

UrbanPlan at High School

An Overview for Teachers

Every teacher implementing UrbanPlan has asked the same questions you are probably asking yourself now:

- Can my students perform optimally on their standardized and/or AP tests if I incorporate UrbanPlan into my curriculum?
- Will the value of the student takeaway be commensurate with the 15 class hours the program requires?
- I teach three to five classes a day. I have no time to recruit or manage volunteers and no budget for any materials. Can a real teacher in a real school do this?

These teachers, including those in some of the country's most demanding high schools, have been able to answer, "Yes". In addition, over 98 percent of all teachers who introduce UrbanPlan in their curriculum continue teaching the program. Since its introduction in spring 2002 through spring 2010, UP has had over 20,000 students in 14 states.

The information below will help you make an informed decision about UrbanPlan's suitability for your classroom.

What Is UrbanPlan and Who Created It?

UrbanPlan (UP) is a realistic, engaging, university-level classroom-based, teacher-led, web-supported, 15-class-hour PBL unit for economics and some government classes.

Through UP, high school juniors and seniors discover how the forces of our market economy clash and collaborate with the nonmarket forces in our representative democracy interfaces to create the built environment in which they live. UP employs best practices of project and problem-based learning.

"If you want students to understand how the concepts of trade-offs, risk, public good, supply and demand, and opportunity cost impact their lives, do UrbanPlan. They get a gut-level understanding of how these forces influence the decisions they make in their proposals—design, market demand, city revenues, investor return, and neighborhood wants—and these decisions have profound, real-world consequences."

~ Ryan Stanley, Economics Teacher, Desert Vista HS, Phoenix, Arizona

"I was most impressed with the energy that the students put into the competition. It was clear that there was a balance of learning, good problem solving skills, and a strong sense of fun."

~ John Goff, Development SVP, Cousins Properties (ULI Atlanta)

"Urban Plan generated the kind of enthusiasm and spirited teamwork that teachers always hope for. There were numerous opportunities for leadership on many different levels, and it was exciting to watch the drama unfold as plans were formalized and projects took shape. The fact that Urban Plan is tied to National Council of Economic Education standards further enhances its use in the classroom."

~Sally Finch, Economics (retired), Westminster, Atlanta

Rigorously Tested Standards-Based Content

The curriculum aligns with state and national content standards for high school economics and provides a much needed local government component to government classes.

Created by Academics, Classroom Teachers, and Land Use Professionals

The Fisher Center for Real Estate and Urban Economics at the University of California at Berkeley developed UP in collaboration with the Urban Land Institute (ULI), a national nonprofit organization of public and private sector land use professionals, and high school economics teachers.

Real teachers, real schools: All teachers on the UP curriculum development team teach in traditional classrooms in traditional public schools. The UP program responds to these realities.

Why UrbanPlan? The Educator's Perspective

Strict curriculum standards, standardized tests, and burdensome resource pressures make it difficult for dedicated teachers to introduce innovative, engaging curriculum units in their classrooms that require students to

- go beyond information gathering and analysis to synthesis;
- resolve problems that have “no right answer.”

The teachers on the UP curriculum development team created UP as an engaging vehicle for teaching core content issues and core learning skills. They demanded a program that would

- provide students with a sophisticated, integrated, and visceral understanding of core content issues in
- economics and government;
- provide individual accountability and individual assessment lacking in most group projects;
- reliably and consistently leverage the skills of outside professionals to advance the academic objectives of the program;
- create no additional resource demands for the teacher or school.

Why UrbanPlan? The Land Use Professional's Perspective

The UrbanPlan Mission

UrbanPlan develops a more educated citizenry around the challenges and complexities of land use decisions so, together, we can create better communities.

UrbanPlan Objectives

Students who complete UrbanPlan will understand three fundamental principles:

- The built environment does not happen by accident or by mandate.
- It is a result of the interplay of dynamic market and nonmarket forces, both institutions and individuals.
- Our actions as citizens and consumers can influence what is built when it is built and where it is built.

