary Mathematics (prerequisite for STAT 208; counts toward open electives)	3
UNIV 101	Introduction to the University	1
UNIV 111	Focused Inquiry I (satisfies general education UNIV foundations)	3
Play course	video for Focused Inquiry I	
URSP 102	Introduction to Human Geography	3
General education course	(select BOK for social/behavioral sciences)	3
Open elective		3

Term Hours: 16

Spring semester

GVPA 100	Making Policy Real: Social Problems and Policy Solutions	3
UNIV 112	Focused Inquiry II (satisfies general education UNIV foundations)	3
Play course	video for Focused Inquiry II	
URSP 116	Introduction to the City	3
General education course	(select BOK for humanities/fine arts)	3
General education course	(select BOK for natural sciences)	3

Term Hours: 15

Sophomore year

Fall semester

STAT 208	Statistical Thinking (satisfies general education quantitative foundations)	3
UNIV 200	Advanced Focused Inquiry: Literacies, Research and Communication (satisfies general education UNIV foundations)	3
URSP 204 & URSZ 204	Physical Geography and Physical Geography Laboratory	4
General education course	(URSP 350 is suggested; satisfies AOI for global perspectives)	3
General education course		3

Term Hours: 16

Spring semester

URSP 306	Economic Geography	3
URSP 310	Introduction to Urban and Regional Planning	3
URSP major elective		3
General education course		3
Open elective		3

Term Hours: 15

Junior year

Fall semester

URSP 313	Research and Field Methods in Urban and Regional Studies	3
URSP major elective		3
Open electives		9

Term Hours: 15

Spring semester

URSP/ENVS 332	Environmental Management	3
URSP major elective		3
Open electives		9

Term Hours: 15

Senior year

Fall semester

URSP 360	Community and Regional Analysis and GIS	3
URSP 428	Land Use and Infrastructure Planning	3
Open electives		10

Term Hours: 16

Spring semester

URSP 440	Senior Capstone Seminar in Urban and Regional Studies	3
Open electives		9

Term Hours: 12

Total Hours: 120

The minimum number of credit hours required for this degree is 120.

- Urban studies (URSP) (p. 3)
- Urban studies lab (URSZ) (p. 5)

Urban studies

URSP 102. Introduction to Human Geography. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. An introduction to human geography from a global perspective, emphasizing settlement patterns, human-environment interactions, cultural variations, political transitions and population change in the global economy.

URSP 108. Uncovering Richmond. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. An introduction to the dramatic changes Richmond has undergone in recent decades and how those changes mirror trends in cities across the country. The student will discover the role of politics, public safety, education and other important issues in the development of the city through course lectures, readings, discussion and presentations by guest speakers.

URSP 116. Introduction to the City. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Introduction to the various theories of urbanism and attempt to offer solutions to the problems of urban life in modern civilization. The course will survey the major works of those who have studied cities or offered solutions and alternatives to existing urban structures. The works of noted social reformers, political analysts, economists, and architects as well as urban planners will be examined through lectures, readings, films, slides, discussions and field trips (when feasible).

URSP 120. Urban Issues in Film. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Introduces students to a variety of themes in urban studies through the medium of film. Focusing on a selection of films and related readings, the course exposes students to critiques of the socioeconomic, historical, political and structural aspects of cities and regions.

URSP 204. Physical Geography. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Examines the interrelated systems of the earth and the physical processes that create regional differences in climate and physiography. Provides a solid foundation for better understanding human-environment interactions, such as those related to climate change, by exploring topics such as earth-sun relationships, air temperature, atmospheric pressure and precipitation, winds and global circulation, plate tectonics, tectonic and volcanic landforms, weathering, and the impacts of running water, waves, wind and glaciers in shaping the landscape.

URSP 245. Housing and Community Revitalization. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. The purpose of this course is to examine housing issues as a major determinant of the make-up and the quality of community life in modern American society. Attention is given to the public and private forces that influence various components of the housing issue, such as: demand for housing; housing availability to various economic and social groups; housing design and quality (including new construction, rehabilitation, historic preservation, and adaptive re-use), housing finance and the relationship of housing to planning in metropolitan areas.

URSP 261. Design of the City. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Architecture, space and activities play a special role in the overall design of the city. These elements are analyzed to understand their interrelationships and importance to a city's visual character. Architectural styles, civic art, effects of space on the individual and methods for designing cities will be discussed. The class is for those who want to understand urban design elements and for those who will be involved in city design.

URSP 303. World Regions. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. An examination of the various regions of the earth, including land forms, climate, resources, peoples, agriculture and urban conditions. Regions to be selected each semester from Anglo-America, Latin America, western Europe, Eastern Europe, the former USSR, Middle East and North Africa, Africa (south of the Sahara), Indian subcontinent, China, Japan, Southeast Asia, and Oceania. May be taken only once for credit. Crosslisted as: INTL 303.

