

2027 Study Guide / Outline for MCRP *Outcome Assessment Exam (OAE)*v.3

I. Introduction

The Master's in City & Regional Planning (MCRP) degree was first established in 1972. With the beginning of national accreditation of planning degrees by the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB), the MCRP degree was first accredited in 1988 and has been re-accredited for the last 35+ years.

Starting in the early 2010s, PAB required nationally accredited degree programs to execute direct measurements of student learning to provide a more focused feedback loop on how well core curriculum are connected to the planning profession.

The Program shall have a clearly defined approach, methodology, and rubrics for measuring student learning outcomes and competencies for the expected **1.)** knowledge, **2.)** skills, and **3.)** guiding values that students are expected to acquire (PAB, "Planning Accreditation Self-Study Report for Master's Degree 2026 Armature Fabric Template," Section 4.D. Student Learning Outcome Assessment.)

To this end, the MCRP program is taking an "outcome assessment exam" (OAE) approach to measure student learning in relation to the three PAB professional planning criteria listed below. OAE is a direct way for the MCRP program to gain specific information on how well students have learned material covered in core classes adequately align with PAB curriculum elements.

1. Guiding Values

The Program shall address in its strategic plan its commitment to fundamental ethical and normative principles and ensure that these principles are embedded in a range of required courses, specifically:

1.a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice

Diversity, equity, inclusion and social justice factors that reduce inequities and promote opportunity for all; planning for the needs of all, including historically underserved and under-resourced communities and populations; and reducing inequities through examination of past and current systems and practices.

1.b Sustainability, Resilience, and Climate Justice

Environmental, economic, and social/political factors that contribute to sustainable communities; reduce impacts of climate change, and create equitable, resilient, and climate-adapted futures.

1.c Professional Ethics and Responsibility

Key issues of planning ethics and any related questions of the ethics of public decision-making, research, and client representation (including the provisions of the AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, and APA's Ethical Principles in Planning).

1.d. Required Knowledge and Skills of the Profession

The Program shall offer a curriculum that teaches students the essential knowledge and skills central to the planning profession. These required components will be taught in such a manner that it is possible to demonstrate that every graduate has studied them. Ordinarily, this means that they are included in courses required of all students, although other approaches are possible. Programs are encouraged to keep their curriculum in tune with emerging trends in the profession and engaged with contemporary issues. Specifically:

2. General Planning Knowledge in Global Context

The comprehension, representation, and use of ideas and information in the planning field, in the U.S. (or Canada) and internationally including appropriate perspectives from history, social sciences, design, and other allied fields.

2.a. Planning History and Theory

The evolution and current practice of planning in communities, cities, regions, and nations; how the history of planning has advanced and hindered opportunities for particular peoples, places and communities; expectations about planning outcomes in different local and national contexts; conceptual models about what planning is and how it works; past and present conceptions of the future, including the relationship between planning and the future; the role of planning in responding to the global climate crisis.

2.b. Planning Law and Institutions

Behaviors and structures available to bring about sound planning outcomes; mechanisms and practices for ensuring equitable and inclusive decision-making; legal and institutional contexts within which planning occurs in the U.S. and/or internationally.

2.c. Urban and Regional Development

Political, economic, social, and environmental explanations of and insights on historical, present, and future development; relationships between the built and natural environments and individual and community health and well-being; planning responses to mitigate climate change, reduce risks, and recover from climate-exacerbated impacts; how the movement of people, products, and ideas has affected cities and regions.

3. Skills and Tools for Planning Practice

The use and application of knowledge to perform tasks required in the practice of planning.

3.a. Planning Process and Engagement

Planning process and community and stakeholder engagement; plan creation and implementation; methods of design and intervention to understand and influence the future.

3.b. Analytical Skills and Tools

Research and critical analysis skills for preparing and conducting research; quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection, analysis, and forecasting; methods of geo-spatial analysis, mapping and data visualization; basic understanding of data analytics and urban technology.

3c. Professional, Communication, and Leadership Skills

Ability to work in teams and with professionals in allied fields; professional leadership in the planning context; written, oral, and graphic communication.

