Description of Program:

Recognizing the need to inspire young people to participate in the planning field, the Associated Students of Planning and Development (ASPD) have designed, coordinated and facilitated a series of events that bring together current Master of Planning graduate students with local high school students. The APA award-winning PLANNING for College program, initiated in 2013, serves as a conduit through which aspiring high school students gain exposure to urban planning as an academic major and a career path through which they can have a positive impact in their communities. The original program has been transformed from a one-day workshop into a multi-event Student Outreach Series that includes a network of high schools, expanded private-nonprofit partnerships and nearly 300 participants.

Throughout 2016, ASPD has hosted a variety of events including a one-day, bilingual college readiness workshop for 100 students and parents from over 10 Los Angeles schools in partnership with nonprofit organizations GEAR UP 4 LA and Families in Schools. The program has expanded to include visits to the Visual and Performing Arts High School (VAPA) in South Gate to facilitate a mapping and design activity in which students collaboratively reimagine the streetscape surrounding their campus. This coming February, ASPD will host students from East Los Angeles Renaissance Academy (ELARA), one of three urban planning high schools in the country, for an interactive day of speakers and workshops focused on planning in Los Angeles.

Fulfillment of Criteria:

The PLANNING for College: Student Outreach Series seeks to benefit local inner-city students by encouraging high schoolers to explore urban planning as a potential academic major and achievable career path and to support equitable planning efforts by empowering youth through education about opportunities to influence the urban planning process.

For many students, these events are their first exposure to the urban planning field and most importantly, to higher education. ASPD seeks to demystify the planning field by relating common topics such as streetscapes, community assets, and urban design to the students’ everyday experiences in their own neighborhoods. By bridging the students’ exposure to planning between discussions in a classroom environment and realistic applications within their
campus or neighborhood, ASPD strives to demonstrate that the planning practice is an opportunity that is very much within students’ reach.

While encouraging students to consider planning in the context of their college plans, the PLANNING for College program strives to expose young people to their fundamental right to positively impact their communities. ASPD’s recent visit with VAPA students was focused on helping the students articulate their concerns about plans to build a middle school across the street from their campus and learn about methods for collecting data to support their input in the planning process, providing them with tools for becoming proactively involved in enhancing their community.

Planning, Implementation and Success:

First initiated in 2013, the PLANNING for College program achieved unprecedented results. Over 100 high school students, faculty, and graduate planning students convened on USC’s campus in 2013 to explore how planning can be an exciting academic opportunity and a dynamic participatory process. Over the past three years, ASPD has sought to expand the scope of the program by reaching out to additional high schools and involving both parents and students. Throughout 2016, the PLANNING for College: Student Outreach Series has grown to include over 300 participants and two new high schools which have adapted their curriculum to include planning topics.

As the PLANNING for College program has evolved, ASPD has implemented a variety of activities that allow students to connect planning principles to their everyday experiences. Classroom workshops, like designing a pedestrian-friendly street or using toys and figurines to imagine students’ ideal neighborhood, have been inspired by ASPD’s own experiences working with professionals like James Rojas on participatory planning practices. Similarly derived from the MPL Studio course curriculum, high school students have participated in a collaborative Lynch mapping activity in which they are asked to create their own maps of the USC campus, including landmarks, nodes and paths after a walking tour of the campus. The implementation of these activities requires an incredible amount of collaboration between ASPD, the Price staff and, most importantly, local schools.
Each outreach event is punctuated by informative discourse about the students’ opportunities to leverage planning as a career path and their ability to impact their own communities. As the PLANNING for College: Student Outreach Series continues to transform, ASPD considers the program a success if even just one student recognizes planning as an accessible and transformative tool, both in their academic career and in their community.