URSP 304. Urban Social Systems. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. This course aims to familiarize undergraduate students with health as a concern in urban studies, and facilitate essential skills in reflexive thinking about the topic. Drawing together foundational readings in public and community health, health service delivery and urban health, this course examines canonical concepts such as social determinants of health, health care financing and community health needs assessments. Broadly, the course is broken up into three distinct parts. The first part introduces students to foundational concepts in public and community health, including the social-ecological model, vulnerable populations, community engagement and health policy. The second part introduces students to key aspects of health care service delivery, such as the types and distribution of health care institutions including the health care safety net. The final part invites students to apply acquired learning to case studies in urban health and to translate their knowledge into a forward-looking view as we enter the next era of urban health.

URSP 306. Economic Geography. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Explores the workings of regional economies through analysis of industries and occupations. Studies the reasons for variation in regional economic characteristics and examines policies and strategies for enhancing regional economic conditions. Course relies heavily on the use of Microsoft Excel; proficiency with using this program is required.

URSP 310. Introduction to Urban and Regional Planning. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Prerequisite: URSP 116 or permission of instructor. Introduction to the theory and practice of governmental planning in the U.S. with emphasis on urban and regional planning. Surveys the history of planning, current planning practice and the ethical responsibilities of planners.

URSP 312. History of Human Settlement. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. A cultural and historical geography of human migration and settlement over the earth. Topics may include agricultural and urban systems, exploration, colonization and imperialism, and changing relationships with the environment, during and since the Middle Ages. Crosslisted as: ANTH 312.

URSP 313. Research and Field Methods in Urban and Regional Studies. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Prerequisite: STAT 208 or STAT 210. Introduces students to a variety of field and research techniques used to gather and analyze information to study urban and regional issues. Key topics include designing a research project, developing and implementing surveys, conducting focus groups and observation, analyzing data statistically, interpreting and reporting results, and utilizing secondary information.

URSP 315. The Evolution of American Cities. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. A general survey of how cities developed in the United States and the factors that contributed to the process of urbanization. Emphasis is placed on the public attitudes and values that have dominated particular periods of history and how these values affected the efforts to urbanize. The American city is examined as a vital force in the economic, social and political development of modern America, as the major location for conflict between people of all persuasions, and as the home of much of what is meant by American "civilization."

URSP 316. Urban Life in Modern America. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Restricted to nonmajors. Examines how a modern city functions, the public services rendered within the city and the impact of public policy on the city. The city is treated as a system consisting of economic, social and political activities that influence and are influenced by the physical/demographic environment. Each activity is studied separately with the cause-effect relationships among the activities highlighted by an analysis of public service delivery and, more generally, urban public policy.

URSP 321. Urban Economics. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Prerequisite: ECON 203 with a minimum grade of B, ECON 205 with a minimum grade of B or ECON 210. An introduction to urban economics, with an emphasis on the economics of agglomeration and the role of externalities in the urban economy. Economic analysis of the provision of urban public services and urban public financing, especially in politically fragmented areas. Crosslisted as: ECON 321.

URSP 322. Urban Finance. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Prerequisite: GEOG/URSP 306. Treats the local government from a practical management perspective as an organization in a political-economic environment. The nature of city expenditures and sources of revenues are explored. Budgeting and taxing decision-making processes are explored in depth. Economic impacts of these decisions on citizens are analyzed and implications for practice drawn.

URSP 331. Geography of Latin America and the Caribbean. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Examines the physical and human geography of Latin America and the Caribbean from an interdisciplinary perspective. A systems approach is used to concentrate on particular topics, themes and patterns that have broader relevance to the overall region or subregions (e.g. Central America, the Lesser Antilles, the Andes, Amazonia) rather than on the details of each country. However, in relation to some topics, case studies are used that may focus on a particular country.

URSP 332. Environmental Management. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Prerequisite: URSP 204. An interdisciplinary review of domestic and international environmental problems and their underlying causes, current management frameworks, alternative management approaches and strategies, and barriers to their implementation. Other topics include: environmental history and economics, population growth, natural resources use, biodiversity, pollution. Crosslisted as: ENVS 332.

URSP 333. Geography of Africa. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. A study of the land forms, climate, peoples, livelihoods, settlement patterns and cultural groupings of sub-Saharan Africa. Crosslisted as: AFAM 333/INTL 333.

URSP 334. Regional Geography of _____. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. A study of the land forms, climate, resources, peoples, agricultural and urban conditions in a specific region such as North America, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and India, the USSR and Eastern Europe. See the Schedule of Classes for specific region to be studied each semester. Crosslisted as: INTL 334.

