

A Shared Path Forward: Our Roadmap for Continued Success

Strategic Plan 2025 – 2027



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Message from the Dean

Enthusiastically, and with a great sense of pride, I present CUPPA's strategic plan, *A Shared Path Forward: Our Roadmap for Continued Success*. This plan reflects the hard work and commitment of our steering committee, chaired by Kelly LeRoux and Phil Ashton. I am grateful to the committee, and to all faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders who took time in the past year to offer ideas to make our plan as robust, inspiring, and positive as possible.

CUPPA's work is deeply oriented towards the future, even as we collectively strive to understand and improve the here and now. This strategic plan will leverage our planning and policy expertise, our commitment to inclusive justice, and our location in Chicago – one of the world's greatest cities – to achieve the goals, strategies, and actions we have identified here. It will allow us to build on our past successes and aim for an even greater future.

As a college with “planning” in its name, CUPPA recognizes the importance of setting ambitious goals and following defined steps to achieve them. At the same time, we understand the need for plans to be adaptive. As circumstances may change, so may our approaches. Regardless, our shared values will be the bedrock from which we engage this work. We have developed a plan with a three-year time horizon to get our most critical work done quickly while building additional paths we may pursue once we have further secured our financial footing.

I recognize that this work will not always be easy. At the same time, I am fully confident it will be inspiring, powerful, and transformative. CUPPA is a unique and remarkable college, poised to contribute more deeply to UIC's mission of inclusive access and research excellence and to strengthen our position here. Though our college is composed of units with individual strengths, I believe our work is always stronger when we act collectively. With this in mind, I invite you to join in to advance the work described within this plan. I am committed to the continued success of every one of us who is part of the CUPPA community. Please find a place for yourself here and let's work together to achieve an even more positive future.

With grateful anticipation,



Stacey Swearingen White
Dean, College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs

Introduction

Over twelve months, we embarked on an ambitious journey to clarify our identity as a college and outline a clear path forward in the context of a rapidly changing environment. This process involved engaging a wide range of people both internal and external to CUPPA who share a stake in the future of the college. These stakeholders included current and former students, newer and long-term staff of the college, early career and senior faculty, staff and leaders of CUPPA's research centers, community partners, and respected leaders at peer institutions.

The clear vision, mission, values, and strategic goals articulated in this plan are the result of many hours of thoughtful deliberation by people deeply invested in the college and its future. Through these stakeholder conversations, a clear overarching vision emerged for CUPPA: one of becoming a college that is globally recognized for exceptional research, education, and engagement with and for the diverse communities we serve. This plan outlines three strategic goals to achieve this vision, centered around expanding and supporting the pipeline of professionals and scholars in our fields, enhancing research impact, and strengthening an environment of mutual support and community engagement. Through the efforts of the steering committee, we arrived at a number of proposed initiatives and actionable steps to achieve these goals.

While many of the proposed initiatives take advantage of existing strengths within the college and can be implemented quickly, it is important to recognize that growth is incremental, progress not always linear, and some of the proposed initiatives will require more time and resources. The plan is organized in a way that enables us to make significant progress toward each of the strategic goals within the next three years, while leaving room for the possibility that it will take longer to implement some of the more ambitious action steps. While the goals set forth in this plan are achievable, we would also note that the plan is a "living document," meaning that goals and objectives may be modified as the plan is implemented over the next three years.

We must also acknowledge that none of our efforts are undertaken in isolation. CUPPA is embedded in a large public university, characterized by resource uncertainties, in an era of rapid cultural and technological changes transforming US higher education. While we cannot control all of these challenges in our operating environment, we can solidify our place within UIC and demonstrate our value to the campus community by focusing our efforts in executing this plan. By undertaking strategic actions to elevate our research on cities and urban issues, develop the next generation of diverse public servants and scholars, and demonstrate our leadership in community engagement, we will continue to add significant value to the city of Chicago and prove our undeniable contributions in furthering the UIC campus' strategic priorities.

Vision, Mission, Values

Vision

The College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs is globally recognized for its exceptional education, research, and engagement in urban affairs with and for the diverse communities that we serve.

Mission

From our home in Chicago—one of the world’s greatest cities—and through our shared commitment to thriving urban areas everywhere, the College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs prepares diverse students and creates knowledge and solutions to positively transform cities, shaping more sustainable, just, and equitable urban environments and policies, locally, nationally, and globally.

