



# PAB Accreditation Standards and Criteria

## *Approved April 14, 2012*

Planning  
Accreditation  
Board

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## 1. Mission and Strategic Plan

The program or the department in which it resides shall have a clearly defined mission supported by goals and measurable objectives appropriate to the profession of planning. The program shall have a strategic plan for achieving its goals and objectives – either as a free-standing plan or as part of a broader departmental strategic plan – and must be able to demonstrate progress toward their attainment.

- A. Strategic plan: The strategic plan must address the program's vision; its definition of mission fulfillment; the elements identified as necessary to carry out the plan (including financial resources); the process by which the strategic plan is developed, refreshed, and disseminated; and a method for evaluating progress and making improvements. Programs must document participation in plan development by faculty, students, alumni, and practitioners. It is suggested that practitioners include a broad spectrum of the profession who can be resources for the program during plan development and implementation.
- B. Mission statement: The program shall have a clear and concise mission statement that expresses the program's core values and fundamental purpose and role in training professional planners. The mission statement summarizes why the program exists and the needs that it seeks to fulfill.
- C. Program goals: The goals shall identify the program's future aspirations in the context of its mission and that of the university. Goals must be meaningful in the sense that they aim toward excellence beyond that which may already exist, while taking into account the particular characteristics of a program, including its opportunities and constraints. Goals must be inclusively developed with participation of members of the program's community.
- D. Measurable objectives: Each goal must have concrete objectives for goal attainment. The objectives should be measurable and framed in a way that can be easily evaluated by PAB and the Site Visit Team.

## 2. Students

The program shall attract a sufficient number of well-qualified students from diverse backgrounds and shall adequately prepare, support, and advise these students to pursue and contribute successfully to the field of urban and regional planning. Accordingly, the program shall demonstrate that its students upon graduation possess the knowledge, skills, and values that will enable them to secure professional employment, to perform effectively as planners, and to participate meaningfully in the planning profession. Because students will join an increasingly diverse workforce, and work in diverse communities affected by global pressures, the student body should be diverse. The approach to diversity should reflect the program's intended scope (e.g., local, regional, national, international). The program should strive to attract a student population, particularly from groups historically lacking access to, and under-represented in, higher education, as well as representative of the type of mixtures of ethnic, racial, and economic groups to be found in the settings where planners often practice.

- A. Student quality: The program shall admit students whose educational attainment, previous academic performance, work experience, aptitude, maturity, and motivation indicate potential for success in their studies and in professional practice. Toward that end, the program shall establish admission standards that reflect the institution's policies and the program's goals, and the program shall apply those standards fairly and consistently. The program shall document its admission standards and the extent to which its current students meet or exceed those standards.
- B. Student diversity: The program shall adopt appropriate recruitment and retention strategies, including curricular strategies, to achieve its aspirations for a diverse student body, and shall document actual progress in implementing those strategies. The program shall foster a climate of inclusivity that appreciates and celebrates cultural difference through its recruitment and retention of students. Students shall possess, in the aggregate, characteristics of diversity (e.g., racial and ethnic background) that reflect the practice settings where graduates work or where professional needs exist in the program's region of recruitment and placement. Notwithstanding, the demographic mix is not a static concept, and all planning programs should seek to be in the forefront of a diverse society.
- C. Size of student body: The number of students enrolled in the program shall be sufficient to constitute a community of inquiry that fosters each student's educational and professional development. Graduate programs shall have a student body of 20 or more full-time equivalent (FTE) students. Similarly, undergraduate programs shall have a total of 20 or more FTE students in their third and fourth years of study. (One part-time student equates to 0.5 full-time equivalent.)
- D. Student advising, services, and support: The program shall provide students with competent academic advising, progress appraisal, and career guidance, as well as access within the institution to any personal counseling that students might need. Furthermore, the program or its institution shall provide students with career services

that assist students in securing suitable internships and jobs. The program shall also support its students by providing them with financial aid opportunities that are sufficient in number and amount to achieve the program's aspirations for a well qualified and diverse student body. The program shall publish its criteria for the allocation of such financial aid.

