Graduate Urban Studies Program at SFU

PROGRAM, STUDENT, ALUMNI AND RESEARCH PROFILE
INTRODUCTION

The Graduate Urban Studies Program is a small, interdisciplinary graduate program in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences located at the Vancouver Campus. The program has:

- strong application, enrollment and graduation numbers,
- an exceptional reputation in academic and applied research,
- an excellent track record of graduates becoming urban professionals in a wide range of fields, and
- increasing recognition in the community as our alumni assume high profile roles as Mayors, senior planners, and non-profit leaders.

The Graduate Urban Studies Program at SFU is a multi- and interdisciplinary meeting place that addresses critical urban issues through engaged education and research. Urban Studies values its embeddedness in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences because the challenges and opportunities facing Canadian cities and communities are first and foremost social, political and economic ones, even though their consequences and potential solutions include technical, design and environmental dimensions.

Our five core faculty members have joint appointments in Geography, History and Political Science. Each of them teaches undergraduate classes and supervises graduate students in these disciplinary departments, while a colleague in Anthropology regularly teaches one of our elective courses. This hybrid model strikes a balance between strong identity and program continuity, while ensuring that we do not lose touch with our disciplinary roots. Our successful joint appointments showcase our genuine interdisciplinarity, as does our roster of Associate Members and Adjunct Professors.

We actively build relationships with urbanists in Anthropology, GSWS, History, Political Science, Public Policy, Sociology and other cognate units within the Faculty and beyond.

We actively build relationships with urbanists in Anthropology, Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies, History, Political Science, Public Policy, Sociology and other cognate units within the Faculty and beyond.

With Metro Vancouver as the program’s “laboratory,” the program has a significant positive impact in terms of its academic, policy, and community engagement. We have identified Housing as the most important gap in our research and teaching expertise. The need to address this subject is critical for a community-engaged university, given the Vancouver region’s ongoing housing affordability crisis.

The Graduate Urban Studies Program exemplifies the SFU strategic vision “to be the leading engaged university defined by its dynamic integration of innovative education, cutting-edge research and far-reaching community engagement.”
THE PROGRAM

We supervise approximately 80 graduate students across 2 credentials (a Master’s degree and Graduate Diploma) who are preparing for a wide array of urban careers in government and the private and non-profit sectors. The coursework based Graduate Diploma provides students an opportunity to engage in theoretical and applied reflection on topics crucial to cities and urbanity today. The Master of Urban Studies degree combines both coursework and independent research.

The Graduate Urban Studies program is a model of learner centred graduate education. The program is designed for both part-time and full-time study, with classes held at night at SFU’s Vancouver campus (Harbour Centre).

We equip students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences that prepare them to make cities work in an ever-changing and challenging world.

Over the last six years, Urban Studies has maintained steady applications and enrollments, and average course enrollments of about 14 students per class. Since all Urban Studies faculty devote half of their teaching time to a disciplinary department, we have only 2.5 CFL and some of the highest supervisory loads per faculty member of any graduate program at the university (averaging 10–12 supervisees per faculty member). Nevertheless, Urban Studies delivers very high quality graduate education, as demonstrated by the career success of our graduates and high level of ongoing alumni involvement in our program.

Urban Studies students represent the current and future generation of urban professionals. Many of our students are mid-career professionals who have gone on to become decision makers in their chosen field. Although our Master’s program is just 14 years old, our 110 M.URB, and 39 GDUS alumni work throughout the region, province, country, and world in professional and leadership capacities in a wide range of urban careers, including at municipalities throughout the Lower Mainland; provincial agencies such as BC Housing and the BC Nonprofit Housing Association; consulting firms Stantec, Brook Pooni, Modus, Bunt and Associates, and Perkins+Will Canada; real estate-related companies like Ivanhoe Cambridge, and Garnett Wilson Realty Advisors; and non-profit organizations, environmental advocacy groups and business improvement associations. Urban Studies alumni have also taken on leadership roles in prestigious professional organizations related, such as the Canadian Green Building Council, Urban Land Institute, and Small Housing BC.

We work hard to disseminate student research, and in 2016, launched a “Research Summaries” database of Master of Urban Studies thesis research. These summaries may be found at http://www.sfu.ca/urban/research-summaries.html (for a full listing of M.Urb theses, see http://summit.sfu.ca/collection/174). Student research has also been published as books and in academic journals, as well as in venues for policy and popular audiences (see http://www.sfu.ca/urban/alumni/recent-publications.html).

To paraphrase the SFU strategic vision, we equip students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences that prepare them to make cities work in an ever-changing and challenging world.
FACTS ABOUT URBAN STUDIES STUDENTS

- Our program has approximately 70-80 students enrolled at any given time.
- Between 2002 and 2016 (September) 149 students have graduated from our program (110 M.Urb and 39 GDUS).
- Historically and currently half of our students study full time and half part time.
- Three-quarters of our students historically and currently are from the Lower Mainland. The remainder come from across Canada and around the globe, including China, Iran, Israel, Peru, the UK, and the USA.
- The gender ratio historically and currently is almost exactly 50:50.
- Average (mean) age of students throughout program history has been about 30. Current age range is 23-50.
- Half of our students attended SFU or UBC as undergraduates.
- Almost one-third of our students’ bachelor degree training was in Geography but the rest have undergraduate backgrounds in a vast diversity of academic disciplines, including a full range of other social sciences (e.g. Political Science, Economics, Sociology, Psychology), the humanities (English, History, etc.), engineering, science, fine arts, and business.
- About 75% of admitted students have professional, student internship, and/or volunteer experience in urban studies prior to admission. They have worked in a diversity of planning occupations, and as researchers, consultants, technicians, and analysts, as well as in communications, outreach, engagement, marketing and community work. They have worked for urban government, urban not-for-profits, property development firms, and urban consultancies. The remaining 25% of our students are either recent graduates from undergraduate degrees or mid-career professionals aspiring to change careers.
- Because of the flexibility and non-cohort nature of our program, there is no standard time to completion for our program. Students have completed their M.URB in as few as 5 semesters and in as many as 22 (including pauses; the new graduate studies regulations will significantly shorten the completion time of students).
- Since 2008 50-55% of admissions to our program have been to the Masters Degree and the rest to the Diploma program.
- Currently and historically between 15-20% of all admitted students transfer from the Diploma to the Masters program.

