

The background of the entire page is a detailed, light gray map of a city grid, showing streets, blocks, and some larger open spaces. The map is oriented with the city center towards the top left.

Doctoral Program Urban Planning and Environmental Policy Student Handbook



Revised June 1, 2025



Barbara Jordan - Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs

Welcome Note

Welcome to the Department of Urban Planning and Environmental Policy in the Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs at Texas Southern University. Individuals pursuing a career in university teaching, research, or highly specialized practice, the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Urban Planning and Environmental Policy provides advanced knowledge, skills, and extensive experience working closely with faculty in teaching and research. The program is designed to foster competencies necessary for the critical examination of the nature of urban planning and environmental policy. Offered by an interdisciplinary faculty, the program emphasizes preparation in research methods, spatial and regional analysis, development theory, historical processes, analytic and policy formulation skills, and the critical appraisal of alternative causes of change.

1. Faculty and Staff Members

Tenured Faculty (listed alphabetically)



Dr. Robert D. Bullard

Distinguished Professor

Ph.D. Sociology, Iowa State University

M.A. Sociology, Atlanta University

Research: Environmental Justice, Sustainable Development, Urban Land Use



Dr. Bumseok Chun

Acting Department Chair, Associate Professor

Ph.D. City and Regional Planning, Ohio State University

M.CRP. City and Regional Planning, Ohio State University

M.S. Geodetic Science, Ohio State University

Research: Coupled Human-Nature Interaction, Thermal Environment, Scenario-Based Analysis



Dr. Glenn S. Johnson

Professor

Ph.D. Sociology, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

M.A. Sociology, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Research: Environmental Policy, Community Impact Assessment, Environmental Justice, Community-University Partnership



Dr. Jeffrey Lowe

Associate Professor

Ph.D. Urban Planning and Policy Development, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

M.CRP. City and Regional Planning, Morgan State University

Research: Housing and Community Development, Planning and Race, Political Economy of Community Development Organizations, Public Philanthropy



Dr. Sheri Smith

Associate Professor

Ph.D. City and Regional Science, Texas A&M University

M.CRP. City and Regional Planning, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Research: Urban Infrastructure, Housing and Community Development, Food System



Dr. Laura Gwen Solitare

Associate Professor

Ph.D. Urban Planning and Policy Development, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

M.URP. City and Regional Planning, Virginia Commonwealth University

Research: Environmental Planning, Health Impact Assessment, Land Use, Public Health, Environmental Justice

Administrative Staff



Ms. Michelle Walker

UPEP Senior Administrative Assistant

Email: Michelle.Walker@tsu.edu

2. Ph.D. Degree Requirements

The overall requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Urban Planning and Environmental Policy are summarized as follows:

1. Completion of a total of fifty-four (54) credit hours. Of the 54 credit hours, twenty-one (21) credit hours are required core courses. In addition to the core requirements, students are required to take twelve (12) hours of their specialization and nine (9) hours of elective. The remaining credit hours are dissertation credits.
2. Of the total 54 credit hours, not more than six (6) non dissertation credit hours can be transferred into the program from another university. Such transferred credits must have been earned in a doctoral program and must be of grade "B" (3.0) or better.
3. Passing of the comprehensive examination.
4. Completion of residency requirement.
5. Presentation and acceptance of dissertation proposal.
6. Successful completion and oral defense of the dissertation.
7. Presentation of at least one paper at a national conference or publication in a peer-reviewed journal.

Here is a list of planning-related national conferences.

1. Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP) Annual Conference, Website: <https://www.acsp.org>
2. Annual North American Meetings of the Regional Science Association International, Website: <https://www.narsc.org/newsite/>
3. Western Regional Science Association Meeting, Website: <https://www.wrsaonline.org/newsite/>
4. International Conference Urban Affairs, Website: <https://urbanaffairsassociation.org/conference/>
5. American Association of Geographers Annual Meeting, Website: <https://www.aag.org>
6. Transportation Research Board Annual Meeting, Website: <https://trb-annual-meeting.nationalacademies.org>

*For all these processes, each Ph.D. student must obtain approval to receive guidance from an academic advisor whose research interests align with the student's own.