The United States will add 60 million people over the next 20 years. As our population grows, our citizens are called on to make increasingly difficult land use policy decisions. Where and how will we, our children, and future generations live, work, shop, and travel from place to place?

Our answers to these questions will determine how we accommodate growth on our limited land resources without sacrificing the livability of our neighborhoods or violating our sense of community. Yet nothing in our education arms us with the language and skills to become problem-solving participants in this process that is so critical to our quality of life and the vitality of our democracy.

We never learn the forces in our market economy that interact with those in our representative democracy to create the built environment. We don't experience the trade-offs that must happen in development and the multiple consequences of each trade-off.

If we are to effectively address, rather than hide from, the challenge of our growing population, if we are to improve our communities as they grow, we must elevate the sophistication of the discourse at the local level. That is why land use professionals across the country, through ULI, support UP in their local schools, providing tomorrow's voters, neighbors, community leaders, public officials, and land use professionals with the insights and language to become engaged and informed problem-solvers.

How Does the UrbanPlan Program Work in the Classroom?

Student development teams respond to a "Request for Proposals" for the redevelopment of a blighted site in the mythical city of "Yorktown." Each team member assumes one of five roles in their private, for-profit firm: finance director, marketing director, city liaison, neighborhood liaison, or site planner. Their goal is to win the contract from the city.

Teams address challenging financial, market, social, political, and design issues; develop a financial proforma and three-dimensional model of their plan; and present their proposal to a "city council" of land use professionals that awards the development contract to the winning team.

Through these roles, students develop a visceral understanding of the various stakeholders in the development process and the challenge of reconciling their often competing agendas to create a well-designed, market responsive, sustainable project. In the process, the teams must

- read, analyze, and synthesize complex information;
- resolve challenging financial, social, political, and aesthetic issues;
- employ a computer-based financial spreadsheet to test economic returns;
- create a three-dimensional model of their site;
- make "trade-offs"—Balance the often-conflicting public and private sector needs and wants of city government neighborhood residents, the market, and investors; and
- present their proposal to a "city council" composed of land use professionals that awards the development contract to the winning team.

Over the course of the 15 class-hour project and prior to the presentations, land use professionals, who have attended the daylong UrbanPlan volunteer training, interact several times with the student teams.

"Facilitators" visit the classroom twice during the 15-class hours. Through Socratic interaction, they challenge the students to think more critically about the UrbanPlan issues and the specific responsibilities of their "job" (finance, marketing, site planner, city liaison, neighborhood liaison).

“Presenters” visit at the teacher’s option. They have an interactive discussion with students on the professional’s own work and how it relates to issues and decisions the students are struggling with in UrbanPlan.

Through complex problem solving and interaction with public and private sector land use professionals, students learn that the issues addressed, and the skills employed in coming to a UP solution, represent a “real-world” situation.

Who Should Teach UrbanPlan?

Demanding economics teachers: UP was developed by and for economics and some government teachers who support academically rigorous, unbiased, problem and project-based learning.

Teachers who have consistently set high expectations for student performance in homework and the classroom, and held students accountable for their performance, will have success with UP.

Academic core content classes: UP was developed for and is only supported in required economics and some government/civics classes where students expect rigorous academics and meaningful homework assignments and care about their grade. It is not supported in any other courses including human geography/urban geography, environmental studies, business, architecture, drafting, or computer/tech courses.

UP is not well suited to elective classes where students do not expect academic challenges or substantial homework or where their grade does not have substantive consequences to their graduation or college acceptance status, and where the class size is not as predictable as in required classes.

Class size: Minimum recommended class size is 20–four teams per class. UP has been run in classes as large as 40 students. It is not suitable for classes with fewer than 18 students.

Is UrbanPlan Right for My Students?