URSP 340. World Cities Outside of North America. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Introduction to the theories and ideas of urbanism through writings and cases of major global cities outside of the United States. Crosslisted as: INTL 340.

URSP 350. Great Cities of the World. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. An interdisciplinary course with a focus on the origin, expansion and significance of one or more cities, the specifics of its/their culture and the role of language. Particular emphasis will be placed on relating the physical, social and economic aspects of the city's growth and development to the cultural expression of urbanism. Crosslisted as: FRLG 345/INTL 345.

URSP 355. Active and Sustainable Transportation. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. This course provides students with an understanding of how transit systems and biking and walking infrastructure networks function within an urban environment. The course explores planning approaches and techniques for shifting travel behavior away from single-occupancy vehicle use and toward biking, walking and mass transit. It also addresses issues around equity of access to transit and other travel modes, as well as the influence that shared mobility, autonomous vehicles and other emerging technologies may have on our transportation systems.

URSP 360. Community and Regional Analysis and GIS. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Introduces students to the core functions and applications of geographic information systems. Trains students in the management, modeling, analysis and visualization of urban and regional georeferenced data. The GIS techniques covered include the classification and symbolization of geographic features, data querying, table and spatial joining, spatial selection, projections, creation and editing of spatial features, geocoding, spatial analysis, and mapping.

URSP 361. Introduction to Urban Design. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. The objectives of the course are to understand the principles of urban design and the means for their implementation within the context of the planning process. The course is organized around three primary topics: human interaction with the spatial environment, implementation of urban design proposals and application of the subject matter of the course through a number of field experiences and projects.

URSP 391. Special Topics in Urban Studies. 1-3 Hours.

Semester course; 1, 2 or 3 credits. Prerequisite: because of the changing subject matter to be treated in this course, permission of the instructor is required. Students will have an opportunity to examine in detail some questions of significance. See the Schedule of Classes for the specific topic to be offered each semester.

URSP 392. Independent Study. 1-3 Hours.

Semester course; 1-3 lecture hours. 1-3 credits. Prerequisite: junior or senior standing is required. Under supervision of a faculty adviser, who must approve the student taking the course, a student studies a topic of interest.

URSP 413. Policy Implementation. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. An examination of the administrative setting of government and its policy impacts on public programs, policy design and redesign, and evaluation and monitoring.

URSP 425. Labor, Employment and Regional Development. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Examines the role of employment and the workforce in regional development from social, economic and geographic perspectives. Explores the factors impacting U.S. employment patterns, such as the green economy, immigration and technological change, and their implications for workers and regional economies. Also examines policy approaches to address labor and workforce issues with special consideration of disadvantaged groups and communities.

URSP 428. Land Use and Infrastructure Planning. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Prerequisite: URSP 310. Explores how the integration of land use, transportation and other infrastructures (e.g., water supply, waste water and storm water) in urban and regional planning can improve development patterns to ensure sustainability and livability. Examines specific professional planning techniques such as site plan review, subdivision permitting and capital improvements planning.

URSP 435. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the City. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. This course will be divided into two units. Unit One – “Foundations” will provide a foundation to the course through the introduction of key concepts related to diversity, equity and inclusion and a brief overview or relevant planning history and practice. Additionally, several frameworks will be explored as a lens to discuss the interactions between demographic identity and urban environments. In Unit Two – “Applications”, students will explore through articles, readings and speakers, present-day urban planning practices that address the needs and empower various identity groups in Richmond and in other cities in the U.S.

URSP 440. Senior Capstone Seminar in Urban and Regional Studies. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Prerequisites: URSP 310 and URSP 313. Enrollment also restricted to students with senior standing. Requires students to synthesize knowledge gained in previous major courses and apply it through one or more field-based exercises. Also explores issues related to career planning.

URSP 461. Applied Planning Studio. 3 Hours.

Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits. Prerequisites: all core courses in the urban and regional studies program. Applying the principles and theories of urban studies, students work as a group in the preparation of a plan to address a real community problem.

Urban studies lab

URSZ 204. Physical Geography Laboratory. 1 Hour.

Semester course; 2 laboratory hours. 1 credit. Pre- or co-requisite: URSP 204. Problem-solving and map-reading exercises related to topics covered in URSP 204, such as earth-sun relationships, air temperature, atmospheric pressure and precipitation, winds and global circulation, plate tectonics, tectonic and volcanic landforms, weathering, and the impacts of running water, waves, wind and glaciers in shaping the landscape. Provides essential analytical skills aimed at a better understanding of human-environment interactions, such as those related to climate change.