
Proposal to Merge the Department of Urban and Regional Planning with the Department of Landscape Architecture

The Department of Urban and Regional Planning (L&S and CALS) and the Department of Landscape Architecture (CALS) request to restructure into a single new Department of Planning and Landscape Architecture in the College of Letters and Science, effective July 1, 2017.

The new Department of Planning and Landscape Architecture will bring together dispersed resources to generate new knowledge and provide academic programs around urban and regional sustainability to improve the livability, economic vitality, and health of communities and their surrounding natural environments. Locating the new department in a single college creates administrative efficiencies and provides a solid foundation for long-term planning.

The two departments currently include 17 tenure-track faculty, seven instructional and research academic staff, and five administrative support staff positions. The new department would continue accredited academic programs in Landscape Architecture (BSLA) and Urban and Regional Planning (MS URPL). The existing PhD program will also continue, along with revised non-accredited undergraduate and graduate programs consistent with a broader multi-disciplinary focus.

Both departments have long histories on campus: Courses in City Planning were first offered on campus as early as 1911, and URPL had its official inception as a department in 1962; the first landscape classes were offered at UW-Madison in 1888.

Major benefits of a merger include the integration of two complementary disciplines to create new areas that return both fields to their early origins in public health, welfare, and ecological improvement by integrating planning, design, community development, and public policy around the disparate needs of people in urban, suburban, exurban, and rural areas. Of additional interest is the enhancement of existing ecological design and restoration/conservation curricula through integration of policy and planning processes, particularly in urban areas.

A merger would increase the capacity to manage graduate programs (URPL's MS and PhD; LA's MSLA) and undergraduate programs (BSLA and the BS major) through a combined administrative structure and course integration.

Informal discussions (since the 1970s) led to formal meetings and the Executive Committee of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning and the Executive Committee of the Department of Landscape Architecture each voted unanimously to approve this proposed plan for restructuring on October 28, 2016. Non-tenured faculty and other voting members of each department also voted unanimously to approve the proposed plan. The plan was approved at the L&S APC meeting on December 6, 2016, and the CALS APC meeting on December 20, 2016. The University Academic Planning Council discussed the name change on April 20, 2017, and unanimously approved it.