Values

- **Student Success:** CUPPA’s students and their individual and collective success drive our commitment to excellent teaching, advising, and co-curricular support.
- **Research Excellence:** CUPPA conducts and disseminates the results of its rigorous research and discovery to help create solutions for the public good.
- **Community Engagement:** CUPPA values and collaborates with our community partners by understanding and working on mutual interests and needs.
- **Belonging and Well-Being:** CUPPA’s community contributes to our common good and is a college where we provide mutual support for one another in pursuing our individual goals.
- **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice:** CUPPA practices and promotes a world guided by these principles and speaks up when they are threatened.
- **Sustainable Future:** CUPPA strives towards the promise of sustainable natural and built environments.

Strategic Goals

1. Expand and support the pipeline of professionals and scholars in our fields.
2. Enhance CUPPA's research impact.
3. Strengthen an environment of mutual support and community engagement.

Strategic Goal 1

Expand and support the pipeline of professionals and scholars in our fields

CUPPA has exceptional students who go on to work in influential positions throughout Chicagoland and beyond. Professors and instructors are leaders and practitioners in their fields, bringing real-life experiences into classrooms. Yet the greatest opportunity and challenge for CUPPA is how to grow and sustain its enrollment while bringing in students who more fully reflect the diversity of UIC's overall student body. It begins with building a strong diverse pipeline through the undergraduate programs, but also continues with the support and access that students need to feel that they belong and have a great experience that results in academic and career success.

To achieve this goal, we will implement the following core strategies in the next three years:

a. Increase recruitment and retention of both undergraduate and graduate students.

Proposed initiatives include:

- Strengthen undergraduate recruitment strategies, using mixed media and tactics to promote CUPPA majors and courses to both prospective and current UIC students.
- Develop and implement recruitment campaigns focused on distinct target markets, marketing CUPPA graduate programs to potential feeder schools in the Midwest, HBCU programs, public and nonprofit organizations, and international markets.
- Analyze potential to enhance pathways for CUPPA undergraduates to matriculate in graduate programs, including accelerated master's programs.
- Systematize efforts to ensure all CUPPA students have access to career support.
- Convoke faculty-staff task force to review graduate academic advising and identify best practices.
- Assess the needs of student organizations and develop a plan to help students build the capacity and funding of their organizations and thus increase students' sense of belonging.
- Enhance CUPPA's data analytics capabilities to deliver reports on recruitment and retention that are timely and program-specific with benchmarks for recruitment, student success measures, and student success initiatives.

b. Increase the diversity, inclusion, and belonging of our student body.

Proposed initiatives include:

- Increase support for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students from admission to graduation with expanded financial assistance to admitted students.
- Invest in the undergraduate-to-graduate pipeline by connecting BIPOC students to training/workshops for CUPPA graduate programs.
- Enhance career pathways for BIPOC students through targeted internships, mentoring, and career development opportunities, including those with alumni and professional organizations.
- Enhance college-wide support for the Urban Public Policy Fellowship and other leadership development programs serving BIPOC students.
- Incentivize faculty to take campus training courses on inclusive classroom practices and pedagogy, including identifying microaggressions and dismantling structural racism (e.g.: <https://teaching.uic.edu/programs/inclusive-education-scholars-certificate-program/>).

c. Evaluate and update curriculum to be more relevant, interdisciplinary, and accessible.

Proposed initiatives include:

- Incentivize faculty to take advantage of existing campus resources (e.g., Center for Advancement of Teaching Excellence) that teach new/emerging technologies such as A.I. and new pedagogical approaches.
- Understand how student achievement relates to key learning outcomes by conducting a uniform annual exit survey and a post-graduation employment survey, and adapting curriculum accordingly.
- Develop interdisciplinary courses within CUPPA and between CUPPA and other UIC colleges that enhance employability and help students meet emerging societal challenges.
- Ensure courses include best practices for accessibility with support and training from The Disability Resource Center.

d. Increase student experiences outside of the classroom, expanding their reach and preparing them well for professional success.

Proposed initiatives include:

- Pilot replicable team-teaching models at the graduate and undergraduate levels that enhance student learning through deepened community engagement.
- Expand the CUPPA Student Ambassador program to increase the number of students who can gain these communication and leadership skills.
- Support all CUPPA students in accessing more experiential educational opportunities, such as increased internship opportunities as well as

travel abroad programs, an Alternative Spring Break program, etc., by leveraging existing faculty networks both locally and in other cities and countries and by tapping international funding opportunities.

