GUIDE TO GRADUATE EDUCATION IN URBAN AND REGIONAL PLANNING

(LIMITED FIRST EDITION - MAY 1974)

prepared by
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with the assistance of
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FOREWORD

The Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning is the official organization of academic departments, divisions, programs, and schools of city, urban, and regional planning. Member institutions are located throughout the United States and Canada.

ACSP was formed in 1959. Since that time its school membership has grown from eighteen to sixty-six. The association recently broadened its operations and now provides a critically important channel for communication among member schools and their faculties.

ACSP maintains close and continuing ties to the American Institute of Planners and the American Society of Planning Officials. This arrangement permits the Association to play a leading role in efforts to improve planning education and to introduce prospective students to educational opportunities in the field.
Editor's Introduction

The ACSP Guide is designed especially for college students contemplating careers in urban and regional planning and for counselors who want to assist students in locating appropriate training and educational opportunities. Part I (Have you Thought About a Career in Urban and Regional Planning?) deals with the problems of choosing a career. It provides an overview of the profession as well as some inside information on the graduate admissions process.

Part II (Compendium of Program Descriptions) summarizes the basic features of sixty-three graduate planning programs in the United States and Canada. All departments mentioned in the Guide are members of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning and/or formally recognized by The American Institute of Planners.

Part III presents a qualitative appraisal of the various urban and regional planning programs and describes the results of a comprehensive survey of practitioners and academics in the United States and Canada. Almost four hundred planners were asked to indicate the top graduate departments and to evaluate their strengths in various areas of specialization. Comments prepared by students and non-tenured faculty members highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each department. Tables summarizing enrollment trends and a bibliography on planning education are appended along with a Special Report on Environmental Planning Programs in Canada.

The production of the Guide was paid for in part with a grant from the School of Architecture and Planning at M.I.T. To the many individuals throughout the United States and Canada who contributed so graciously of their time, and thereby helped to make the Guide possible, ACSP owes a vote of thanks.

Suggestions and comments on how the Guide might be improved would be greatly appreciated. Please forward all correspondence to The Association of Collegiate School of Planning, c/o School of Urban Planning, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, 48823.

L.S.
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PART ONE: OVERVIEW ESSAY

"Have You Thought About a Career in Urban and Regional Planning?"
PART I

Have You Thought About A Career
In Urban And Regional Planning?

Choosing a Career

How do most people choose a career? A few follow in the steps of their parents or older brothers and sisters. Some people make up their minds when they are very young and never stray from that resolve. Others just fall into a career by accident. For most people, though, the task of choosing a career involves careful thought and, in some cases, systematic investigation. What things need to be taken into account? Of course, everybody sets his or her own priorities, but you might, for example, be most interested in the things that can be accomplished in one field as opposed to another. Some fields, such as urban and regional planning, are particularly hospitable to women, minority group members, and students from other countries interested in pursuing professional careers. Vigorous recruitment efforts and affirmative action programs launched several years ago are now beginning to bear fruit.

You might be most concerned about the settings within which certain jobs are typically performed. In addition, almost everybody gives some thought to the prestige, salary, prospects for advancement, and required training associated with different jobs or professional roles. One item that is often overlooked is that there are different life styles associated with careers that demand enormous time commitments.

It is not as difficult as you might expect to discover the answers to these questions. There are several possible strategies. One is to look around at people who hold jobs that seem interesting. How do they spend their time? Do they seem to be happy? Are they accomplishing anything? What do other people think of them? What do they think of themselves? Another approach is to talk with people actively involved in a particular profession, even if they are strangers. Remember though, that some practitioners have not remained in touch with fast-breaking changes in their profession. New people coming into every field bring their own ideas, perceptions, and priorities, but it often takes some time for these to reach even some of the best people in the field. A third approach is to do some independent reading. Biographies of major figures are very revealing; so are professional and scholarly journals. In urban and regional planning, for example, The Journal of the American Institute of Planners, Planning (a monthly publication of The American Society of Planning Officials), The Journal of Regional Studies and The Journal of Land Economics can provide helpful
insights into some of the issues that planners normally encounter. You ought to develop at least a rough sense of how your chosen profession has changed or is likely to change in the future. Finally, it is often possible to try a profession on for size. Part-time or summer jobs can provide an opportunity to sample day-to-day activities. Many college undergraduates discover their long-range career interests through extra-curricula or volunteer programs, not just through the courses they take. Finally, you ought to consider the subjects you normally read about and the kinds of issues you like to follow and debate. These may suggest professional directions most closely related to your interests.

