

STUDENTS LIVING **CARDINAL, GOLD AND GREEN**

A History of Community Connections

The [Community and Regional Planning \(CRP\) program](#) at Iowa State University is one of the nation's largest and longest established planning programs. Through the CRP department, students regularly work with real communities to understand the challenges and achievements of city planning. In addition, the department undertakes high-quality research on behalf of federal and state governments, businesses, the nonprofit sector and other funding agencies, all of which feed into the courses taught in CRP.

Community Planning Studio

Students in the College of Design are offered a unique connection opportunity to immerse themselves within personal areas of interest outside of the classroom through studio courses. Studios nurture collaboration and creativity which fosters connectivity inside and outside of the classroom.



Photo Courtesy of the City of Urbandale

In the spring of 2024 Monica A. Haddad, Professor in CRP and Director of the [Geographic Information System Certificate](#), had the opportunity to teach the course. CRP 432 is an integration of planning methods and theory that deals with community planning issues. Students in the Community Planning Studio also analyze problems and formulate strategies for implementation, culminating in a community planning report that is published at the end of the semester.

Although there were many directions Haddad could have pursued for her students, she chose the topic of climate change. "... I really think that the generation that we are teaching now is going to be the generation that is going to be working in mitigating and adapting for climate change," she noted. Haddad also said, "I really wanted to work with issues related to sustainability and connecting the student to cities practicing sustainability."

In preparation for the spring semester class, Haddad visited Urbandale, after narrowing down a list of Iowa communities planning for climate change. During that visit, John Konior (Director of Risk Management and Support Services) shared that the City Council was working on the adoption of the Urbandale Sustainability Statement.



Photo Courtesy of the Community and Regional Planning Program

The [Community Planning Studio \(CRP 432\)](#) is a required undergraduate course for the CRP program that rotates among departmental faculty.

In consideration of Urbandale's proactive vision toward increasing sustainability efforts and practices, Haddad determined Urbandale to be the perfect client for her studio class students.

Konior and Kristi Bales (Assistant Director of Community Development), along with Haddad and 15 undergraduate CRP 432 students, undertook the challenge in developing the [Sustainable Urbandale Action Plan \(SUAP\)](#). This month's Student Living Cardinal Gold and Green showcases the student connections toward ensuring a sustainable present and future for the City of Urbandale.



Photo Courtesy of the City of Urbandale

A Sustainable Urbandale Action Plan

The vision for the Sustainable Urbandale Action Plan originated with the Urbandale City Council spotlighting sustainability in their strategic plan. With the city not having a dedicated sustainability person on staff, making connections with outside organizations was vital to advance the Council's sustainability efforts. The foundation of the SUAP focused upon building the



Photo Courtesy of the City of Urbandale

community's starting point in sustainability, [the 2020 Greenhouse Gas Emissions \(GHG\) report](#) completed by the [University of Northern Iowa's Center for Energy and Environmental Education](#).

"The Urbandale City Council spotlighted sustainability in its strategic plan. To advance the Council's priority, staff had to find connections with outside organizations," Konior said. "The SUAP allowed us to partner with another education institution, this time ISU, to capture ideas, concerns and potential solutions," he added.

The SUAP was outlined as a comprehensive strategy developed to promote sustainability, resilience and equity within the community. Its commitment components focused on citywide goals and action items aimed at reducing the use of fossil fuels, lowering greenhouse gas emissions and combating urban sprawl.

Critical strategic areas including renewable energy adoption, net-zero energy buildings, infill development and enhancing

community education about sustainable practices were also of priority – that resulted in 10 goals.

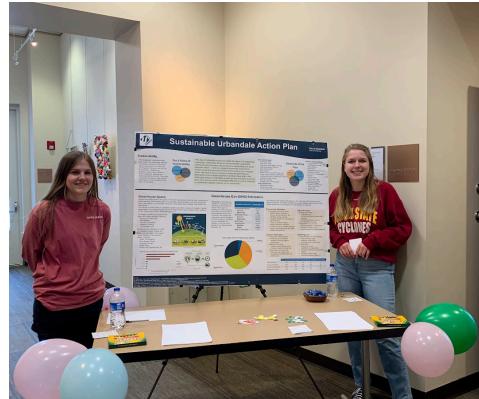


Photo Courtesy of the Sustainable Urbandale Action Plan

Student Connections

Student collaboration with Urbandale in developing the SUAP was divided into six phases: Introducing sustainability planning; Learning from other cities; Implementing community engagement events; Building scenarios; Developing goals and actions in detail and Writing the SUAP. In completing these phases connections between City officials and local stakeholders were imperative in ensuring a collective successful outcome.

