
THE GEORGE
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Sustainable Urban Planning
NEWSLETTER

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What were you doing before applying to the program?

Before applying to GW's Sustainable Urban Planning Program I was a recent graduate from Loyola University Maryland, and intended to take a gap year before going to graduate school. Upon graduation I had an internship working at a Township in Cumberland County, PA in their MS4 department. In this position I worked directly under the Clean Water Act to ensure that the Township was in compliance with its federal mandates and safeguarded its waters.

What prompted you to apply?

Three factors prompted me to apply to the program, experiences from my hometown, my undergraduate studies, and past jobs. I come from Lancaster, PA, a small rural farming town. However, in the recent years it has been rapidly developing into a more suburban, and certain parts urban area. The once quaint farmland town has now become home to vast shopping malls, high density neighborhood developments, and congested highways. This frustrated me as I felt the way in which these new additions were constructed and planned were not done in a sustainable way for my community. My undergraduate studies were in History and Environmental and Sustainability Studies. The particular area that I had a strong focus in was the Industrial Revolution and its impact on society and the environment. I found that the land use patterns during this time widely shifted and brought about a new economy and a more industrialized society and environment. While working in MS4, I realized I wanted to make a career out of something related to planning and land use with a focus on environmental quality and protection. I wanted to understand more of the planning process, and how different forms of land use can impact communities, the natural world and even influence policy. I began to search for different programs and came across GW's. What struck me the most about their program was the strong emphasis on urban planning that benefits people, the environment and the economy, or the triple bottom line. Each issue from my hometown, undergraduate studies, and job experience led me to this program due to its focus on the triple bottom line.

What have you learned thus far that had the most impact on you or was your favorite part of the program?

I learned so much in my first semester at GW. I started with three classes, Resilient and Low Carbon Cities, Land Use Law, and Sustainable Transportation. Although each class had its own general focus the underlying themes stayed the same which is the focus on positive planning in regards to the triple bottom line. The sentiment of using planning

for productive good to help benefit all types of communities, empower inclusive economic development, and protecting the environment. What had the most impact on me was learning about GHG emissions and IPCC scenarios in my Resilient and Low Carbon Cities class. I generally knew about the world's plight with GHG emissions but I guess I wasn't as aware with how bad it was, and how bad the projects are even with slight to moderate reductions. Being confronted with this stark and extremely pessimistic view it was easy to lose hope. However, I left the class feeling hopeful and optimistic because we spent extensive time looking into cities across the world who are tackling this issue in creative ways. I was excited to continue learning how I, as a future urban planner, could participate and help create a better world for generations to come.

What is your capstone/research interest?

Since I come from an extensive environmental background, I would like to gear my final capstone project towards environmental protection and quality namely in the face of climate change. I am interested in looking at how developing countries who have contributed the least to the problem but who bear the brunt of it, are tackling the issue while also competing economically in the globalized world. I think it would be very interesting to look at some of their tactics in planning and compare them with some of the plans used in the United States. Planning is not a singular practice therefore, I would love to look at what both developed and developing countries are doing.

Do you have any advice for prospective students?

As a recent prospective student myself I urge you to do your research. Look into programs that interest you and reach out to their coordinators. What I was so impressed with GW over was how quick they were to respond to my initial query into the program, I was literally on the phone with someone 15 minutes after I sent in a request for information. While the other schools I considered took weeks to get back to me. I was able to attend a virtual information session, and they even helped set up a tour of the campus for me, a meeting with the program director, and allowed me to sit in on a class. By putting myself out there and asking for the resources I was extremely rewarded as GW was so happy and quick to provide me with everything I needed to help make my decision. What helped me the most was sitting in on a class. In that I was able to see how the class was structured, get a feel for the curriculum, and engage with current students. I definitely recommend doing that as grad school can be a costly and timely investment and you want to make sure you make the right choice.



What were you doing before applying to the program?

After completing my B.A. in Philosophy, I worked in operations and manufacturing in the racing industry for five years and gained valuable experience managing and wearing multiple hats in a small business environment. With that business experience, I transitioned to sales and operations in multi-unit property management and commercial real estate. I managed and lead sales teams with a focus on accountability, reporting, and operational efficiency. I then had a unique opportunity to shift into medical device sales, where I focused on capital equipment account management at hospitals and surgery centers.

What is your particular area of interest in urban planning?