This data is from an analysis conducted in Fall 2014 of the 225 students who had been admitted to the Urban Studies and had taken at least one urban studies course by that date.
FACTS ABOUT URBAN STUDIES ALUMNI

In September 2014, the Urban Studies program had 112 graduates, and we know how 82% of them are currently employed (statistics below are based on the 82% we know about).

- 77% work in the Lower Mainland
- 19% work elsewhere in Canada
- 4% work outside of Canada

Almost 50% of our alumni work in urban planning-related careers, including top-level management.

20% work as consultants, market researchers and policy researchers in the urban field, again with some reaching the top ranks of their field.

30% work in a wide range of careers, including social and community service, urban-related careers in advertising, marketing, and public relations; property assessment and appraisal; and the arts, culture, recreation, and sport.

Over 40% of our alumni work for local government. The remainder work in the private and nonprofit sectors, as consultants, for the federal/provincial governments, or in education at all levels.

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1 This data is from an analysis conducted in Fall 2014 of the 112 Urban Studies alumni, who have graduated from either the diploma or the masters up to and including summer 2014.
Our program is research intensive: Over the last six years (since 2010), the five members of Urban Studies’ core faculty have published 4 books, 8 single-author and 43 co-authored articles, 22 book chapters, 3 edited collections, and 6 guest edited journal issues. As principal investigators, they have attracted over $750,000 in one-time and multi-year research funding, including two SSHRC Insight and one SSHRC Partnership Development Grant. In recognition of their funding track-records and service of grant selection committees, three faculty members are appointed by the SFU VPR to serve as Research Mentors, providing advice to colleagues on the preparation of grant applications. Our faculty members are sought after urban experts in our region and around the world. They conduct applied research with a wide variety of academic, government, and community partners and offer their expertise by participating on a number of influential advisory bodies. Many of our students, most of who do not pursue academic careers, have nevertheless published their Urban Studies research, including in academic journals and university presses.

We communicate our findings far and wide: Urban Studies faculty disseminate their research through: top academic journals and university presses; discipline-specific national and international conferences; interdisciplinary and community-engaged workshops and forums; policy reports and presentations to policy audiences; invited presentations at universities, think tanks and the public sphere. We are regular media commentators on urban affairs. We contribute to making SFU “a world leader in knowledge mobilization building on a strong foundation of fundamental research”.

We engage a broad range of networks, disciplines and research styles. Our faculty members conduct a wide variety of research, representing the range of scholarly traditions in Urban Studies. They are social scientists and humanists; they publish alone and in teams; their work is empirical, theoretical, critical, basic and applied. They are highly connected researchers, involved in myriad academic and professional networks.

**RESEARCH VALUES**

- Interdisciplinarity within the Social Sciences & Humanities.
- Research that promotes urban sustainability, broadly conceived.
- Research that builds respectful and mutually beneficial community relationships.

**CURRENT/RECENT RESEARCH PROJECTS**

- **Bringing Nature and the Neighbours into Infill** – infill development, small homes – Holden, 2015-16.
- **Constructing Canada’s Cities** – transportation finance, urban development, global cities – Perl, 2010-17.
- **Comparing and Integrating Frameworks for the Study of Policy Making** – Perl, 2013-16.
- **Getting to Groundbreaking** – urban development, housing regulation, partnership – Holden, 2014-17.
- **Local Election Financing in BC** – a Data Set and Report for BC’s Chief Electoral Officer – Smith, 2015.
- **Logistics, linkages and development** – port-logistics industry, regional development – Hall, 2013-18.
- **Rethinking the Life of Transport Infrastructure** – Perl, 2015-18.
- **Social Enterprise Sector Survey** – social enterprise, surveys, community development – Hall, 2010-17.
- **Who Gardens the City?** – local food planning, policy networks – Evans, 2016.
PARTNERS AND NETWORKS OF URBAN STUDIES FACULTY (selected)

- Canadian Community Economic Development Network
- Canadian Index of Wellbeing
- Cities of Vancouver, Surrey, New Westminster
- Enterprising Non-Profits
- Greater Vancouver Home Builders Association
- Griffith University, Cities Research Centre
- Korea Transportation Research Institute
- Meeting the Climate Change Challenge team
- Metro Vancouver
- Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions
- Perkins+Will
- Post-Carbon Institute
- Poverty and Social Inclusion CURA
- SFU Community Trust
- Sustainable Canada Dialogues
- Urban Development Institute
- Urban Land Institute
- Vancouver Foundation
- Vancouver City Planning Commission

DISSEMINATION
Presentation venues of Urban Studies faculty (selected)

- American Association of Geographers
- Association Collegiate Schools of Planning
- Association of European Schools of Planning
- Association for Nonprofit and Social Economy Research
- BC Political Studies Association
- Canadian Association of Geographers
- International Conference on Public Policy
- International Political Science Association
- National Urban Freight Conference
- Organization of American Historians
- Transportation Research Board
- Urban Affairs Association
- World Congress on Transportation Research

INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT:
Partners, visitors and research sites of Urban Studies faculty