UP was piloted with a demographically diverse range of college-bound students, both urban and suburban. A successful UP requires:

- Consistently high attendance—a very low absentee rate is essential to run UP. The team cannot function
- effectively when a member is missing.
- Students who can (and will) read at 12th grade level.
- Students who have the maturity to accomplish work independently and in a group.
- A controllable classroom.
- Pace: The 15-class-hour format is intense; students' capacity to focus is critical.
- Students need simple computer skills:
 - ability to start up and shut down a computer;
 - input text into a document;
 - save a document to a disk or remote storage drive; and
 - print a document.

Group Project Objections?

The teachers who developed UrbanPlan demanded a curriculum and format that resolves teachers' key objections to project and problem-based learning (PBL) programs: academic rigor, individual accountability & assessment, and "mule syndrome," while maximizing the benefits of PBL formats:

- Academic rigor: standards-based content and high demand on core learning skills.
- Individual students assume a role and advocate a position with the team—given the demands of the program, one or two students cannot carry a team.
- Each member must contribute to the solution and can be evaluated, though rubrics/objective criteria, on her individual class and presentation performance.
- Each member must speak from her/his role during team presentation.
- Roles demonstrate to students the variety of skill sets required in developing solutions to complex, real world issues.
- "Cheat-proof"—Because of the format of the program, described previously, and the "no right answer" problem, an individual student cannot have someone else do her work or find the "right answer" through any source.
- Every team member interacts with practicing land use professionals.

What are the Resource Demands on My School and Me?

Program Support & Logistics—A Turnkey Program

All teachers who developed UP experience the strict curriculum standards and burdensome resource pressures that make it increasingly difficult for dedicated teachers to accommodate exciting new programs in their classrooms. Therefore, UP provides full support for the teacher at no cost to the school.

Program Support

The ULI support for the program includes:

- Teacher's Guide and lesson plans.
- Required teacher training.
- Standards based curriculum and all associated materials.
- Land use professionals for the classroom who have attended a full day UrbanPlan volunteer training.
- Website.

Logistics

- Duration: 15-class-hours plus a presentation (teacher's may, of course, expand time allotted for program).
- Classroom: Fully implementable in traditional classroom.
- Field trips: Does not require any out of classroom trips.
- Professionals: Your ULI sponsor recruits and schedules all UP trained facilitators, presenters, and city council members.

Does UrbanPlan Address Additional Core Skill and Learning Issues?

Core Skill and Learning Issues

Reading skills—High demand on reading to acquire, analyze, and synthesize information.

- Focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information.
- Make straightforward inferences.
- Interpret and integrate ideas and information.

School to Work Issues

- Introduction to the skills, processes, and behaviors required in a contemporary work environment.
- Introduction to career opportunities in public and private sectors.
- Students interact with professionals from public and private sectors with in the classroom & present to public and private sector professionals at culmination of project.

Why Not Use a Project in My Community?

Learning the Principles Dispassionately

UP addresses some of the most complex, highly emotional, and politically charged issues we address as citizens. UP allows students to step back and engage these issues dispassionately, while it insures that curriculum content standards are consistently and appropriately addressed.

UP does not advocate a position or point of view. The development team took great care to create an unbiased platform that provides students with insights into the interplay of the real market and non-market forces that affect development in our democracy. They will discover that every choice they make has social, political, economic, environmental, and aesthetic implications.

When students play with the full range of scenarios, they gain a visceral understanding of how the market and nonmarket forces impact land use decisions in their own community.

Grounded in the basic issues and with an understanding of the various stakeholders, the students can have an informed interaction with the land use professionals who visit your class to discuss the challenges of local projects. As UP veterans, your students will be well prepared to evaluate the costs and benefits of future development as they confront them in their city or town.

Time & Content

The “case study” insures that the full range of issues involved with land use challenges are tied to curriculum content standards in 15-class-hours.

Given the complexities and duration of real estate development projects, students could never meaningfully engage in a real problem in 15 or even 1500 class hours.

More Questions or Reservations?

Please give us the opportunity to answer your questions, challenges, reservations. With over seven years in the field—14 states, dozens of teachers, hundreds of classrooms, and 20,000 students—we can answer any question or concern you have regarding implementing UP in your classroom.

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