Below are strategies/initiatives that the college may not have enough resources to implement within the next three years but could endeavor to implement soon after:

- Expand funding for career development programming.
- Expand the college's capacity to promote student success through merit- and need-based financial assistance and targeted support to career preparation programs.
- Investigate the return on investment in growing online degree courses and non-degree programs (certificates, micro-credits, stackable credits, etc.).

Strategic Goal 2

Enhance CUPPA's research impact

CUPPA's faculty members and researchers are recognized as experts and perform high quality and impactful work locally and around the world. We believe there is an opportunity to enhance CUPPA's collective impact within UIC and in the broader community by enhancing support for research and practices that lead to greater collaboration and coordination.

To achieve this goal, we will implement the following core strategies in the next three years:

a. Refocus and enhance support for research activities.

Proposed initiatives include:

- Improve infrastructure for research production, such as the creation of a centralized repository of templates and examples of supplemental documents typically needed for grant applications.
- Identify resources to help find and disseminate funding opportunities, facilitate grant applications with higher overhead rates, and strategize approaching foundations for research funding.
- Create a mentoring program for grant writing and submission of applications with small financial awards for both mentors and mentees.
- Create a CUPPA research award to be granted annually, and a task force to design the reward criteria.

b. Create avenues and incentives for disseminating research externally and developing opportunities for pursuing interdisciplinary projects where appropriate and desired.

Proposed initiatives include:

- Reward partnerships and enhance processes between research centers and departmental faculty to build research capacity and collaborate equitably on grants.
- Create a program soliciting research activities from interdisciplinary teams with other UIC colleges (e.g., UIC's recent interdisciplinary research initiative).
- Host a convening of research center leaders and external stakeholders and potential funders.

Below is a strategy/initiative that the college may not have enough resources to implement within the next three years but could implement soon after:

- Create an Associate Dean for Research position within the Dean's office dedicated to supporting new research grants and leading technology transfer initiatives.

Strategic Goal 3

Strengthen an environment of mutual support and community engagement

CUPPA's individual academic and research units have many unique strengths and identities that we will continue to celebrate. At the same time, significant opportunities exist to create better connections and mutual support among the faculty, staff, and students of our various units, contributing to a greater sense of belonging, the generation of more new ideas, and discovery of more opportunities for cross-unit collaborations, while working together towards a common purpose of strengthening the college. In addition, we will continue to strengthen our services to and partnerships with external communities, inclusive of diverse geographies and affinities.

To achieve this goal, we will implement the following core strategies in the next three years:

a. Implement whole-college activities and events that connect our community members.

Proposed initiatives include:

- Pilot a college-wide "Orchard Forum," a standing meeting where members of the college gather to share recent scholarly work, receive feedback on that work, discover new ideas, and start conversations on potential collaborations and other ways they may support each other. Identify and rotate volunteers to chair the Orchard meetings. Also provide small pots of seed money to support the most promising ideas resulting from these meetings.
- Conduct the annual Urban Forum as CUPPA's marquee event, highlighting the great work happening in CUPPA and showcasing our college to a wide audience within and beyond UIC. Ensure broad participation from all college members at the Forum, and develop a series of smaller events and promotions that lead up to the Forum.

- Form a small committee of faculty, staff, and students to design and implement an annual “CUPPA Connections” activity or set of inclusive activities, supported by a small amount of funding provided by the college.
- Conduct periodic CUPPA Climate Surveys to identify opportunities to continually improve inclusivity and connectivity across the college.

b. Further enhance connections among college members while promoting our shared identity and values through activities with outside communities.

Proposed initiatives include:

- Pilot a CUPPA “day of service” with a community partner—an event where our faculty, staff, and students work together in service, building camaraderie, providing a benefit to the community partner, and serving as an active reflection of our college values.
- Coordinate community partnerships in support of project-based courses in the departments and promote research center work, doing so by:
 - creating a centralized database of community engagement projects;
 - prioritizing diverse and inclusive community partnership(s) that allow the involvement of a broad swath of CUPPA’s research centers, faculty, staff, and students, including helping to expand ties to global communities and issues where CUPPA’s faculty and centers have deep expertise and connections; and
 - advancing racial equity in all our community engagement work.

Below is a strategy/initiative that the college may not have enough resources to implement within the next three years but could endeavor to implement soon after:

- Create a dedicated “Community Engagement Coordinator” position to better coordinate all community engagement efforts.