3. Comprehensive Examination

The purpose of the comprehensive examination is to assess the student's understanding in the areas of urban and regional theory, planning theory, quantitative methods, and environmental planning and policy, in relation to their research topic. This examination is designed to evaluate the student's technical, analytical, and evaluative abilities within selected areas related to planning.

After completing the required coursework, the student becomes eligible to take the comprehensive examination.

Before taking the exam, the student must thoroughly consult with their academic advisor regarding their research topic. A comprehensive review of the existing literature on the chosen topic must be completed in advance. This literature review should be primarily based on scholarly journal articles. Using this review, the student must demonstrate sufficient background knowledge of the research topic to their academic advisor. The format of the literature review should follow the standards typically found in the literature review section of academic research papers to ensure academic rigor and professionalism.

And after consulting with your advisor, you will select your committee members. The committee consists of a total of three members, including your advisor. The majority of the committee members must be faculty from the Urban Planning and Environmental Policy (UPEP) program.

The examination consists of a **written and an oral component**. The written exam is a take-home format, in which the student must answer all questions provided by the committee members and submit a well-organized written document within 72 hours. Based on the submitted responses, the oral examination will be conducted on the scheduled date, either in person or via an online meeting with the committee members.

A candidate is allowed two attempts to pass the Comprehensive Examination. A doctoral student who fails on the first attempt may petition to retake the exam. The petition must include a detailed plan outlining the steps the student will take to improve their performance. This plan must be approved by the examination committee and the Department Chair. Failure to pass the Comprehensive Examination, or any part of it, after the second attempt will result in automatic dismissal from the doctoral program.

4. Doctoral Candidacy

To be admitted to candidacy for the Doctor of Philosophy in Urban Planning and Environmental Policy (UPEP), a doctoral student must meet the following requirements:

1. Successfully pass the doctoral comprehensive examination.
2. Be unconditionally admitted to the UPEP doctoral program.
3. Fulfill the residency requirement of two consecutive semesters of full-time enrollment (9 credit hours each) or an approved equivalent.
4. Complete all required coursework for the degree, including 42 non-dissertation credit hours of approved graduate-level courses.

5. Ph.D. Dissertation

The dissertation serves several purposes, including demonstrating to the academic community, the university, and the supervisory committee that the student is capable of conducting and successfully completing independent, scholarly research on a problem of significance to urban planning and environmental policy. Therefore, focused work on the dissertation typically does not begin until the student has passed the comprehensive examination. A successful dissertation must involve original research and is expected to contribute significantly to the body of knowledge in the field.

After achieving candidacy, the student, in consultation with their advisor, must select the members of the dissertation committee and submit their names for approval to the Dean of the Graduate School. The committee must consist of at least three graduate faculty members, including the dissertation chair. The chair must be a faculty member from the Urban Planning and Environmental Policy (UPEP) Department.

The dissertation process consists of two stages: the proposal defense and the final oral defense.

To prepare for the **proposal defense**, the student must work closely with their academic advisor. It is recommended that the student register for an **independent study** under the guidance of their advisor to facilitate this preparation. All graduate students engaged in independent study for the purpose of dissertation preparation are required to enroll in a minimum of three (3) credit hours during the semester in which the independent study is conducted.

Prior to the proposal defense, the student must also develop a well-organized document—formatted according to academic standards—that includes a

clear introduction to the research topic, a comprehensive literature review, and a detailed methodology section. Your committee members will review your document. Once they have completed their review and all members have given their approval, the proposal defense can be scheduled.

Once you successfully complete the proposal defense, you must immediately submit **the IRB application and obtain your CITI certificate.**

The **Institutional Review Board (IRB)** is a committee established to review and approve research involving human subjects. Its primary purpose is to ensure that all research conducted by students, faculty, or staff complies with ethical standards and federal regulations protecting the rights, welfare, and privacy of human participants.