How do you know if your choice is a good one? Nobody wants to wait twenty-five or even five years to find out whether or not he or she has made a wise decision. Obviously you have to wait a reasonable period of time for any decision to prove itself out. Yet, if you are honest with yourself, there are some tell-tale signs that you should be able to spot relatively quickly. Are you able to live with short-term setbacks because the long-range rewards seem worth it? Are you satisfied with the distant image you have of yourself as a full-fledged professional? Are you confident about your ability to overcome certain personal weaknesses? Remember, you may have made the right choice at the wrong time!

A number of people have suggested that it makes more sense to work for a while than it does to go directly from college to graduate school. This is worth considering, especially since professional education at the graduate level is fairly expensive. Graduate training is important not only because it provides a credential, but also because it represents the last uninterrupted period of sustained personal exploration of values and key ideas for most people. It also provides a special opportunity to deepen and broaden your thinking through intense contact with an assortment of people and points of view.

Graduate education represents a substantial investment of time and money that most people can only afford to make once. It is sad but true that post-graduate opportunities for continuing professional education are limited. Once you are on the job, free time for self-renewal is extremely hard to come by. Thus, after selecting a potential career, your first problem is whether or not to go directly to graduate school. The arguments in favor of an initial stint in the field are that you can develop a better sense of a profession through personal observation and that you can best sharpen your understanding of the things you need to learn in graduate school by putting your undergraduate education to the test. Of course, this presumes that someone without a graduate degree can find an entry-level job. Surprisingly, there are a great many more
pre-professional opportunities than most people suspect. On the other hand, for someone with a firm grasp of his or her strengths and weaknesses, a direct route to graduate school makes a great deal of sense. If your convictions are not yet firm, though, you ought to think seriously about working for a period of a year or more.

How should you choose a graduate school? There are a great many factors that students ought to take into account. Among these are faculty expertise and diversity, quality of the student body, strength in related departments, research opportunities, long-term performance of graduates or alumni, financial resources, and curriculum structure. These and other characteristics need to be weighed against each other.

A great many people find their choices limited by factors beyond their control. Location, for example, may be one over-riding factor because of family obligations, because a spouse is tied to a certain city or because a prospective part-time job is the only way to finance graduate school. The selection of a graduate department is often shaped by other highly personal considerations. In addition, it is important to remember that this is a two-way process. You narrow down the choice of schools, but ultimately, some school has to decide that it wants you.

There are many ways in which you can enhance your prospects for admission. These include selecting courses at the undergraduate level that take account of graduate admissions requirements, taking the necessary graduate entrance examinations, preparing a strong application, and taking advantage of interview opportunities. These and other steps in the admission process are discussed in more detail below.

You ought to consider what it will be like once you are accepted. Each graduate school has a different set of requirements. At the doctoral level you may be expected to commit yourself to a four or five year program; at the master’s level only one or two years are required. Course selection, time commitments, mandatory levels of performance, thesis requirements, and student participation in decision making vary from school to school. Moreover, each profession has its own special approach to inducting new members. Medicine requires an internship and a residency. Practicing lawyers must pass the bar exam. Architects have to be licensed. You ought to be clear at the outset about the various preconditions for professional membership as well as job prospects in your chosen field. Some graduate schools provide students with substantial help in locating jobs, others leave you
more or less on your own. It is a good idea to explore the changing job market as well as your personal prospects for employment before making any firm commitments.

What do urban and regional planners do?

Everybody plans. Planning involves thinking ahead and organizing to get things done. Urban and regional planning deals with the problems that people have holding their communities together, coping with the pressures of urbanization and development, and trying to provide an opportunity for everyone — especially the poor and the disadvantaged — to improve their lives. There are more specific ways of describing what planning is all about. One is to look at the settings in which urban and regional planning take place. Another is to review the policy issues that tend to occupy the planner’s attention most of the time.