Enabling Goals

The *strategic goals* described above define the set of focused objectives the college wants to achieve in the next three years to strengthen and distinguish itself. On the other hand, the following *enabling goals* represent underlying requirements needed for a strategic plan to succeed – they describe approaches to securing and strengthening critical resources and infrastructure necessary for us to successfully execute our strategic goals and elevate our work.

- A. Eliminate future budget deficits for the College and its units by securing the resources we need to thrive; and
- B. Shore up CUPPA’s marketing and communications functions and our infrastructure.

Enabling Goal A

Eliminate future budget deficits for the college and its units by securing the resources we need to thrive

The college has faced financial challenges for many years. Some of these challenges relate to our small size compared to other colleges; others are a function of declining support for public higher education happening throughout the US. We must collectively understand and pursue the best path(s) forward for financial sustainability, in order to create an environment where new ideas can thrive and the great work already happening at CUPPA can be further supported.

To achieve this goal, we will implement the following core strategies in the next three years:

- i. **Make fully transparent and collectively examine the financial resources available to and allocated within the college.**

Proposed initiatives include:

- The Dean will prepare and share with the college a detailed presentation showing the sources of funding we receive each year and how those are allocated within the various units and subunits. By having a clear idea of how our budgeting works, we can collectively begin to create effective solutions for more stable finances.
- CUPPA’s Executive Committee, with input from the Cabinet, will conduct a scenario planning exercise to determine possibilities and impacts of potential changes in annual budgetary allocations for the units. Evaluating different scenarios for resource allocation will help assess the *status quo* as well as the *pros and cons* of new approaches. Budgetary allocation decisions will then be made based on this analysis.
- Departments will examine current practices with respect to graduate assistantships and differential tuition and determine how best to support graduate students while maximizing tuition revenues.

- Conduct break-even analyses to determine the annual numbers of undergraduate and graduate student enrollments needed to fill the college's financial gap. Develop an enrollment strategy needed to reach these targets and estimate the time frame for achieving them.

ii. Develop and implement a college-wide fundraising plan.

- Each unit will work with the Dean to determine the operational, administrative, and/or needs for which it would most benefit from fundraising. College-wide needs and places for mutual benefit will also be considered.
- Units will also help to identify the most promising potential donors for individual or collective needs.
- The Dean will work with staff in UIC Advancement to develop a more detailed plan for pursuing the desired fundraising goals of the units and the college and begin implementing this plan.
- The Dean will request from campus administration financial support for CUPPA's highly impactful community engagement work, by presenting evidence of such impact as provided by unit heads. CUPPA contributes significantly to the Chancellor's "engagement with our community" strategic priority area, and we believe this outsized contribution deserves support from campus administration.
- Strengthen relationships with philanthropic foundations in the Chicagoland area and beyond, with assistance from UIC's corporate and foundations office to better support research function.

iii. Evaluate the potentials for forming strategic partnerships with other UIC college(s).

Proposed initiatives include:

- The Dean will initiate a conversation with the Provost and/or Chancellor, as well as other UIC Deans about the steps that would be needed should CUPPA wish to expand or partner with another college.
- The Dean will appoint a small committee to examine the outcomes for similar colleges in other higher education institutions that have undergone strategic partnerships across the university system and evaluate potential forms of partnerships that could be mutually beneficial to CUPPA and one or more other UIC colleges.
- Based on the results of the two preceding initiatives, CUPPA will determine whether it's beneficial and feasible to pursue strategic partnerships with other UIC college(s), and if so, with which college(s) and in what forms.

Below are strategies/initiatives that the college may not have enough resources to implement within the next three years but could endeavor to implement soon after:

- Implement the enrollment strategy to reach undergraduate and graduate student enrollment targets to at least help the college achieve financial break-even.
- Fully implement the fundraising plan, and, together with other financial measures, achieve net positive revenue for the college.

- If a decision is made on forming strategic partnerships with other UIC college(s), then begin to lay the groundwork for realizing such partnerships.

Enabling Goal B

Shore up CUPPA's marketing and communications functions and our infrastructure

To support the success of this strategic plan, other resources are also necessary. We seek to strengthen the college's marketing and communications functions in order to promote our unique value propositions, raise our visibility, and help us attract students, faculty, staff, and funding. We also seek to improve our infrastructure to ensure we continue to be inclusive, accessible, and up-to-date in our technology.

