Syllabus: PLA 1107 Current Issues Paper
Monday 9–11am (on scheduled dates)
Room WW119 (first 2 weeks virtual)

Instructor

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Office Hours: Monday 1-3pm (Virtual: Sign up here, Link on Quercus)

What is the Current Issues Paper?

The Current Issues Paper is intended to help you bring together ideas and skills acquired during your degree and make the transition from the academic world to the professional world of planning. Success will require that you think deeply and apply knowledge gained over the course of the program. There are several formats that the CIP can take. The option you choose should depend on 1) the problem you want to tackle, 2) the career goals you have, and 3) the skills you have, and those you want to develop further. Format options include:

- Research paper (brief thesis option)
- Professional or client report
- Urban design project or architectural model (computer or physical)
- Popular/community-based communication tool (Eg handbook, zine, or other multimedia product)

Regardless of the output format, your work should be original, high quality, polished, and appropriate to the format/audience. It should demonstrate that you understand and can work with the complexities of a specific planning issue and that you can identify, analyze, and present relevant context and facts. For all options, you need to show that you can think independently, conduct appropriate research, meet deadlines, write clearly and concisely, make a persuasive presentation before an audience, and revise your work after receiving comments from others. Your project should also consider the key aims of the planning program which include a "commitment to humane city-regions, healthy environments and social well-being for everyone (especially, for those who have been historically marginalized through traditional development practices) See full mission statement here.

Your paper must be useful and applicable to a real-world problem. This means that you will:

- choose and work with an outside advisor—that is, someone working in the field that interests you;
- focus on a single, manageable issue that is genuinely important to the field of planning;
- take "real-world" constraints into account (while utopias have a long history in planning we want you to do something implementable);
- conduct appropriate research and independently analyze the information you collect;
- write in a clear, concise style that will be accessible to non-specialists.

Don't try to tackle too broad an issue. At the same time, don't settle for an issue that is too narrow and does not give you an opportunity to create a meaningful output. Your work should not merely consist of an array of data followed by a conclusion or list of recommendations. Your

project must in some way define the issue, explain why it is important, present relevant evidence and analysis, and argue for your conclusions. Be concrete, practical, and specific.

CIP Format Options

Research paper

The original research paper format requires undertaking some original research for the purposes of this paper. This format contains many of the same elements as an academic masters' thesis including engagement with scholarly literature, original primary research and analysis (e.g., interviews, document or policy analysis, modelling, quantitative analysis). This option is recommended if you think your topic requires more in-depth engagement with scholarly literature, or if answering your question requires more substantive original research (that you can conduct), or if you want to work toward something you might publish in an academic format or use to build toward doctoral studies.

Professional/client report

The professional or client report should resemble a professional report on a real-world planning question. You are required to demonstrate engagement with planning theory, understanding of complex planning contexts, and undertaking appropriate research. The audience for this report would be a private, public, or third sector employer or client. It should have a clear problem statement, detailed attention to a real-world context, minor engagement with scholarly literature, appropriate engagement with grey literature, policy or other professional reports, and a clear outcome, evaluation or recommendation(s) based firmly in the evidence presented in the report.

For both of the approaches above the recommended word length is between 7000 and 12000 words, with the professional client report expected to be on the shorter side while the original research paper may require more text.

Urban design project

A picture is worth 1000 words. In this option, the objective is to produce an urban design plan in response to a clearly articulated problem or challenge. Such an urban design plan typically involves a theoretical and historical consideration of the chosen problem, an analysis of the site and the context in which it is located, a written rationale for the proposed solution and detailed drawings illustrating the urban design plan. This option draws from several courses in the planning curriculum, especially those dealing with planning theory, research methods and urban design. The urban design option may be conceived as a research project, professional client report, or popular community-based communication tool.

Popular/community-based communication tool

The community-based tool, like the professional/client report should address a real actionable problem. Its audience is likely a community organization or group. You are required to demonstrate engagement with planning theory, understanding of complex planning contexts, and undertaking appropriate research (this can be desk rather than primary research). The output can be in a range of formats that are appropriate to the audience, for example a guidebook, handbook or zine. If you can include reference to planning theory/context within this format, then the document can stand alone, if the format discourages this then a very short paper describing the theoretical or scholarly underpinnings should accompany the tool.

Other formats
Other formats are also possible, such as a piece of original software, a GIS program, or a video. If you have an idea for a project you want to conduct you can propose it and we will negotiate the details on a case-by-case basis. All outputs must include some identification of the problem you are addressing, its significance for planning, the method you used to arrive at the final product, some way to determine its usefulness, and an assessment of its performance in relation to the planning problem you identified.