- E. Student engagement in the profession: The program shall provide opportunities for student engagement in the profession, including but not limited to participation in a planning student organization affiliated with the program, in the local chapter of the American Planning Association, in other professional societies and activities, and in work, internships, community-based planning activities, or project experiences that develop their skills as planners. The program shall also promote socialization into the planning profession by encouraging students to attend APA's planning conferences and other events in which students might interact with professional planners from a variety of backgrounds.

### 3. Faculty

The program shall employ a sufficient number of high quality, productive, and engaged faculty members to permit the achievement of program goals and objectives.

- A. Faculty quality: The faculty of the program shall be appropriately qualified to serve the program's mission and shall be capable of executing the program's goals and objectives, particularly as they pertain to teaching, research, and service. The program shall employ faculty with the focus, commitment, teaching ability, and qualifications in planning sufficient to prepare graduates to enter professional planning practice in diverse occupational and institutional settings.

#### GUIDELINES

1. The faculty will include a mixture of individuals with backgrounds in planning scholarship and planning practice.
  2. Regular, full-time faculty members have educational and professional backgrounds appropriate for the program level, with a relevant mix of credentials (i.e., accredited degrees in planning, significant experience in planning, PhDs in planning, degrees and experience in related fields, and AICP membership).
  3. Regular, full-time faculty members have the educational background and competencies to teach core courses and an area of specialization (if offered by the program), and to carry out the major share of teaching, research, and service based on the mission and goals.
  4. Adjuncts, lecturers, and guest speakers include individuals with the professional involvement and status to effectively add perspectives from the planning practice and other related specialties.
  5. Adjunct faculty members should complement the teaching competencies of the full-time faculty based on educational and professional backgrounds, experience in the planning field, and AICP membership.
- B. Faculty diversity: The program shall foster a climate of inclusivity that appreciates and celebrates cultural differences through its recruitment and retention of faculty members. Faculty shall possess, in the aggregate, characteristics of diversity (e.g., racial and ethnic background) that reflect the practice settings where graduates work or where professional needs exist in the program's region of recruitment and placement. Notwithstanding, the demographic mix is not a static concept, and all planning programs should seek to be in the forefront of a diverse society.

#### GUIDELINES

1. Full-time faculty members demonstrate diversity with respect to age, race, ethnicity, gender, and state or country of origin.
2. Full-time faculty members demonstrate diversity through their degrees being earned from a variety of universities, ability to conduct research in a variety of ways, and range of specialized knowledge covering program content.
3. Policies and procedures are in place and followed to further equal employment opportunities.
4. Adjuncts, lecturers, and guest speakers enhance the diversity of expertise, professional experiences, race/ethnicity, and gender.
5. Programs collect data which makes tracking of diversity issues in faculty recruitment and retention possible.

- C. Faculty size: The faculty shall be of a sufficient size to accomplish the program's mission and goals, administer the program, and teach the curriculum. The program shall have a faculty of such size that the full-time faculty are able to teach the core curriculum and direct all areas of specialization.

#### GUIDELINES

1. As a general rule, the program should have a minimum of 5 full-time or equivalent of 5 full-time faculty members.
  2. As a general rule, the program should have no greater than a 15/1 ratio of undergraduate student FTE to instructional faculty FTE, and a 10/1 ratio of graduate student FTE to instructional faculty FTE.
- D. Engagement with students: The faculty shall be engaged with students beyond the classroom as mentors, advisors, and/or committee members or committee chairs on thesis, reports and dissertations. Faculty shall provide career advice and assist in job placement in ways that coordinate appropriately with the efforts of staff and academic professionals.

#### GUIDELINES

1. Faculty members work directly with students on projects and research outside of classroom time.
  2. Faculty members advise students beyond or in place of professional staff in a student's course of study.
  3. Faculty members participate as committee chairs or members in individual student work.
- E. Research and scholarship: Faculty will engage in research, scholarship, and/or outreach reflective of the stage of their careers and the mission and expectations of the university.