I am interested in intersection of health, planning, and urban resilience.

What prompted you to apply to the program?

While working in commercial real estate I observed first-hand the negative impact of poor planning and development practices. I transitioned into medical device sales with the hope of working with technology to create healthier outcomes for people. In many ways, I achieved that goal every day. My reach, however, was restricted to a small number of individuals. I joined the program at GWU because it would allow me to apply what I learned in medical device sales and commercial real estate to a larger scale. As an urban planner, I could be part of a profession that plans for healthier outcomes for communities, cities, and regions.

What have you learned thus far that had the most impact on you or was your favorite part of the program?

I am thrilled by the fact that climate change and adaptation planning has been common thread throughout my time in the program. Understanding the relationship between cities and climate change from the perspective of an urban planner is a critical skill. The course curriculum not only prepares students to work in various fields of urban planning fields, it also educates students about the intricacies of climate change policy and the science that backs it.

I am thrilled that climate change and adaptation planning have been a common thread throughout my time in the GW Sustainable Urban Planning program

What is your capstone/research interest?

My research is focused on how nature-based design affects public health.

Do you have any advice for prospective students?

Join the Sustainable Urban Planning Student Organization. Attend community support events with your classmates. Get involved in activities with your professors, classmates, alumni and friends of the program. It will greatly enrich your experience!



Student HIGHLIGHTS

Shannon Tokumaru

Anticipated Graduation:
May 2021



What were you doing before applying to the program?

I graduated from Mississippi State University in 2018 with a degree in Public Relations. Prior to attending GW, I was living in Tallahassee, FL taking graduate classes in Public Administration and Urban Planning at the Florida State University. I am currently working as Curbside Analyst at District Department of Transportation

What is your particular area of interest in urban planning?

I am interested in the connection of Urban Planning and Public Health, particularly through the integration of green and gray infrastructure and WASH systems in developing areas.

What prompted you to apply to the program?

Urban planning can seem broad because it affects virtually every aspect of our life. After speaking with the program director at that time, I learned how customizable this program is. When I was applying, I knew I had interest in public health and urban planning, but I did not know what that entailed. With the diverse curriculum I have been able to take classes that encouraged me to discover a specialization that connects these two interests.

What have you learned thus far that had the most impact on you or was your favorite part of the program?

SUP has opened my eyes to the many sectors of creating sustainable communities. My favorite part of the program is that both students and faculty come from various backgrounds. This allows us to learn from each other while considering new perspectives. The diversity in curriculum makes this program specialized but the diversity of people keeps it holistic.

What is your capstone/research interest?

I am still at the beginning stages of my capstone proposal so there is some work to be done but I am going off the idea of "the world is your playground." With my capstone I hope to highlight the application of sustainable parks design in urban streetscape focusing on developing areas.

Do you have any advice for prospective students?

Don't be afraid to challenge yourself, your classmates, or your professors. This program is designed to make you ask questions and push your comfort zone. If you are unsure of anything, just ask. If you have an idea but think it might be too bold, propose it anyway. All the faculty are passionate about seeing you not only succeed in the field but find pride in your work.

Webinar HIGHLIGHTS

Students in the Sustainable Urban Planning Program take advantage of various webinar opportunities, including:

CAREER BUILDING SERIES



[Linkedin Lab](#)
[Resume Building](#)
[Interview Strategies](#)

Nicole Mintz and Dr. Sandra Whitehead

EPA WEBINAR



[Efficiency and Renewables Finance for Small Business and Congregations](#)

Scott Sklar

Student Project HIGHLIGHTS

Sustainable Urban Planning Students Gain Hands-on Experience with Studio Class Projects

The Sustainable Urban Planning (SUP) Program is aimed at students interested in policy and environmental change to create healthier, more inclusive and prosperous communities. Our program, with its policy focus, provides students with the skills and knowledge required to make an impact on their community and the world.

Ballston 21

Through the studio class, students gain real world knowledge and experience working with the Arlington County, Virginia Planning Department. One example of this partnership is a project, called Ballston 21, where the studio class made 21 recommendations to make the Ballston area, where the GW SUP campus is located, more livable.

[See project...](#)

Shirlington Village

For the past three years, the planning studio class at GW has worked with members of the Arlington County planning department on real-time projects. This year, the studio class project was to work with county staff on the community engagement piece of the Shirlington Special General Land Use Plan (GLUP) Study Plus.