Planning takes place in public, non-profit, and private settings. City, regional, state, and national governments spend a considerable amount of money every year trying to orchestrate the flow of people, jobs, money, and natural resources from place to place. At the local level, municipal redevelopment, planning, public works, housing and transportation departments are concerned about regulating the development of housing, roads, industry, and recreational spaces. There are also departments and agencies concerned with the improvement of social services systems which provide health care, education, and manpower training. At the state level, planners are involved in the formulation of environmental policy and the administration of transportation, housing, community development and criminal justice programs, just to name a few. At the regional level, planners working with public agencies, councils of government, and special districts spend a great deal of their time coordinating the activities of local governments. Operating at the national level both here and abroad, in departments of housing and urban development, environmental protection, economic development, public works, social welfare, and fiscal management planners are concerned especially with the implementation of social welfare programs and the integration of economic and physical development efforts.

Urban and regional planning are not confined to government agencies. There are non-profit groups, especially those concerned with the provision of modestly priced housing in the central city, that employ planning practitioners. There are also a host of research institutes scattered throughout the world, in which urban and regional planners devote themselves to the full-time study of urban policy questions. Universities, hospitals, school systems and other complex public and private organizations employ institutional planners who manage a vast array of development decisions.
In the private sector there are for-profit consulting firms as well as urban and regional research divisions in major corporations. Consulting firms sell their services to various units of government as well as to individual entrepreneurs and corporations involved in large-scale projects. The building of entirely planned new towns, for example, brings together planners and urban designers from government agencies, large corporations, and private consulting firms. Some of the major corporations in the United States such as General Electric, Westinghouse, and others have established urban and environmental planning divisions concerned especially with application of advanced technology to urban and environmental problems. Finally, there are international organizations such as the Agency for International Development, the United Nations, and the World Bank that employ planners in a variety of roles concerned mostly with economic and social development.

Another way to understand what planners do, especially in the United States, is to look at the policy issues with which they are forced to wrestle. There are numerous items on our national agenda that require continued and serious attention: the revitalization of deteriorating central cities and depressed rural areas, the provision of new and better housing at prices all people can afford, the search for more effective ways of involving client groups in the decision-making process; the need to combat pollution and conserve scarce resources, the problems of designing more efficient public services, and most difficult of all, perhaps, the search for solutions to long-standing social problems such as discrimination and inequality. Planners work not only in agencies and departments but also as key assistants to policy makers such as congressmen, city managers, and other elected officials.

Over the past ten years the planning schools have developed increasing opportunities for specialization. The traditional concept of the planner as a generalist with a specialty has been supplemented in many quarters by the need for increasing functional specialization. At the Master's level, planner students are expected to complete a core of general courses and then to delve deeply into an area of specialization such as environmental design, transportation planning, health planning, social policy planning, or public systems analysis. Although the curricula, the faculties and the student bodies in planning schools have changed considerably over the past few years, there are a number of truths that are still generally accepted: first, the strength of the planning profession lies in its integrative approach to the problems of cities and urban regions; second, there is a greater need than ever before for effective long range planning and the evaluation of public policies
involving the distribution of resources and the utilization of the
natural environment; and third, the planning process must involve
the articulation, formulation, and continued reformulation of goals
and objectives, the analysis of alternative policies, the design and
implementation of programs, and the monitoring of citizen feedback.
The past decade has reminded us once again that action must be
informed by theory and empirical research, citizens and consumers
must be afforded an opportunity to participate in public decision-
making, and that there is no one "best" solution to the difficult
problems that we face.

Choosing a Graduate Program
Planning departments used to limit admission to students with back-
grounds in architecture and civil engineering. During the 1950's
this situation changed dramatically. At the present time there are
probably more graduate students with backgrounds in the social
sciences (sociology, political science, economics, history, etc.)
than in architecture or engineering. There are also a great many
graduate students from hybrid fields such as urban studies, ethnic
studies, Black studies, and environmental science. Most depart-
ments welcome applicants from almost every field, so don't feel
excluded without checking.

