

**Accelerated Master's Program for the Master of Community and Regional Planning (MCRP) degree with the Bachelor of Science in Environmental Studies (BSES) degree program**

**DATE:** March 9, 2021

**SUBJECT:** Proposal to establish accelerated master's program between the Master of Community and Regional Planning (MCRP) and the Bachelor of Science in Environmental Studies (BSES) (CASNR only)

The Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor has received and reviewed the proposal to establish an accelerated degree program between the Master of Community and Regional Planning and the Bachelor of Science in Environmental Studies (BSES) in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. We are pleased to inform you that the requested accelerated degree program has been approved, effective for Fall 2021.

**A. Justification for the proposed Accelerated Master's Program**

**1. What are the educational goals of the proposed Accelerated Master's Program?**

- The purpose of the proposed accelerated program is to provide students with an accelerated and more efficient approach to their preparation related to the growth and emerging opportunities for inter- and trans-disciplinary careers and academic activities in the areas of community sustainability planning, environmental planning, and natural resources planning at local and regional scales.
- The Master of Community and Regional Planning (MCRP) degree prepares students for professional planning practice. Requirements for the MCRP degree program are detailed in the UNL Graduate Catalog. Community and regional planning is an interdisciplinary field that influences a broad range of future-oriented decision-making.
- The Bachelor of Science in Environmental Studies (BSES) degree program provides both a comprehensive education in the physical, biological, and social sciences, as well as development of competency in a specific discipline. The BSES prepares students to contribute solutions for current and future local, regional, and global environmental challenges. The BSES interdisciplinary curriculum uses a student-centered approach to create a positive and nurturing learning community, emphasizing engagement in the community, internship opportunities, communication skills, collaboration, teamwork, leadership skills, and critical thinking—all of which serve students well in the workplace, the pursuit of advanced degrees, and/or as life-long learners.
- The BSES/MCRP accelerated master's degree program is designed to prepare students to become exceptionally well-qualified professionals who can effectively focus—in the context of social, political, and economic forces—on solutions to myriad environmental issues impacting the world today and in the future.
- An important educational goal of this proposal is to provide an opportunity for highly qualified UNL students who are pursuing the BSES degree to enter and complete a MCRP degree at a faster pace than would normally be possible if the two degrees were to be pursued separately. Pursued separately, the two degrees would require six years of full-time study; whereas, if students could enter the proposed accelerated program, both degrees could be completed in about five years. Enabling students to get a head start on the master's degree while completing their bachelor's degree will support graduation and retention goals at UNL. For students, the accelerated program will reduce the cost and time associated with completing both degrees.

- This accelerated BSES/MCRP program is intended to better prepare students for professional roles in addressing complex environmental issues. This accelerated master's degree program will provide a connection between an undergraduate program and a graduate degree program at UNL that will benefit students who wish to pursue careers focused on the environment or who may wish to seek other opportunities that the two degrees will afford to them. Students will reduce both cost and the time associated with completing the BSES and MCRP degrees.

**2. Describe any partnership agreements that will enhance the quality of the program.**

The MCRP degree provides interdisciplinary training in the field of community and regional planning, a profession that influences a broad range of future-oriented decision-making. Planning is a dynamic profession that works to improve the welfare of people and their communities by creating more convenient, equitable, healthful, efficient, and attractive places for present and future generations. Planners develop long- and short-term plans for the use of land and the growth and revitalization of urban, suburban, and rural communities and regions. Environmental issues at the community and regional scales is an important element in urban design and planning. Multidisciplinary approaches are needed to address the environmental issues and to develop workable planning strategies that improve the quality of life at the community and regional scale. The work needed to successfully address environmental problems requires knowledge of the natural sciences, skills to identify and analyze relevant data, abilities to clearly identify and assess challenges to the environment, competencies to formulate workable solutions, and the knowledge and wherewithal to promote and implement desired change in organizations and communities.

The BSES undergraduate degree program is designed for students who want to make a difference and contribute to solving environmental challenges on a local to global scale. Solutions to challenges such as climate change, pollution, and resource conservation require individuals who have a broad-based knowledge in the natural and social sciences, as well as strength in a specific discipline. The environmental studies major will provide the knowledge and skills needed for students to work across disciplines and to be competitive in the job market. The environmental studies program uses a holistic approach and a framework of sustainability. This framework recognizes the necessity of meeting current resource needs without compromising the environment or the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

The proposed accelerated program couples the BSES degree in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources with the professional MCRP degree in the College of Architecture. The collaboration between BSES and MCRP will better prepare students to address environmental issues fully and effectively at community and regional scales. The students in this accelerated program, many of whom eventually will work as professionals in multidisciplinary teams, will facilitate decision making processes where consideration is given, in a holistic framework, to not only the natural environment, but also to social, economic, political, and governance issues.