Through a diversity of connections and connecting, as well as collaborative experiences and leadership opportunities, the students played a vital role in piecing together the building blocks toward ensuring a sustainable future, as well as honing impressive personal and professional growth.

CRP 432 students, Nicholas Alexander, Greenlee Dahle, Paige Harman, Jack Harris, Kristen Hoss, Ahillan Kumar, Myer Loeb, David McGee, Jack Miller, Ezekiel Newell, Carla Prochaska, Ella Tollefsrud, Sophia Wepking, Ashton Wheeler, Lindsey Wilson and teaching assistant Natalia Nery De Farias, brought the SUAP vision of the City of Urbandale and the sustainable present and future considerations and feedback of the Urbandale community together.

Two CRP 432 students, Greenlee Dahle and Lindsey Wilson, both seniors in Community and Regional Planning, shared their experiences, perspectives and reflections in being a part of this community connection.

Instilling a connection of interest and enthusiasm is always a significant first step for any project. Haddad recalled the immediate connectivity to purpose as being especially noteworthy to her.

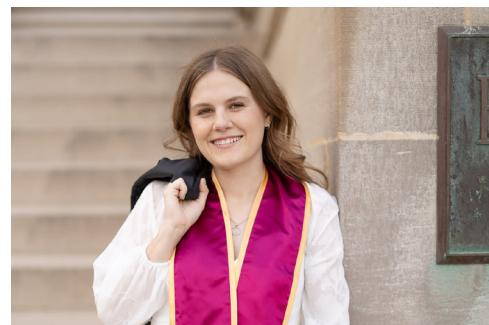


Photo Courtesy of Lindsey Wilson

"They surprised me the most in the beginning of the process

when I told them that they needed to do community engagement, they were so creative," she said.

Wilson noted her interest in this studio opportunity, being connected to growing up in Colorado and having connection to the environment and sustainability. "Being from Colorado, I am very committed to supporting the environment and improving sustainability in communities across the world no matter the size."



Photo Courtesy of Greenlee Dahle

Dahle also expressed enthusiasm in learning the project would be focusing on sustainability. "I was excited to learn that the topic was sustainability because I want to make communities more sustainable, equitable and connected," she noted.

Aspiring to lead the way in low-carbon solutions, while fostering a community where people and nature can flourish, the SUAP is built on the principle of equity. Ensuring that all residents, particularly socially vulnerable and historically marginalized communities, benefit from these sustainable efforts – multi-connections are essential.

"My students did a lot of community engagement and when we have community engagement, it is more likely that the residents are going to accept their ideas because their voices were heard in the process," Haddad noted, "... when a plan brings this community engagement, equity and justice are a way to evaluate the success of the project."

Konior agreed, "The students in CRP 432 did an outstanding job listening to staff, elected officials and our community. They engaged segments of the community that often do not participate in local government decisions. That was amazing to see, and it allowed everyone to feel their input was received and incorporated."



Photo Courtesy of the Sustainable Urbandale Action Plan

Community engagement and connection played a central role in shaping the SUAP, with multiple events taking place focused on gathering feedback from residents to ensure that the SUAP reflected local priorities and addressed Urbandale's unique environmental and social challenges.



Photo Courtesy of the Sustainable Urbandale Action Plan

Haddad commented on how creative her students were when it came to community engagement. "It surprised me how creative they got when designing community engagement events. They even designed a game so that young people in Urbandale could participate," she said. "Getting the younger community involved in this project was important to the students as well."

A meaningful connection Wilson made was with the children in Urbandale. "While they were not part of the interviews, I engaged with them through various games and art activities, which offered a unique opportunity to understand their perspectives and experiences through play."

Dahle also found connections to Urbandale youth especially meaningful. "Through their perspective, we developed an online game to increase educational awareness among young people in the Urbandale community."

The overarching impact of diversified connections also resonated with Wilson and Dahle.



Photo Courtesy of the Sustainable Urbandale Action Plan

For Wilson connecting with unique sectors within the community stood out. "One of the most impactful connections we made was through focus groups held specifically for refugee populations. These efforts allowed us to gain valuable insights into the lived experiences of refugee communities, which was vital to ensuring that the SUAP reflects the voices of all residents in Urbandale," she said.

For Dahle, connections with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including [EMBARC](#), [UCAN](#), [Habitat for Humanity](#) and [the Bike Library](#) in Iowa City, offered a specifically unique impact opportunity. "The NGOs allowed us to reach vulnerable populations in the Urbandale community (immigrants and refugees). This was the most impactful connection for me, as I was able to facilitate focus group sessions with the help of language interpreters. It changed my worldview, in a way," she noted. "These connections inspired our plan and highlighted the importance of forming relationships as planners."