The word length/project scope for the last 3 options is dependent on the content/format. This should be discussed with your supervisor and/or course coordinator before the first draft is submitted.

Who is involved?
For this project you will have a committee of 3-4 people. In addition to the course coordinator you must have a primary supervisor (it is recommended they are from the department of geography and planning, or affiliated tri-campus graduate faculty). You also must have an outside advisor; this is someone in a professional position relevant to your topic who is willing to provide some guidance throughout the year and most importantly read your second draft and attend your final presentation in March (you should identify this person by Nov 15th). You are also encouraged, but not required, to have a second faculty reader, this is usually a scholar who can provide additional support or insight into your project, they can be from within or outside the department of Geography and Planning.

The course is also designed to encourage you to draw on the support and resources of your classmates. As in real life your colleagues and friends are incredibly valuable and we will aim to develop a collaborative and respectful class environment where everyone can be supported in their work.

Course Organization
Class meetings
The first 2 weeks of the course will be delivered virtually. After that we will be in person (unless public health mandates change). The class does not meet every week as most of the work happens outside class. Some class times are set aside for student presentations. Scheduled classes are designed to boost your skills in research, analysis, project advancement, writing and presentations, and to give you additional opportunities to ask questions and discuss your progress with the course coordinator and your classmates.

Submissions
Assignments are to be submitted by email to the relevant committee members.

Consultations with course coordinator
At least once a term, you should make an appointment with the course coordinator. These meetings give you an opportunity to discuss your progress and deal with any concerns or questions you have.

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment	Due Date	Weight	Graded by

Proposal	Oct 4, 2021	20%	supervisor
Oral progress report	Jan 10,17,24,2022	5%	coordinator
Draft 1	Jan 31, 2022	15%	supervisor
Draft 2 + Presentation	March 2, 2022	40%	whole committee
Final Report	April 4, 2022	20%	supervisor and coordinator

The importance of meeting deadlines (Late policy)
The current issues paper is a rehearsal for professional life, and you are expected to approach this assignment in a professional manner. In particular, this means that you must meet all deadlines.

Only in exceptional circumstances will your supervisor and the course coordinator adjust the scheduled dates (permission is needed from both), and this should be in advance with a new deadline worked out. If you simply let a deadline go by with no advance explanation, you will reduce your grade by up to one point per day (changing a B+ to a B, for example, is a reduction of one point). Therefore, when in any doubt or difficulty, consult your supervisor and the course coordinator immediately.

Summary of Important dates:

First term

Monday**,** September 13, 2021	In Class: overview and explanation of requirements
Monday, September 20, 2021	In Class: preparing a proposal, overview of ethics protocol, recruitment, consent.
Monday Sept 27, 2021	In Class: Laying the groundwork, surveying the literature, writing literature reviews, making it relevant and focused.
Monday, October 4, 2021	No Class: Proposals due by midnight.
Monday, October 18, 2021	In Class: project advancement troubleshooting 1: Topic Interviewing
	ALSO: Proposal approval form due to course coordinator by midnight on this day. Last day for presenting proposal to supervisor.
Monday, October 25, 2021	In Class: project advancement troubleshooting 2: TBD
Monday, November 1, 2021	In Class: project advancement troubleshooting 3: TBD
Monday, November 15, 2021	No Class: Identify outside reader and provide contact details here.
Monday, November 22, 2021	In Class: tips and advice from planning graduates

Second term

Monday, January 10, 17, 24, 2022	In Class: Oral progress reports/discussion
Monday, January 31, 2022	No Class: Draft 1 submitted to supervisor by midnight.

Monday, Feb 7, 2022	No Class: Supervisor to return Draft 1 with comments by this date
Monday, February 14, 2022	In Class: Editing, writing recommendations and other writing tips.
Wednesday, March 2, 2022	No Class: Draft 2 submitted to supervisor, course coordinator, and your second faculty reader by midnight. Give a copy to your outside reader at least five days before your presentation.
March 9 to 30, 2022	Presentations to supervisor, second reader, outside advisor, course coordinator. Other students and faculty welcome to attend.
Monday, April 4, 2022	Final Report and covering memo submitted to supervisor and coordinator by midnight.

CIP Step-by-step

September: Identify your problem/research question/format, choose a supervisor, write a proposal that includes ethics information if needed.
The work you do in the first month may well determine whether you find the current issues paper experience enjoyable or difficult. ***Get started now***. Talk to everyone you can about your ideas and read up on the topic. Write the proposal, get others to read it, revise it a few times, then submit it.

