

Nohad A. Toulan School of Urban Studies and Planning

Urban Studies Doctoral Program Plan of Study Conference (Annual Milestone Review)

Who: You, the student, develop your Plan of Study with consultation from your faculty advisor. Once you have submitted the Plan of Study, you will conference with your faculty advisor and the Urban Studies Program Director to discuss and revise your Plan.

What: The Plan of Study is a document that lays out the substance and timeline of your PhD program, submitted to your advisor and the Urban Studies Program Director for discussion and feedback.

When: The Plan of Study form and conference should be completed in spring term each year for the first four years in the program. The Program Director will be part of the conference for the first two years. You are encouraged to submit the plan of study to your advisor as early as possible during the first year so that you can begin to focus your studies and avoid time delays. You will revisit your plan at your annual program progress conference.

Why: The Plan of Study form and conference is an opportunity to define the intellectual landscape of your research and your future goals, and to receive feedback on how to ensure that your coursework and research activities will support your success and timely completion of the doctoral degree.

How: You, the student, should consult the Urban Studies handbook and courses in other departments, consider your initial ideas about the scholarship you'd like to engage with over time, and discuss your draft plan with your advisor and other faculty.

Plan of Study contents

1. *Cover sheet and signatures.* Your name, date, and advisor's and director's names. To be signed upon successful completion of the program conference.
2. *Goals after receiving the degree.* Briefly describe the type of work you hope to do and the kind of institutional setting in which you would like to do it. For instance, I hope to be a tenure-track faculty member in a research-intensive university; or, I plan to do community engaged research and would like to be in an undergraduate focused institution; I will be conducting research and evaluation as a state agency employee; or, I will be directing a nonprofit that conducts participatory action research.

Long-term research objectives. Describe briefly the major intellectual debates you will participate in and the kinds of research questions you hope to pursue over the long term. This section should include some citations to major authors you find compelling.
3. **** Focus of your doctoral work.** How will your doctoral work support your future goals for research and practice? This is not a course list, but a set of topics, concepts, and skills you plan to develop during your program.

- Declare fields and describe the specializations or conceptual frameworks within those fields
 - Research design and methods. What are the research approaches that are appropriate to your questions?
 - Expected dissertation subject. Very briefly suggest what you might pursue as a dissertation topic.
4. Previous Preparation. Degrees, coursework, and work experience that contribute to the fulfillment of the above intentions. For coursework, indicate whether these are undergraduate or graduate courses and what grades you earned and please attach syllabi.
 5. ** Coursework for the PhD at PSU. Course list and timeline (table format suggested). The coursework should prepare you to have the substantive knowledge to complete the comprehensive exam and to do scholarly research in your area of specialization; to have the research skills in design and methods to undertake original dissertation research and a research career; and to teach in an urban studies/urban planning (or closely related) curriculum.
 - Field area and specialization
 - Research design
 - Research methods
 - Other courses
 6. Research skills. Outline your plan to gain experience in research and build skills beyond what you will learn in research design and methods courses. For example, you may be working as a research assistant with a faculty member. We realize this might not be an option for all students; independent study courses provide another pathway to gain formal research experience.
 7. Teaching skills. If your plans include teaching at the undergraduate or graduate level in the future, outline your plans for developing teaching skills. These could include serving as an instructor, a teaching assistant, grader, guest lecturer, or participating in workshops or courses on the teaching repertoire.
 8. ** Timeline for completing the degree. Map your expected timeline for completing the PhD degree, including the timing of your field area papers, exams, and dissertation colloquium. If you expect to continue other professional commitments while enrolled in the doctoral program, please indicate those plans and their impact on your timeline.

*** These sections marked with asterisks should be updated annually for your program progress conference.*

Plan of Study Conference

Students:

Students should reach out to their assigned faculty advisor shortly after beginning the first year of the doctoral program in order to begin the plan of study process. Students should begin to sketch out the sections of the plan of study as the basis for discussion with the advisor.

Students should provide to their advisor and the PhD director the written plan of study two weeks in advance of scheduling the plan of study conference.

At the plan of study conference, the student should briefly present goals and strategies for achieving the PhD degree and subsequent career plans. Expect to discuss and answer questions about the plan of study, and to revise or adjust it according to the direction and advice of faculty.

Faculty:

The primary faculty advisor should expect to discuss the plan of study with new PhD students as part of establishing the mentoring relationship.

The review of the plan of study and conference should establish that the student's plan will provide the path to successful completion of the field exam, the dissertation proposal colloquium, and to complete original research and defend the dissertation.

- Does the student define a focus and a strategy for mastery of the substantive fields?
- Does the student's plan achieve proficiency in appropriate research design and methods?
- Is the combination of coursework and other means of gaining knowledge sufficient to reach the student's goals? Are there appropriate departmental and university resources to achieve the goals in the field areas and research methods?

The result of the plan of study conference could be: accepting the plan as-is; accepting the plan with minor changes submitted in writing; or requesting the student revise the plan and hold a second conference to review. Whatever the outcome, the purpose of the conference is as a formative evaluation of the student's program plan. It is an intellectual excursion and meant to help the student develop a strong platform to achieve their own goals.