[Read more...](#)

Quantico Marine Base Project - Phase 1

In the fall of 2019 the Program was contacted by the Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Office at the Quantico Marine Base about 30 miles from DC. They were interested in working with students to reimagine a vacant site on the base as a recreational amenity. In the spring of 2020, students embarked on the first of three studio classes to create an open space plan for the site known as Whiskey Gulch. We began with interviewing stakeholders, visiting the site and setting up the framework of the project: mission, vision and goals. In a short video, the semester 1 students describe their work on a real-world project. This summer, the class is focused on engaging the community to decide which uses they would want to see to create a useful space that people who work and live on base can enjoy and, in the fall, the third class will put the finishing touches on the design. This series of studios gives students hands-on experience doing what real world planners do with a federal client while having a great time.

[Watch video...](#)



Faculty HIGHLIGHTS



“The majority of the Sustainable Urban Planning Program’s faculty are based external to George Washington University in governmental, nongovernmental, and private sector agencies. This unique aspect of the program means that students learn from practitioners at the cutting-edge of their respective fields and have extensive access to networks in the Washington D.C. region and beyond.”

–Dr. Sandra Whitehead
SUP Program Director

SOLAR TODAY

Covid-19: Climate Change, Geologic Changes, Old Equipment, Human Error, Squirrels and Raccoons

By Scott Sklar

Whatever life throws out – are we as a society, a government, a person able to take the punch? What happens if a certain event is not singular at all, but rather a portfolio of risks that coincide?

Well, here’s the bad news first! The U.S. has an old grid, both long distance transmission lines and local distribution lines are seriously aging. According to Americans for a Clean Energy Grid (ACEG), “Begun in the early 1900’s when the power system consisted of large, isolated power plants, our current grid is ill-equipped to serve smaller, innovative solar or wind facilities.”

[Continue reading the latest article by Professor Sklar](#)



MDOT planner maps out successful career

By Teri Winslow

Andrew Bernish has 100 chickens to thank for his career.

The chickens were the start of a poultry farm he helped establish in a rural South African village while serving in the Peace Corps. The project got him interested in community and economic development, which in turn, led to an interest in planning. His studies then introduced him to Geographic Information Systems (GIS), often used for mapmaking.

Flash forward 10 years and Bernish, an MDOT planner, just received an award for one of his maps. He won third place in the 2020 ArcGIS Maps for Adobe Competition, sponsored by the software company Esri, for a map of Talbot County kayak launches. Last year, his work at MDOT was honored with a Special Achievement in GIS Award from Esri.

[Read the full article and watch the MDOT video with Professor Bernish](#)

Urban Planning CAREER OUTLOOK

The advent of the coronavirus has shaken the foundation of society. We have a once in a lifetime opportunity to bring back our cities without bringing back any of the inequity, congestion and pollution. We have the chance to double down on infrastructure to fuel our economy and create jobs. We need to focus on health supporting projects that help us adapt to the brave new world like making it easier to bike and walk and get to public space; reimagining and creating new open spaces and rethinking the distribution of essential services like grocery stores, walk-in clinics and day care centers. As federal funds become available to state and local governments to implement these programs, there will be a clarion call for professional planners who are systems thinkers, who can work across disciplines to anticipate and adapt to our changing environment.

Communities will be seeking well-rounded professionals with a solid understanding of sustainable practices that will help design the cities of tomorrow working with residents. Urban planners serve in positions that lead change like sustainability officer, director of equity, community engagement manager and long range planner.

Employers for GW's Sustainable Urban Planning Program Graduates include:

- Michael Baker International (planning consulting)
- Gannett Fleming, Inc. (architecture/planning consulting)
- Ian Thomas Group (contractor in California)
- USAID
- Asian Development Bank
- Urban Land Institute
- Gannett Fleming, Inc.
- USAID
- DC Southwest Business Improvement District
- DC DOT
- U.S. Air Force
- City of San Diego
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Appalachian Regional Commission
- The World Bank
- China Fortune Land Development
- US EPA Sustainable Communities Program
- Island Press
- U.S. Department of State
- Top of Alabama Regional Planning Council
- ICF, International
- Fairfax County (Transportation Planner)
- HKF Group (Climate Adaptation Planner)
- Trust for Public Land





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