Sept 27: Don't worry! If you haven't found a supervisor by this date we will pair you with an appropriate one. If you do have one, or are waiting to hear back from someone, please be sure to complete the supervisor info on the form here.

October 4th: Submit a written proposal
Submit a written proposal, to your supervisor and the course coordinator. It must include:

- the problem or research question(s) you plan to tackle.
- why the issue is relevant to planning practice;
- The output format you intend to pursue
- the approach and methods you plan to use to analyze the problem;
- the main sources of information on the subject and relation to previous research;
- the name of your supervisor and second reader if applicable;

More detailed instructions on the preparation of the proposal will be presented in the class on proposal writing.

Before October 18th: Chat about the Proposal with your Supervisor
Negotiate a convenient time to meet with *your supervisor.* You will give a brief oral summary of your proposal and answer questions about it. These sessions are usually about 30 minutes long.

After your presentation, if your supervisor is satisfied, he or she will sign a form that will give you the go-ahead to start your project. You must then submit this form to the course coordinator who

must also sign it. If there are problems with your proposal, your supervisor will ask you to submit a revised proposal.

By October 18th: Submit proposal sign off form
Submit your signed proposal sign-off form to the course coordinator. This should include comments from your supervisor about any changes you are making to your proposal.

Any time in October or November
Make an appointment with the course coordinator to discuss your proposal and approach to analysis, and any other questions you have.

October/November: Troubleshooting Plans
There will be three class periods in Oct/November focusing on project plans. You will have chosen your basic approach and format in consultation with your supervisor by this point, and you may have started on the work, but this is your opportunity to work out the details or troubleshoot obstacles that have arisen. **You must attend one but may attend more** of these three sessions – the focus of each week will be guided by your proposed research and announced on Quercus in advance. You will have an opportunity to fine tune and problem solve issues related to research methods, writing, finding relevant information, etc. This is an instructor and peer supported process so come prepared to help your classmates and get input from others on your own approach.

Nov 15th: Identify you outside reader
Provide the name of your **outside advisor** and their complete contact information, including mailing address, to your course coordinator (complete all fields on the google document here).

First three weeks in January: Oral Progress Reports
Three class periods will be devoted to presentations. This is your *Oral Progress Report* worth 5% of your grade. At one of these meetings you will give a 5-minute oral presentation of your research. This is a chance to practice talking about your work before the more comprehensive public presentation in March. You will be working on your first draft, so this is an excellent opportunity to get some initial feedback from the course coordinator and class about the directions you are going in your draft. This should not be a complete overview of your research (there is not time for this). Use this time to your greatest advantage by presenting a portion of your work that you are working through. To support your classmates please attend at least two of these three classes, and participate in the discussion.

Any time in January or February
Make an appointment with the course coordinator to discuss your progress and any other questions you have

January 31st: Submit Draft 1
Give your supervisor the first draft of your Current Issues Paper. The supervisor should return the draft to you by **February 7th**. This draft will be assigned a mark that reflects your progress to date.

March 2nd: Submit Draft 2
Submit your complete project to your supervisor, second reader (if applicable), and the coordinator on this date, **no matter when your paper is scheduled to be presented.** This product should be **complete**.

The main text of the paper or other output should **be no more than 12,000** words, and **can be shorter**. You can add appendices to include *relevant* information that does not fit into the body of the paper. The product should be clear and professional-looking, but do not waste hours on complicated formatting (text based outputs should be 12pt font, 1.5 spacing, 1" margins). Whatever your output format, spend your time for this draft revising content not formatting. If your output demands special formatting, talk to the course coordinator before proceeding. Title your file "lastname firstname CIP draft 2"

March 9th to 30th: Present Draft 2

Present your paper to a panel made up of your outside advisor, your supervisor, a second faculty reader (if you have one), and the course coordinator, as well as interested students or staff members. Presentations last 20 minutes (they are timed), with 30 minutes for questions and discussion. You must negotiate a time that is mutually convenient for everyone and find a first-year student to act as chair of the session. If you want to use PowerPoint, set it up in advance, so that the session starts right on time. Your outside advisor must receive the report at least 5 days before the presentation.

April 4th: Submit Final Report and covering memo

The purpose of this final stage is to demonstrate your ability to respond constructively to suggestions, criticism, and additional information from others—an important professional skill, since in the work world, it is rare that individuals work on documents in isolation.

This version should be accompanied by a **memo** (point form is fine) that explains where and why you have made changes to Draft 2 in response to feedback.