#### GUIDELINES

1. Faculty produce theoretical and/or applied research and scholarship relevant to the profession and disseminated through appropriate journals or other publications.
  2. Faculty teaching and administrative assignments allow sufficient opportunity to pursue research and scholarly achievements.
  3. Faculty scholarly activities are reviewed and recognized by faculty peers.
  4. Faculty participate in conferences and other venues as outlets for their research efforts.
- F. Professional involvement and community outreach: Faculty shall be continuously engaged in activities leading to their professional growth and advancement, the advancement of the profession, and progress toward meeting the needs of the broader community.

#### GUIDELINES

1. Faculty participate in university and professional services.
2. Faculty participate in service to the profession through research and outreach efforts and in support of student activities related to the profession.
3. Faculty demonstrate activity in the profession through participation in national organizations and/or participation in local, state, regional, and national professional conferences, workshops and other sponsored activities including activities of professional planning organizations.

4. Faculty serve the continuing education needs for members of the profession.
- G. Professional development: Faculty assignments and opportunities shall be such that skills in teaching, research, and other creative activities are sufficiently maintained and developed.

#### GUIDELINES

1. Assignment of duties shall recognize the need for activities that build human capital, such as research, engagement, outreach, and professional leadership.
2. Appropriate mechanisms, such as release time from teaching and sabbaticals, shall exist to enable significant research projects.
3. Adequate resources shall be available to support faculty professional development.

#### 4. Curriculum and Instruction

Planners integrate knowledge, skills and values to anticipate the future and improve the quality of decision-making affecting people and places. They understand the dynamics of cities, suburbs, regions, and the theory and practice of planning. They attend to the diversity of individual and community values. They develop and implement ethical plans, policies and processes. The minimum curriculum criteria below reflect these educational goals.

The curriculum should demonstrate consistency and coherence in meeting the program's mission, goals and objectives. While an accredited degree program must meet basic minimal performance criteria, the PAB recognizes that programs may have different profiles with varying emphases. The program being reviewed must demonstrate how its curricular content matches the profile emphasized in its overall mission. For example, a program emphasizing urban design would meet a different test than one emphasizing small town and rural planning.

The program shall provide a curriculum and offer instruction to best assure achievement of the knowledge, skills, and values that qualify graduates of accredited degree programs to enter professional planning practice. While programs may adopt such established and familiar learning activities as courses and internships, the PAB is also receptive to program innovations that prove effective in meeting the criteria.

An accredited degree program must ensure that each graduate demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for competent professional planning in diverse occupational and institutional settings; such evidence will be provided in Standard 6. The criteria below provide a framework for judging the scope and quality of minimum educational outcomes.

- A. Required knowledge, skills and values of the profession: The program shall offer a curriculum that teaches students the essential knowledge, skills, and values central to the planning profession. These required components will be taught in such a manner that it is possible to demonstrate that every graduate has studied them. Ordinarily, this means that they are included in core courses required of all students, although other approaches are possible. Specifically:
1. *General planning knowledge*: The comprehension, representation, and use of ideas and information in the planning field, including appropriate perspectives from history, social science, and the design professions.
    - a) Purpose and Meaning of Planning: appreciation of why planning is undertaken by communities, cities, regions, and nations, and the impact planning is expected to have.
    - b) Planning Theory: appreciation of the behaviors and structures available to bring about sound planning outcomes.
    - c) Planning Law: appreciation of the legal and institutional contexts within which planning occurs.