Students enrolled in this uniquely collaborative program can complete requirements for both the BSES and MCRP degrees in approximately five years of full-time study, compared to six years if each degree program were pursued separately. Completion of this collaborative program will qualify graduates to work not only as professional environmental managers/planners, but also as professional planners in other areas of the broad field of community and regional planning. Graduates of the collaborative program also will be qualified to work in various positions normally open to students completing only the environmental studies degree.

The proposed collaborative undergraduate and graduate/professional dual degree program will be administered within the existing degree programs without need for additional faculty or other resources.

**B. List the graduate courses that will be shared with the bachelor’s degree.**

<p><i>No more than 12 credit hours may count toward the bachelor’s degree. Courses must be established and currently offered. 900-level courses may <u>not</u> be included. Dual-listed courses (400/800) are acceptable, but not required.</i></p>			
Prefix/Number	Course Title	Credit Hours	Frequency of course offering (e.g., “Fall only”)
CRP 800	Introduction to Planning	3	Spring and Fall
CRPL 830 (or CRPL 833)	Planning with GIS (or GIS in Environmental Design and Planning)	3 (3)	Fall only (Spring only)
CRPL 863	Land Use and Transportation Planning	3	Spring only
CRPL 870	Environmental Planning & Policy	3	Fall only

**C. Administrative and Governance Procedures**

**1. Describe additional admission requirements (if any) beyond the minimum eligibility requirements.**

Students need to meet the admission requirements listed in the UNL’s Accelerated Master’s Program Guidelines. This accelerated master’s degree program has no additional admission requirements.

**2. Describe the selection and admissions procedure for students seeking admission to the Accelerated Master’s Program. Include strategies designed to enhance the recruitment, retention, and success of students from diverse backgrounds.**

Students need to meet the enrollment criteria listed in the UNL’s Accelerated Master’s Program Guidelines.

Admission and selection procedures: The collaborative program is designed for dedicated undergraduate students who are motivated and willing to pursue the accelerated MCRP in conjunction with the BSES. The proposed collaborative accelerated master’s degree program will be administered by both of the MCRP and BSES programs. Student admission procedures will follow the graduate student application procedures. Students need to submit official applications to the Office of Graduate Studies, and the application will be reviewed by the Community and Regional Planning program in consultation with the Environmental Studies program.

Strategies for recruitment, retention, and success of students: The information of the accelerated program will be regularly shared with students in the Environmental Studies program. The two program directors, faculty members, and staff will jointly supervise the students who are interested in this accelerated program. Students will work closely with the two program directors to develop an integrated plan of study. The plan will cover the entire undergraduate and graduate professional degree programs and will be reviewed each semester with the student’s advisors. The collaborative program allows eligible students to begin working toward the MCRP degree requirements from their undergraduate BSES degree program. A maximum of 12 credit hours from the MCRP program (of the required 48 graduate credits for

the MCRP degree) are counted toward the undergraduate degree. At the end of the fourth year of this accelerated program, students will receive the BSES degree with a Community and Regional Planning option. This option requires 18 credit hours, including the 12 credit hours of graduate-level planning courses plus 6 credit hours of undergraduate courses chosen in consultation with the student's advisors. The two program directors will conduct annual reviews and discussions to maintain, update, and enhance the success of the accelerated program.

**3. Describe how and when graduate faculty advisors will be assigned to students in the Accelerated Master's Program.**

At the time that a student is admitted to the collaborative BSES and MCRP program, a graduate faculty member of the Community and Regional Planning Graduate Committee will be assigned as an advisor to the student. The graduate advisor will work in collaboration with the student's undergraduate advisor to guide the student in course selections to fulfill the requirements of the collaborative program.

**4. Grading Requirements**

For the four courses that will count for both the undergraduate and graduate programs, when the courses will be registered as 800+ level courses, we will follow the grading requirement policies from the UNL Office of Graduate Studies:

- A minimum grade of "B" is required for graduate credit in 800-level courses with 400 or lower counterparts within the student's major department or area. A grade of "B-" is not acceptable.
- A minimum grade of "C" or "P" (Pass) is required for graduate credit in 800-level courses in minor, collateral, or supporting areas of work. A grade of "C-" is not acceptable. Note: A grade of "B-" or lower received in a minor course will result in a minor comprehensive exam being required.
- A minimum grade of "C" or "P" (Pass) is required for graduate credit in 900-level courses or 800-level courses without 400 or lower counterparts.

**5. If applicable, describe national guidelines or accreditations that currently exist for the undergraduate and graduate degree programs.**

The Master of Community and Regional Planning graduate program is nationally accredited by the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB), which ensures a high quality of urban planning education among accredited degree programs. The MCRP degree program at UNL has been continuously accredited by the PAB since 1970s. This accelerated program will meet the PAB requirements for continued accreditation of the MCRP program.

**6. Describe plans to regularly review and revise the program that reflect new developments in the discipline.**

The directors of the BSES and MCRP degree programs will conduct annual reviews of the accelerated program to assess effectiveness and to make adjustments as necessary.