If you would like to do more elaborate or distinctive formatting from that used for the second draft, you may do so in the third and final version of your paper. The only requirement is that the font must be large enough to read comfortably – minimum 11 points.

As well you must send a PDF of the final product to the Geography Main Office for archiving.

Questions? When in doubt – ask! And the sooner you ask, the sooner you have an answer.

There are many routes to completing this course, provided that you demonstrate the required skills and meet the deadlines. If you need to discuss the way in which these guidelines apply to your work, or would like to attempt a more innovative approach to fulfilling the requirements, do not hesitate to contact me during my office hours or at Lindsay.stephens@utoronto.ca.

April 14th: Submit abstract and image for coursework booklet

Now that you have completed your final report, it's your chance to show it off! As a class you have designed a template for these submissions. Please upload your 100-150 word abstract and image in the designed format to the location identified by Parveen.

Policies

The department's full Graduate Course Policies apply to all courses offered.

Accessibility Services

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations because you are disabled, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

Where there is an accommodation recommended by Accessibility Services, the department and/or instructors will be provided with an accommodation letter.

Academic Integrity

Academic misconduct by graduate students is taken very seriously. The University's policy on academic misconduct is found in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters (the Code). Students in graduate studies are expected to commit to the highest standards of integrity and to understand the importance of protecting and acknowledging intellectual property. For example, it is assumed that they bring to their graduate studies a clear understanding of how to cite references appropriately, thereby avoiding plagiarism.

Regarding plagiarism, the Code includes the following statements:

B.i.1. It shall be an offence for a student knowingly:

(d) to represent as one's own idea or expression of an idea or work of another in any academic examination or term test or in connection with any other form of academic work, i.e., to commit plagiarism.

Wherever in the Code an offence is described as depending on "knowing," the offence shall likewise be deemed to have been committed if the person ought reasonably to have known.

Other academic offences include the possession and/or use of unauthorized aids in examinations, submitting the same paper for different courses without the knowledge of the instructors, forgery (whether of academic records or other documents), concocting facts or references to sources, personating someone, and other forms of cheating and academic dishonesty. Please refer to sections B.i.1. and B.i.3. in the Code for detailed descriptions of offences applicable to students.

The SGS Academic Integrity Resources webpage outlines the policy on academic misconduct and the process for handling an allegation of academic misconduct.

Religious Accommodations

Students must alert instructors in a timely fashion to any upcoming religious observances and anticipated absences. Instructors will make every reasonable effort to avoid scheduling tests, exams or other compulsory activities at these times. In the case of an unavoidable conflict with a compulsory activity, every reasonable effort is made to give students the opportunity to make up missed work.

Copyright in Instructional Settings

If a student wishes to record (tape, video, photograph, etc.) any lecture presentations or other similar materials provided by the instructor; the instructor's written consent must be obtained beforehand. Otherwise, all such reproduction is infringement of copyright and prohibited. In the case of private use by students with disabilities, the instructor's consent shall not be unreasonably withheld.

Extension Requests

The authority to grant an extension to submit coursework beyond the sessional grade deadline is with the department and not the instructor of the course. To request a formal extension beyond a grade deadline, students must submit a Coursework Extension Form, completed by

both the student and course instructor, to the relevant graduate department prior to the final grade deadline.

In order to ensure fairness in granting extensions, the department must be reasonably certain that:

- The reasons for delay are serious and substantiated.
- The student is not granted unfair advantage over other students in the course.
- The student has a reasonable chance of completing the outstanding work within the time allotted.
- The normal and satisfactory completion of any new coursework is not in jeopardy.

Extension requests for medical reasons (e.g. short-term illness) must be accompanied by a medical note. Extension requests for students with accommodations due to disability must be supported by documentation from Accessibility Services. Extension requests for other reasons must be detailed in the form or a note to the department.

Mental Health Statement

As a student at U of T, you may experience circumstances and challenges that can affect your academic performance and/or reduce your ability to participate fully in daily activities. An important part of the University experience is learning how and when to ask for help. There is no wrong time to reach out, which is why there are resources available for every situation and every level of stress.

Please take the time to inform yourself of available resources, including:

- [Geography & Planning Mental Health Support Website](#)
- [Graduate Wellness Services](#)
- [Student Mental Health Resources](#)
- [Emergency support if you're feeling distressed](#)

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Other Student Services and Support Resources

- [Links to Additional Student Services and Support Resources](#) (general services and support for students, international student support, Health & Wellness, financial aid and professional development)