



UrbanPlan for High Schools Frequently Asked Questions

If you have additional questions, please contact your local ULI District Council or urbanplan@uli.org

1. What is UrbanPlan?

UrbanPlan is a project-based learning unit in which high school students learn about the complex nature of land use decisions and the role each of us plays in creating better communities. Along the way, students enrich their academics, think critically, and gain practical and professional skills to take with them to their university, the workplace, and beyond. The program is primarily delivered as a 15-hour classroom unit; the teacher is trained to deliver the curriculum with support from ULI's chapter network. ULI also offers UrbanPlan as a shorter unit which can be delivered in one day as an in-school field trip or by the teacher over several classes if there is a unique situation in which the 15-hour unit is not the right solution.

2. What do students learn from UrbanPlan?

Students learn to read, analyze, and synthesize complex information. They learn to manipulate and interpret a financial spreadsheet to perform cost-benefit analysis, and they learn to build 3D site plans. They also learn how to respond to competing financial, social, political, and aesthetic demands, while collaborating with classmates and interacting with land-use professionals. UrbanPlan is a highly engaging and intellectually demanding simulation, and it prepares young people to be more deeply involved in their own community's land-use decisions.

3. Does UrbanPlan teach core academic skills and/or career competency skills?

UrbanPlan integrates multiple core academic skills – including reading and writing, quantitative analysis, critical thinking, and public speaking – in a project-based, interdisciplinary format. In addition, it incorporates essential soft skills such as interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, time management, and creativity.

UrbanPlan is an excellent vehicle for introducing students to the skills, processes, and behaviors required in a contemporary work environment. Students interact on multiple occasions with land-use professionals from both the public and private sector, and they present their solutions to professionals in a realistic “City Council” simulation at the culmination of the project.

4. What are the resource demands on participating schools or teachers?

ULI provides full support to the teacher at *no cost* to the school. Teachers are provided with comprehensive training, a teachers' guide with lesson plans and exercises, access to the financial model and site plan, and LEGO kits for building 3D models. Lesson materials are available in MS Word/Excel, PDF, and Google formats.

In addition, ULI recruits, screens, trains, and arranges for land-use professionals to serve as facilitators, guest speakers (if requested), and city council members.

Teachers have ongoing opportunities to share best practices and collaborate with peers as part of ULI's online community.

5. How does UrbanPlan address the pitfalls of group projects?

UrbanPlan demands unique contributions from each of the five roles on a development team, which prevents “free riders” and makes it impossible for any one team member to dominate and successfully complete the project on their own.

Each team member must speak from their role perspective during facilitation visits and the team's City Council presentation. This structure supports academic rigor and individual accountability, and it allows for individual assessment.

6. Who created UrbanPlan, and for what purpose?

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

The UrbanPlan mission is to “[Develop] a more educated citizenry around the challenges and complexities of land use decisions so that together we can create better communities.”

7. Why does UrbanPlan require so much time?

Scaffolding during the first week is essential, so that students understand the scope of the challenge, have time to conduct “due diligence” (obtain the relevant information from the UP Handbook), and master their role-specific skills, such as manipulating the financial model and using the site plan builder.

Once they begin working on their plans, student teams need time to experiment with the tradeoffs of various decisions. In addition, two separate classes during the build process are dedicated to facilitation sessions with land-use professionals, which are critical to building deep understanding. Finally, students need time to prepare and practice high-quality presentations.

8. What is the ideal class for implementing UrbanPlan?

UrbanPlan has been successfully implemented in a variety of classes, including Economics, Government and Human Geography, as well as Business Technology, Marketing, Engineering, Architecture, and Social Justice and Urban Issues. The unit has been delivered to AP classes, IB classes, and on-level classes.

The ideal class size is 20-30 students, to allow for 4-5 teams in a class, but it has been implemented in classes with as few as 15 or as many as 40 students. The ideal grade level is 11th or 12th grade so that students have the critical thinking, reading comprehension, presentation and group work skills to successfully participate, but the unit has been delivered to occasional



9th and 10th grade classes when the teacher feels confident about the cohort's potential ability to complete the challenging exercise.

9. Can UrbanPlan be offered virtually or in a hybrid format?

Since March 2020, ULI District Councils have worked with many teachers to successfully create an online UrbanPlan experience. The first five hours of instruction are delivered synchronously, and students meet in team breakout rooms to build their plans. All materials are available in digital format, and facilitation can be conducted through Zoom or a similar format.

10. Why doesn't UrbanPlan use a real-life project in my community?

UrbanPlan addresses many of the issues faced in communities globally, including housing affordability, homelessness, environmental sustainability, housing density, and big box stores. The fictitious scenario allows students to step back and engage these complex social and politically charged issues dispassionately, without the charged emotions of a real "backyard" issue. ULI has worked with several communities to develop an extended "place-based" learning module to follow UrbanPlan.