To achieve this goal, we will implement the following core strategies in the next three years:

i. Strategically and consistently promote CUPPA's research impact to increase the College's visibility.

Proposed initiatives include:

- Create a process for collecting information on research activities, outputs, and impacts.
- Assess and enhance current approaches to sharing research internally within CUPPA and UIC.
- Determine and implement the best avenues for consistently and strategically sharing research innovation and impact externally to relevant stakeholders.
- Evaluate opportunities to enhance social media outlets and strengthen coordination with campus and system resources that will increase CUPPA's visibility with media and legislative contacts.
- Host roundtable events with external partners to promote scaled impact of CUPPA research, inviting relevant stakeholders and potential funders to these events.

ii. Increase centralized college efforts in communications, marketing, and promotion of student recruitment and community engagement efforts.

Proposed initiatives include:

- Enhance CUPPA's marketing and communications functions in support of recruitment, providing strategic content targeted to specific audiences that amplifies CUPPA's competitive advantages.
- Prioritize a share of the college's overall communication budget to support communication of CUPPA's community engagement work. CUPPA's community engagement could be an asset when integrated with recruitment marketing.

iii. Improve our infrastructure to maximize inclusiveness and facilitate the greatest success of everyone, prioritizing projects that support the environment we want the college to have.

Proposed initiatives include:

- Ensure that CUPPA has at least one fully accessible set of restrooms.
- Provide at least one all-gender set of restrooms.

Below are strategies/initiatives that the college may not have enough resources to implement within the next three years but could endeavor to implement soon after:

- Create a centralized communications position within the Dean's office dedicated to promoting CUPPA to the rest of the campus and to external audiences.
- Further improve our infrastructure, such as providing a prayer/reflection room for students, and other inclusive, supportive facilities and technology.
- Invest in our capacity to produce content for online courses, leveraging campus resources in video production and podcast technologies.

Moving Forward

As this college recognizes so well, a plan is only as good as its implementation. Input received from throughout the CUPPA community during this strategic planning process suggests that we are ready to engage collectively and enthusiastically in the work of bringing our goals to fruition. Let's make it happen!

Our next step will be to develop an implementation plan so that we can get to work right away on realizing our strategic initiatives. The Dean will work with CUPPA's Executive Committee to determine a three-year timeline to engage the activities outlined in the strategic plan. We will task teams or groups with leading each of these activities and will set metrics to assess our progress. We invite everyone's participation in these initiatives, and in making our strategic goals a reality.

Recognizing also that the sum is greater than its parts, we hope this plan provides a roadmap for CUPPA's academic units and research centers as they identify and work on their own strategic goals in the next three years, ensuring that we are cohesive and intentional in our pursuits of growth and change. It is our hope that everyone can see themselves and their vision for the College reflected in the pages of this plan.

CUPPA has had a 30-year history of impactful success. Let's work together to ensure even greater success for the next 30 years, making CUPPA the best urban-focused college in the US to work, learn, and conduct research in pursuit of the public good.

Appendix

Leaders of the Strategic Planning Process

Strategic Planning Steering Committee Members:

- Philip Ashton, Professor and Interim Department Head, Department of Urban Planning and Policy (UPP), Committee Co-Chair
- Kelly LeRoux, Professor, Department of Public Policy, Management, and Analytics (PPMA) and Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and Research, Committee Co-Chair
- Sari Buffill, Business Administrative Associate, PPMA
- Ed Bury, Public Information Coordinator, Urban Transportation Center
- Deborah Carroll, Professor and Department Head, PPMA and Director, Government Finance Research Center
- Joe Hoereth, Director, Institute for Policy and Civic Engagement
- Kazuya Kawamura, Professor, UPP
- Deana Lewis, Associate Director, Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy
- David Lopez-Garcia, Assistant Professor, UPP
- Stacey Swearingen White, Dean
- Jodi White Jones, Assistant Dean for Communications
- Yonghong Wu, Professor, PPMA

Project Consultants

The CiTTA Partnership Team:

- Belinda Li, Founder and Chief Consultant
- Rena Henderson Mason, Senior Consultant

The Strategic Planning Steering Committee expresses its deepest gratitude to all the individuals who provided inputs throughout this process, too numerous to list by name here. The committee is also grateful for the administrative support provided by Lynn Ross-Anderson, Director of Operations and Executive Assistant to the Dean, throughout the strategic planning process.