- d) Human Settlements and History of Planning: understanding of the growth and development of places over time and across space.
  - e) The Future: understanding of the relationships between past, present, and future in planning domains, as well as the potential for methods of design, analysis, and intervention to influence the future.
  - f. Global Dimensions of Planning: appreciation of interactions, flows of people and materials, cultures, and differing approaches to planning across world regions.
2. *Planning skills*: The use and application of knowledge to perform specific tasks required in the practice of planning.
- a) Research: tools for assembling and analyzing ideas and information from prior practice and scholarship, and from primary and secondary sources.
  - b) Written, Oral and Graphic Communication: ability to prepare clear, accurate and compelling text, graphics and maps for use in documents and presentations.
  - c) Quantitative and Qualitative Methods: data collection, analysis and modeling tools for forecasting, policy analysis, and design of projects and plans.
  - d) Plan Creation and Implementation: integrative tools useful for sound plan formulation, adoption, and implementation and enforcement.
  - e) Planning Process Methods: tools for stakeholder involvement, community engagement, and working with diverse communities.
  - f) Leadership: tools for attention, formation, strategic decision-making, team building, and organizational/community motivation.
3. *Values and ethics*: Values inform ethical and normative principles used to guide planning in a democratic society. The program shall appropriately incorporate issues of diversity and social justice into all required courses of the curriculum, including:
- a) Professional Ethics and Responsibility: appreciation of key issues of planning ethics and related questions of the ethics of public decision-making, research, and client representation (including principles of the AICP Code of Ethics).
  - b) Governance and Participation: appreciation of the roles of officials, stakeholders, and community members in planned change.
  - c) Sustainability and Environmental Quality: appreciation of natural resource and pollution control factors in planning, and understanding of how to create sustainable futures.
  - d) Growth and Development: appreciation of economic, social, and cultural factors in urban and regional growth and change.
  - e) Social Justice: appreciation of equity concerns in planning.
- B. Areas of specialization and electives: The program shall have sufficient depth in its curriculum and faculty in the specialization areas and electives it offers to assure a credible and high quality offering.

1. *Specializations*: When a program includes specialization fields, it is assumed that they are built on top of the general planning foundation and that courses in the areas of specialization add significantly to the basic planning knowledge, skills and values. Programs must demonstrate that there are enough courses in the areas of specialization that students get the depth and range of materials to give them a level of expertise.
  2. *Electives*: The curriculum shall contain opportunities for students to explore other areas such as exposure to other professions, other specializations, and emerging trends and issues.
- C. Instructional delivery and scheduling: Courses shall be taught by fully qualified faculty, and appropriate instructors shall be assigned for core, specialized and elective courses. In general, most core courses will be taught by fulltime planning faculty. Courses shall be offered in formats and times to assure appropriate student access to them and timely completion of program requirements.
- D. Facilities: Students, faculty and staff shall have access to sufficient physical resources and facilities to achieve the program's mission and objectives. The facilities shall be appropriate for the level and nature of required classrooms, studio workspace, and offices.
- E. Information and technology: Students, faculty and staff shall have access to sufficient information systems and technology, and technical equipment to achieve the program's mission and objectives. Information and technology include, but are not limited to, maintained computer hardware, software and access, library resources and collections.

## 5. Governance

The program shall make administrative decisions through a governance process that exhibits a high degree of transparency, inclusiveness, and autonomy. The program shall be located within an identifiable and distinct academic unit, such as a department or school of planning, and the program's faculty shall be clearly identifiable as such. The program shall involve faculty and students, as appropriate, in administrative decisions that affect them and shall demonstrate that those decisions serve to implement the program's strategic plan.

- A. Program autonomy: In accordance with customary university procedures, the planning faculty shall have responsibility for the design of its curriculum and shall have an independent voice in the appointment, promotion, tenure, and evaluation of its faculty, and the admission and evaluation of its students.

### GUIDELINES

1. The planning program will normally be headed by its own administrator, who will report directly to a dean or an equivalent academic official.
  2. In administrative units with multiple degree programs, however, the planning program shall function as an independent entity with respect to most if not all administrative responsibilities.
- B. Program leadership: The administrator of the degree program shall be a planner whose leadership and management skills, combined with education and experience in planning, enables the program to achieve its goals and objectives. The administrator shall be a tenured faculty member with an academic rank of associate professor or higher.
- C. Communication: The program shall use a variety of media to provide effective two-way communication with current and prospective students, faculty, alumni, employers, professional associations, practitioners, and other stakeholders about the program's goals and objectives and about its progress toward achieving those aims. The administrator of the program shall be regularly accessible to these stakeholders, providing them with suitable opportunities for interaction.
- D. Faculty and student participation: The program shall provide faculty, individual students, student organizations, and other interested parties with opportunities to participate fully and meaningfully in administrative decisions that affect them. To the extent that these interested parties might raise substantive issues from time to time, the program shall demonstrate that it has responded appropriately to those issues, and communicated the outcomes in such a fashion that the interested parties understand how the decisions were made.
- E. Promotion and tenure: The program shall publish policies and procedures for making decisions about the promotion and tenure of faculty, and shall provide junior faculty with the support that they need to advance professionally within the program. The

program shall provide mentorship opportunities for all junior faculty, including women, racial and ethnic minorities, and members of other under-represented groups.