Dahle also noted multiple key collaborations and partnerships including the [City of Urbandale](#), [Urbandale Public Library](#), [MidAmerican Energy](#), the [Human-Computer Interaction Department](#) at Iowa State University and the [City of Iowa City Sustainability Coordinator](#). In addition, Dahle emphasized the connection to her peers as being a significant component of her studio experience. "I was excited to work with my peers in a team-learning environment. I thrive in collaborative settings and enjoy working with other CRP students."

On September 17, the SUAP was presented to the Urbandale City Council by four CRP 432 team members and approved for implementation. The ongoing impact of this unique opportunity for connection and connectivity is collectively evident for the City of Urbandale. "The SUAP started connections that will endure through this plan and beyond. Urbandale is known for its strong community engagement and working through the SUAP development process sparked conversations that continue," Konior said.

For Wilson and Dahle there are also instilled takeaways, both professional and personal, from their involvement with the SUAP.



Photo Courtesy of the Sustainable Urbandale Action Plan

Wilson noted the importance of building relationships and ensuring all voices are heard. "Professionally, I enhanced my networking skills and developed meaningful connections with experienced planners," she offered. "Encouraging community participation ensures that people feel invested in sustainability efforts, making them more likely to support and maintain their initiatives," she added.

"On a personal level, this project deepened my understanding of environmental justice and planning, bringing me closer to my goal of creating a more sustainable future and positively impacting the environment," Wilson noted.

Dahle mentioned that working in teams as a primary takeaway. "Working in teams is a critical skill that can be challenging at times but eventually pays off. Connecting with residents is the first step to truly engaging with them in the planning process... Sustainability looks different for every community!"



Photo Courtesy of the Sustainable Urbandale Action Plan

On a personal level, Dahle noted collaboration. "I love working with others and learning together. Knowledge-sharing, collaboration, etc., are so important! Diversity

of voices, ideas and resources is important," she said.

Strengthening Community Bonds for Lasting Sustainability

The Sustainable Urbandale Action Plan (SUAP) is a powerful example of how meaningful connections can drive sustainable change within a community. This partnership not only allowed for the exchange of knowledge and resources but also fostered deep connections among community members, enhancing their collective commitment to sustainability. The connections made during this project will have lasting impacts on Urbandale and the relationships built through the SUAP will serve as a foundation for future sustainability initiatives.

Urbandale united city leaders, students and residents to create a comprehensive roadmap for a greener future. The SUAP strengthened connections within the community and fostered sustainable practices, serving as a catalyst for change. Students built many important connections within the community and participated in events that highlighted local priorities.

"Since the SUAP, residents have regularly emphasized sustainability in our meetings. As the city implements the SUAP, additional partnerships, funding coalitions and shared services will be crucial to drive lasting change in Urbandale and beyond," Konior said, "The SUAP reenforced ideas in the new Forward Urbandale Comprehensive Plan, that

challenge how Urbandale has developed over the past fifty years. I am excited to see a great variety of connected mobility housing nodes that prioritize community connectedness in shared parklets, green space, trails, and residential services."



Photo Courtesy of the Sustainable Urbandale Action Plan

The SUAP not only charts a path toward a sustainable future but also reinforces the idea that the strength of present and future impact lies in connections.

"The people who work at the city hall and the people in the Urbandale community are very important connections for this project to happen. John and Kristi were the ones who really spearheaded this project happening because they worked with the students and made community engagement possible," Haddad offered.



Photo Courtesy of the Sustainable Urbandale Action Plan

Konior added, "The SUAP fostered lasting connections between elected officials,

business leaders, community members, and CRP 432 students under Monica's guidance." These connections have become a bridge between the classroom and community, empowering students to make a lasting sustainability impact.

As illustrated through projects like the SUAP, commitment to community connections is of priority to the student experience at Iowa State University.

For Haddad, she is on to the next project. "My students are now starting a project addressing homelessness in Council Bluffs, exploring how we can ensure urban revitalization efforts to provide essential services."

For Wilson and Dahle, unique and invaluable connections are available both in and out of the classroom, with both noting participating in student organizations, attending campus and community events, lectures and workshops and continuing to take advantage of opportunities to meet new people, make new friends and gain new perspective and awareness.

The SUAP created building blocks that most certainly transcend a semester class. Dahle summed it up well. "This project was really special. Seeing the diversity of perspectives, experiences, knowledge, was so cool to apply to this project. Making connections is important because it builds everything together."