Why attend planning school, why not a school of law, public admini-
stration, social work, environmental engineering, architecture or
public health? It is clear that there are professionals in each of
these fields who do some of the same things that planners do. The
design and administration of local land use controls is often as much
the domain of lawyers as it is of planners. The design and evalua-
tion of social service programs overlaps the activities of many social
workers. Environmental engineers are as involved with the imple-
mentation of pollution control strategies as are urban and regional
planners. And a number of public health officials seem as preoc-
cupied with problems of health care delivery as the health planners.
At the doctoral level why not study urban policy questions in a
traditional department of sociology, economics, political science,
or history? The differences in style and approach are not always
obvious, but they are very real. Professional education, all
graduate education in fact, involves a not so subtle process of sociali-
zation. Planners and planning educators like to believe that they
ask different questions, worry more about the policy implications
of their research, come to this work with a real sense of client
needs, and are concerned ultimately about action and institutional
change. Finally, they believe strongly in the value of an inter-
disciplinary approach to problem solving. There is a difference
between dealing with all types of problems in cities and dealing with
the real problems of cities. Most urban professionals are concerned
only with the former; planners must be concerned with both.
There are two over-riding problems associated with choosing a graduate planning program. The first is knowing what things to look for, and the second is finding out more about each of them. Five items stand out above all the others: location (life style, contacts, job prospects, climate, and distance from family), quality of the program (expertise, diversity and teaching ability of faculty, long-term success of alumni; facilities, quality of students, strength in related university departments, and general reputation); curriculum (prerequisites, course requirements, core program, strength in areas of specialization, inter- and intra-university arrangements, thesis requirements, availability of field-related activities, job counselling and placement, overall flexibility); finances (tuition and fees, cost of living, fellowship and scholarship support, availability of teaching and research assistantships, work-study options, average levels of support, length of support, part-time and summer job opportunities); ambience (scale, faculty-student interaction, role of students in departmental governance, administrative efficiency, class size, teaching style, stability, quality of facilities, relationship to the rest of the university and the surrounding community).

Finding out more about each of these factors is not simple. There is obviously no substitute for first-hand encounters. Visits should include discussions with students and faculty as well as administrators. It is especially revealing to sit in on several classes. Catalogues and departmental brochures cannot tell the whole story, but they can give some idea about the range of courses and facilities available. Also a careful reading may turn up important information about requirements, prerequisites, financial aid, and field work opportunities. Informal discussions with recent graduates may also be helpful, but they are certainly not as effective as a two or three day visit.

Urban and regional planning departments offer a range of master's degrees (M.C.P., M.A., M.S., M.U.P. and others). The Master of City Planning (M.C.P.) is the most common degree, although a number of schools offering slightly different degrees are recognized by the American Institute of Planners and hold full membership in The Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning. Only a limited number of schools offer the Ph.D. (The master's degree in planning is usually not a prerequisite to the Ph.D.) Students can enter most doctoral programs in planning with a master's degree in a totally different field and some departments admit Ph.D. candidates with only undergraduate degrees.

The Admissions Process

No two departments handle admissions in quite the same way. Although it is difficult to "psyche out" the implicit criteria used by each department, it is relatively easy to enhance your prospects
for admission by observing a few simple rules. The important factors to keep in mind are undergraduate preparation and the "gamesmanship" of the applications process.

At last count there were more than 3,500 planning students enrolled in master's programs and over 650 students in doctoral programs in the United States and Canada. No one knows exactly how many students apply every year, but it is safe to assume that the number applying is larger than the number of places available. Some departments are extremely competitive (12 - 15 applicants for each place), others are prepared to offer admission to practically every student who meets the basic entrance requirements. What do admissions committees look for? Obviously, each department has a slightly different set of priorities, but in general they are concerned about the breadth and quality of an applicant's undergraduate background. Most are also interested in prior work experience, Graduate Record Exam scores, letters of recommendation, and other indicators of professional competence and ability to handle graduate level work.

Since the planning field encompasses a great many disciplines, undergraduate preparation need not be in design, engineering or sociology. Majors in anthropology, economics, or even science and literature are likely to have equally strong prospects. An increasing number of planning schools require some undergraduate work in economics and statistics. However, provision is usually made for students to make up prerequisites during their first semester of graduate study. Not surprisingly, planning schools are looking for breadth, depth, and performance. They are looking for students who have a talent for oral, written, and graphic communication. Above all, they want students who can read critically, grasp abstract concepts, and engage their fellow students with a sense of purpose and confidence.