- F. Grievance procedures: The program shall publish policies and procedures for resolving student and faculty grievances, and shall appropriately disseminate such policies and procedures to students and faculty. The program shall maintain records to document the number and kinds of grievances it has received and the manner in which it has resolved those grievances.

## 6. Program Assessment

The program, or the department in which it resides, shall have a clearly defined approach, methodology, and indicators for measuring the program's success in achieving the goals it articulated in its Mission and Strategic Plan. Specifically, performance indicators and their results shall be reported at each accreditation review in the areas listed below, and in areas not listed below that are contained within program goals.

A. Faculty research/scholarly contributions to the profession: The program shall provide evidence of faculty contributions to the advancement of the profession through research (theoretical and applied) and scholarship.

B. Student learning and achievement: The program shall report clear indicators of student success in learning the Core Knowledge, Skills, and Values of the profession. Such evidence should clearly identify the learning outcomes sought and achieved for students at either cohort or year level over the accreditation review period.

C. Student retention and graduation rates: The program shall report student retention and graduation rates (including number of degrees produced each year) relative to program enrollment and to targets set by the program.

D. Outcomes: The program shall report student achievement and success after graduation in at least the areas specified below:

1. *Graduate satisfaction*: The program shall document the percentage of graduates who, two to five years after graduation, report being satisfied or highly satisfied with how the program prepared them for their current employment.
2. *Graduate Employment*: The program shall document the percentage of graduates who secure employment within one year of graduation in professional planning, planning-related, or other positions, and the definitions thereof.
3. *Graduate certification*: The program shall document the percentage of master's graduates who pass the AICP exam within 3 years of graduation, and/or the percentage of bachelor's graduates who pass the AICP exam within 5 years of graduation. If the program believes that alternative credentials are meaningful to its goals and objectives, the program may supplement its AICP data.
4. *Graduate service to community and profession*: The program shall provide evidence of graduates' contributions to meeting community needs and to providing service to the planning profession, such evidence obtained between 2 and 5 years after graduation.
5. *Other outcome(s) identified by the program*: The program shall identify, target, and report results for one or more additional outcomes related to program goals not already identified above.

## 7. Progress

The key elements of an outcomes-based assessment plan include making decisions about programmatic changes based on analyzing the outcomes data collected, and by connecting the changes made to long-term objectives, including those objectives that aim towards excellence.

- A. Progress towards goal attainment: The program shall demonstrate its progress since the last accreditation review in meeting program goals and objectives as measured by performance on the outcomes identified in Standard 6.
- B. Programmatic changes: The program shall document programmatic changes recently completed or currently underway to advance the outcomes identified in Standard 6.
- C. Strategic issues for the next 5-7 years: The program shall identify the critical steps needed to advance its goals and progress during the next reaccreditation period.
- D. Public Information: The program shall routinely provide reliable information to the public on its performance. Such information shall appear in easily accessible locations including program websites. Information shall include, but not be limited to:
  - 1. student achievement as determined by the program;
  - 2. the cost (tuition and fees) for a full-time student for one academic year;
  - 3. student retention and graduation rates, including the number of degrees produced each year, the percentage of master's students graduating within 4 years, and/or the percentage of bachelor's students graduating within 6 years
  - 4. the percentage of master's graduates who pass the AICP exam within 3 years after graduation and/or the percentage of bachelor's graduates who pass the AICP exam within 5 years of graduation; and
  - 5. the employment rate of fulltime graduates in a professional planning or planning-related job within 1 year of graduation.