IRB approval is required when your research involves:

1. Collecting data from people (surveys, interviews, experiments, observations).
2. Using identifiable private information about individuals.
3. Studying existing human data that is not publicly available.

Even if a student believes their research qualifies for an IRB waiver, it is still necessary to submit an application for review. This ensures official determination and compliance with university and federal research policies.

The **Final Oral Defense** is the concluding stage of the dissertation process, where the doctoral candidate defends their completed dissertation research in front of a committee of faculty members, typically including the dissertation advisor and other academic experts in the field. This oral examination allows the student to present their research findings and methodology, answer questions from committee members, and demonstrate their comprehensive knowledge of the research topic.

6. Standards of Performance

To continue in the program, a student must make reasonable and timely progress toward the degree in terms of course work completed and examinations. A determination that a student is not making satisfactory progress and should be terminated from the program may be made at several points in his or her program, including failure to achieve and maintain a doctoral GPA of at least 3.00, failure to pass twelve (12) credit hours within a twelve-month period, failure of the comprehensive examinations, or failure to defend successfully a dissertation proposal or dissertation. In all such cases, a recommendation of dismissal must be made to the Admission Committee and Program Coordinator, both of whom will review the case and issue a final decision regarding termination from the program.

7. Residency Requirement

A residency of at least one consecutive academic year is required prior to scheduling the comprehensive examination. This entails completing a full course load of three courses (9 credit hours) in two consecutive semesters, or its approved equivalent.

Once the residency requirement has been fulfilled, students must complete the Student Plan for Residency form and submit it to the Graduate School for official documentation.

For students unable to enroll in 9 credit hours across two consecutive semesters in a traditional academic year, an alternative option is permitted:

- 9 credit hours in the Spring semester, followed by
- 6 credit hours in Summer I and 3 credit hours in Summer II, or vice versa.

8. Ph.D. Degree Completion Time Limit

After admission to a program leading to the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree, students are allowed seven (7) calendar years to complete all program requirements.

Under extenuating circumstances, a student may request an extension. This request must be approved by the student's Doctoral Degree Advisory Committee and the Dean of the Graduate School. With approval, the student may be granted up to a maximum of nine (9) calendar years to complete the doctoral program.

This time limit does not include any coursework completed as part of a master's degree program. Furthermore, **credits earned more than seven (7) years prior to the completion date of the doctoral program cannot be applied toward the Ph.D. requirements unless special permission is granted by the Dean of the Graduate School.**

9. Other Requirement

With the exception of students who are required to resolve incomplete grades, all graduate students must be enrolled during the semester in which they intend to complete degree program requirements. These requirements

include, but are not limited to, fulfillment of the English proficiency requirement, the comprehensive examination, and the dissertation defense.

10. Coursework Summary

All doctoral students in Urban Planning and Environmental Policy are required to complete twenty-one (21) semester credit hours of core courses across three (3) areas: Sustainable Environmental and Land Use Planning, Community Development and Housing, and Spatial Analysis and Mobility Planning. Additionally, students must participate in the doctoral research curriculum. The core curriculum is designed to provide a comprehensive introduction to planning, emphasizing analytical methods, planning techniques, and environmental issues and policies. The following outlines the twenty-one (21) credit hours required:

Subject	Core Course	Credit Hours
Planning Theory	UPEP 900 Advanced Planning Theory and Practice	3
	UPEP 901 Advanced Urban Theory	3
Research Methodology	UPEP 902 Advanced Planning Analysis I	3
	UPEP 903 Advanced Planning Analysis II: Statistics	3
Environmental Policy	UPEP 763 Environmental Planning and Policy	3
	UPEP 765 Environmental Planning and Natural Resource Management	3
	UPEP 770 Environmental Monitoring and Analysis	3
Specialization (4 courses)		12
Elective Courses (3 courses)		9
UPEP 942 Dissertation I & UPEP 943 Dissertation II		12
Total Required Credit Hours		54



TEXAS SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

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*Department of Urban Planning
& Environmental Policy*