How does the admissions process work? Most schools admit students in September. Applications are usually due in January or February. Admissions decisions are announced in April. With the emergence of tri-semester programs and spring-term admissions this situation varies in many places, so study the materials distributed by each department in which you are interested. Applicants are typically asked to submit an outline of their career objectives, their professional experience, if any, and their reasons for wanting to go to graduate school. For the most part honesty and precision are likely to increase your prospects for admission. Of course, the personal statement isn't everything. Graduate record exams are required by less than half the departments, and letters of recommendation sometimes play an important role.* It is best to solicit letters from a mix

*Most departments encourage applicants to submit GRE scores but do not require them to do so. In any case; it is probably wise to take the GRE's early in your senior year to keep open all your options.
of academics and non-university employers. Letters from pre-eminent types who are not really familiar with your strengths and weaknesses have little if any effect. Some schools ask for samples of written and/or design work. Few if any schools actually require an interview. However, interviews serve as an important source of information for a prospective applicant and they are usually worth the investment. There are other details peculiar to each university: application fees, financial aid requests, college transcripts, and other supplementary documents are likely to come into play in different ways.

The best ways to enhance your prospects for admission are to visit a school before you apply, talk to as many students and faculty members as you can, read the catalogue carefully (noting all deadlines and necessary submittals), prepare a relatively specific statement detailing your career interests, your past experience, and your expectations regarding graduate study (i.e. what you hope to learn), and solicit letters of recommendation from people who know you well. When it comes to financial assistance, ask for what you need. Most universities try to uncouple admissions decisions from financial aid decisions. Finally, try to prepare your application as thoughtfully and as neatly as possible.

What to expect once you get there

Graduate education is bound to be frustrating as well as exciting. Nothing is quite the way it should be -- classes are often too large, required courses seem overly restrictive, key faculty members are sometimes away the semester you plan to take their courses, decisions are often made without adequate student input, some faculty members are not as well prepared for their classes as they should be, and the red tape surrounding registration and financial aid often seems endless. On the other hand, the material is exciting, you can learn as much from your fellow students as from the faculty, projects and field-linked experiences invigorate the concepts and theories bandied about in class, and a growing sense of professional identity blossoms.

There is a tacit understanding that graduate students are supposed to take primary responsibility for their own graduate education. Even in a department that has a fairly rigid curriculum, the assumption is that each student will develop his or her own theories of action.

Curriculum development questions come up year after year. What is a planner supposed to know? What skills are essential? Should planners be trained as generalists or as specialists? How do the various specializations and components of the field fit together? How do we know what we know? Questions of governance also arise
frequently. What role should students have in departmental affairs? The debates are often exhilarating, they can also be exhausting. There are times when you will feel compelled to withdraw -- to hide yourself in the library or to fling yourself headlong into a new community-based effort or research project. Then, suddenly, you may wonder where everyone is and why the department seems so fractionalized. The range of activities in most planning departments and the diversity of faculty interests reinforces the need for sub-groups or small clusters. Students and faculty are often organized around common areas of interest. Classroom encounters lead to the emergence of new friendships and collegial relationships. Students and faculty parry back and forth, one group arguing for fewer requirements, the other for more structure. They need each other. At the end of a graduate career, it is not unusual to marvel at how much you have learned and how little you know.

The transition from the university to the professional world is not an easy one. The job market is not well organized. Every year the professional societies attempt to pull together the latest information on positions available in various parts of the country (see TAB, published by the American Society of Planning Officials), but they only scratch the surface. Most people find jobs through faculty or university contacts. The continued proliferation of specialized planning roles makes it increasingly difficult to keep track of what is available. Moreover, new positions tend to turn over very quickly.

Some schools are much more diligent than others when it comes to job counseling and placement assistance. Five years ago, there were probably five jobs for every graduating planner. Now the ratio is probably two to one. There positions are scattered throughout the world -- in big cities as well as non-metropolitan areas. Problems arise when students fail to consider the full array of alternatives. For some students the transition is very quick, for others (especially at the doctoral level) there is a tendency to linger in the university community. There is no doubt that graduate school is what you make of it. It will be both more and less than what you expect.
PART TWO: COMPENDIUM OF PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS