

UNBC'S SCHOOL OF PLANNING AND SUSTAINABILITY: PREPARING PLANNERS FOR PRACTICE IN THE NORTH AND BEYOND

/ Rylan Graham PhD, RPP, MCIP Tara Lynn Clapp PhD, RPP, MCIP Theresa Healy PhD Scott Monroe, Mikhaila Carr, PIBC Student Members

In our previous submission to *Planning West*, we were pleased to share news about some of the recent (and exciting!) changes at UNBC's School of Planning and Sustainability – including a name change, a move into the newly-formed Faculty of Environment, and the addition of new personnel! A year later, we are again pleased to connect with readers to offer a brief overview of what makes our school unique.

UNBC's School of Planning and Sustainability has been shaped by and for its place. Over time, this has created a planning program that is both regionally relevant and internationally unique. At UNBC, students can specialize in community, environmental, and/or First Nations planning. Our students graduate prepared to serve in roles that are typical in the North. At the same time, the skills and sensitivities that they develop through our program are widely transferable. The integration of soft skills and analytical skills is valued in many places, including large urban centres, regional districts, small, rural and remote communities, and First Nations communities.

Our school has a set of values that shape our program, the practices we emphasize, and our pedagogical approach. Some, such as 'En Cha Huná (he/she also lives) and "in the North, for the North," set the foundation from which we operate. We strive to offer an educational experience that is accessible, practical, relevant, and reflective. Importantly, we value inclusiveness, respect and reconciliation, and the development of lifelong learners. Our commitment to an accessible education implies both 'employable skills' and 'reflective skills.'

At the School of Planning and Sustainability, our commitment to community engagement and experiential learning is inseparable from these foundations. This commitment links us to the communities of the North and to the empathies and multiple perspectives that are required to develop a planning practice that respects 'En Cha Huná. In doing so, students are presented with opportunities to work with communities through their coursework.

Learning through community-based projects in the North

In the winter 2022 semester, students of *ENPL 409: Advanced First Nations Community and Environmental Planning*, led by Dr. Tara Lynne Clapp and Dr. Theresa Healy, had the opportunity to collaborate with the Nak'azdli Whut'en First Nation. The Nation asked students to assess land alienations from its traditional territory through privatization and use of other tenures, as well as through provincial management of cumulative impacts and the operation of the Agricultural Land Reserve. This collaboration engaged the class in learning about – and translating between – colonial land management and traditional land obligations. Throughout the semester, students met with community members to present their work and learn what members mean by 'land,' 'law,' and their sense of relationship to the land. Students used publicly available data sources to document the ongoing privatization of Nak'azdli land under the Land Act (as recently as 2021) and to start to assemble the types of land management practices that would practically alienate aboriginal title. It was not within the project scope to gather Nation-owned data about

traditional use, so the work on cumulative impacts was general rather than evaluative.

Students shared that this project provided them with the confidence and experience to listen, learn, and adapt to the needs of the community. In working on this project, students felt they had the autonomy to engage with members in a largely unstructured way. Furthermore, students gained insight into how planning operates and this experience provided them with a better sense of the types of things planners must do when working with the community.

Our ability to have students work on community-based projects requires appropriate resources, including established relationships with community partners, time, and the appropriate space. Excitingly, this past fall, we made big moves on the latter with the opening of a new studio at UNBC's main campus. The studio will better serve planning education, as well as others at UNBC who engage in studio-based teaching and learning.

A studio space fit for planning education

For years, planning students and faculty worked in computer labs and classrooms that were designed and intended for lecture-based classes. While there are many delightful qualities that accompany being a small program on a relatively small campus, there was no classroom that could accommodate the special requirements of a studio class. Students and faculty worked around the limitations of fixed-desk computer labs and in rooms that required class time for furniture rearrangement. The absence of an 'owned space' limited the use of maps, drawings, and other mediums.

Already, students have commented on the benefits of the studio. For example, students have shared that they feel the studio provides the space needed to foster a sense of belonging and connection with other aspiring planners. Students have developed a sense of ownership in this studio space as a place to come together and build a sense of community. Importantly, the space is also equipped with the software needed to engage in modeling, which is needed to build the technical skills expected of planners.

Connecting with the professional community

As students move through their planning education, the School of Planning and Sustainability also facilitates their connections with the profession throughout the province. One way that we do this is through our engagement with the School's Planner in Residence. Finlay Sinclair, RPP, MCIP, who serves in this role, helps students to develop a vision for their future and connects our School with the professional community. Increasingly, we are able to connect students with practitioners for internship experiences, where they can engage their knowledge and bring their learning back into our courses.

Now more than ever, issues related to climate change, equity, diversity, and inclusion require our attention. Planners and planning play a pivotal role in addressing these issues within the context of space and place. At UNBC, our commitment to innovative pedagogical approaches, supported by the right physical spaces and relationships, ensures that we are preparing



1 Located in BC'S "Northern Capital," UNBC is a university in and for the North
2 A glimpse into the recently completed studio space which allows for creative thinking and collaboration

students to be successful changemakers in the communities of their choosing.

Rylan Graham, PhD RPP MCIP is an Assistant Professor in the School of Planning and Sustainability

Tara Lynn Clapp, PhD RPP MCIP is an Associate Professor and Chair of the School of Planning and Sustainability

Theresa Healy, PhD is an Assistant Professor in the School of Planning and Sustainability

Scott Monroe is a planning student in the School of Planning and Sustainability

Mikhaila Carr is a planning student in the School of Planning and Sustainability



Planning, Development & Environmental Law



*Practical advice,
Creative options,
Value for local government*

CARVELLO LAW

**Lui Carvello, RPP, MCIP
Lawyer & Registered Professional Planner
PIBC Board Director since 2013**

203-1005 Broad St.
Victoria, BC V8W 2A1
250-686-9918 | lui@carvellolaw.ca | carvellolaw.ca

Recruiting Now for Experienced Lawyers and Junior Planning Professionals