II. Exam Rubric / Format

The Outcome Assessment Exam (OAE) is a take-home exam implemented in CRP 8940 Professional Planning Seminar in the last semester of a student's second year in the MCRP program. The exam will be a graded class requirement, and essay questions are written and scored by the MCRP faculty. The early timing of the OAE exam provides an opportunity to recognize students who pass the exam with "distinctions" and provide an opportunity to address gaps in student performance. Students are not required to get a perfect "100%" score on the exam and doing "poorly" on the exam will not prevent you from graduating from the MCRP program. Again, information gained from the OAE are only used to help revising the curriculum, course delivery, and /or student support to improve student learning.

The OAE is made up of 6 essay questions with two questions focused on each of the three PAB Outcome Assessment criteria: 1.) Guiding Values, 2.) General Planning Knowledge in Global Context, and 3.) Required Knowledge and Skills of the Profession. Each essay question is equally weighted. All answers must be original work (no group work and no AI) and integrate at least three key sources from class readings. Each essay cannot be less than 2 pages and no more than 3 pages including bibliography.

The MCRP faculty will score the essays with the following grade per question: pass with distinction (100 to 95), pass (94 to 70), not pass (60 or below). In addition, the OAE essays will be qualitatively reviewed with the MCRP faculty members providing a short (2 to 3 sentence) holistic review observation on how well the student addressed the questions. The scoring rubric for exam essays are as follows:

A. Directly addressing the question	...	25%
B. Citation of recognized sources from planning literature	...	25%
C. Clearly defining the role of the planner	...	25%
D. Ability to identify ramifications of planning decision	...	25%

III. Sample Questions

1. Guiding Values

1.a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice

- How the planner defines the “impacted community” dictates who gets a voice in the citizen participation phase in the planning process. Identify and discuss two guiding principles to help the planner be more inclusive in how they define the “community” in their planning projects. Conclude with how these principles be applied to practice.

1.b Sustainability, Resilience, and Climate Justice

- All planning decisions have primary and secondary impacts on the environment, economy, and the community. Discuss at least two guiding values that help planners arrive at planning decisions that balance resilience, economic sustainability, and equity.

1.c Professional Ethics and Responsibility

- The most optimal zoned land use may make economic sense for a city, but may not always be the most equitable decision. Discuss this position and relate it to your understanding of the AICP Code of Ethics. Be specific in which Code is most relevant to your argument.

2. General Planning Knowledge in Global Context

2.a. Planning History and Theory

- How did National Housing Act of 1949 and 1954 directly impact what planners should not do when working with impacted communities?
- What is utopian planning and how has the evolution of utopian planning impacted planning today?
- How did the Standard Planning and Zoning Acts of the 1920s affect local land use planning?

2.b. Planning Law and Institutions

- What is the significance of zoning being recognized as a “police power” function in local government?
- Do all zoning ordinances impact everyone in the community the same way? If not, why? And if so, what can you do as a planner to make zoning ordinances more transparent and equitable?

2.c. Urban and Regional Development

- Political, economic, environmental, and social approaches to affordable housing can see the topic and solutions completely differently. Explain why and discuss which approach should be a guiding principle in urban and regional development.
- Does economic development equally benefit all segments in the community? If not, what is the responsibility of the planner to mitigate the negative impacts of economic development on those communities that benefiting from growth?

3. Skills and Tools for Planning Practice

3.a. Planning Process and Engagement

- Is Sherry Arnstein's "Ladder of Citizen Participation" (1969) still relevant in contemporary planning? Explain why or why not, and what lessons may still be relevant.

3.b. Analytical Skills and Tools

- What are the strengths and flows associated with qualitative and quantitative data?
- Describe multiple regression analysis and give an example on when it can be applied in a real planning situation.

3c. Professional, Communication, and Leadership Skills

- Identify three critical leadership skills a planner needs to be considered trustworthy in the community.
- Identify different approaches to deal with divergent views on local issues in a community in a public meeting.
- What methods of communication would you utilize to inform residents and effected parties of local issues and/or public meetings? How would you promote broad engagement?