

Student Profile

Angela Martinez

University of Maryland, Master of Community Planning, 2015

Hometown: Twinsburg, Ohio

Undergraduate degree: Environmental and Natural Resource Economics and Sustainable Design, West Virginia University

Why did you pursue a graduate education in planning?

I became interested in the impacts of the built environment on people and the natural environment through my undergraduate coursework in sustainable design. I believe that problems like climate change and income inequality require planning-based policy interventions. Comprehensive planning allows communities to get ahead of future problems and prepare for change.

I chose to study planning because understanding the history of our communities—the good and bad—is necessary for planning for social, environmental, and economic resiliency in the future. I like that planning blends technical and interpersonal skills to serve communities, and while planners can be specialized, we are trained to think comprehensively. The best planners are educators who empower individuals to have a say in the future of their community.

What aspects of your program did you like best?

There are so many reasons why the URSP program at the University of Maryland (UMD) stood out as I chose my graduate program. One attractive aspect of the program is studying planning in Maryland, which has a history of smart growth policies. Maryland is also home to several notable planned communities, including Columbia, Kentlands, and Greenbelt. This provides an opportunity to learn about the development and implementation of planning tools for environmental and social sustainability in a local setting. UMD is situated in the Washington, D.C., Virginia, and Baltimore region; the breadth of challenges, cultures, and resources available in this area exposes students to the full gamut of planning issues.

URSP is affiliated with the National Center for Smart Growth, and all of the URSP faculty at UMD are active in either local or international planning issues (and sometimes both). Our faculty are involved in activities that range from rural preservation in China to helping plan the first light rail transit line as a part of the D.C. Metro. In my experience, it is easy for students to find faculty with whom they share planning research interests.

What planning subject or interest area most interests you?

Planning is multidisciplinary, but transportation is the specialization that interests me most. Everyone who has ever gone to work or school has made a transportation decision or has had this decision made for them based on the availability (or lack thereof) of transportation options. Transportation impacts an individual's access to opportunities, while congestion can harm the environment and limit how much time (s)he can spend with his or



her family. Furthermore, the permanent nature of transportation investment shapes communities for decades after construction.

There is so much work that can be done to improve the way we travel in the face of climate change and shifting demographics. This work has to happen in the planning stage or else we shall repeat history and remain stuck with inadequate transportation options. Improving accessibility and making environmentally friendly transportation decisions easier puts transportation planners to be at forefront of building resilient communities.

What advice would you offer someone considering a master's degree in planning?

Planning has more moving parts than just about any other discipline or practice. If you are an analytical thinker, enjoy challenges, and want to make a difference in communities, then planning may be the field for you. The trend of urbanization, emerging technology, and increasing diversity makes it an excellent and exciting time to be a student of planning!

What do you hope to do after completing your planning degree?

After I complete my master's in community planning I would like to gain practical experience working as a community planner or with a consulting firm. Eventually I may be interested in working at the policy level, which would allow me to do research in the field of sustainability and transportation.