



## Webchat Transcript April 5, 2018

Q: Will all the graduate students of MCP have the longer OPT after graduation? No matter which concentration?

A: Yes! It is now STEM designated so has a longer OPT than in the past.

Q: OPT is Optional Practical Training, correct? This is the first I've ever heard of this. Who is it valuable for?

A: It's mostly exciting for our international students since it means that they can work here in the US for longer after their master's degree program ends.

Q: When doing TAship am I paid by check or is it only counting towards my tuition?

A: You usually get paid a stipend unless it is a work-study position in which case you would get paid weekly depending on your hours.

Q: My question is about the doctoral degree of City and Regional Planning. Which aspects of a graduate student are the most interesting to professors? I think if I have weakness in these parts, I will strengthen them. Because I have the desire to apply for doctor degree after practical training.

A: I think if you join the MCP program, you will get to know all of the professors and their interests.

Q: I was wondering about the research opportunities for incoming MUSA students and what the process is to get involved in current research.

A: As for research opportunities, it will depend on your interests, but there is no shortage of opportunities. If you have something specific that you're interested in, I would definitely discuss it with the program director (because the program is intensive, I'd recommend trying to tie the research into other coursework, which I know that students sometimes do).

Q: Typically, are there GSR or GSI positions available to MCP grad students which waive tuition?

A: There are plenty of research positions open to students, but they pay an hourly rate and do not waive tuition.

Q: I assume TA positions do not waive tuition either?

A: That's correct.

Q: How many hours per week, on average, is a graduate research position? TA position?

A: It really depends on what the position is, and if you attend the classes for which you're a TA. For some TA positions I clock an hour or two a week, for research positions I tend to clock more 5-10.

Q: Is anyone familiar with being a resident assistant in on-campus housing --- Are your housing costs covered by the university? Time commitment?

A: If you choose to be a resident assistant on campus your housing is provided, a partial meal plan and a small living stipend (I believe \$2,000ish) a semester. It is a pretty hefty time commitment. Resident Assistants need to be on call frequently in the dorms - often patrolling the halls. You are the emergency contact for the hall, so if there is an incident you could be pulled out in the middle of the night. You are

also expected to run a few events (social/educational) for people in the dorm to participate in each semester. Talking around the room, none of us seem to know anyone at the design school who has gone after a resident assistant position. I would imagine it would be difficult to balance, though not impossible!

Q: My question is regarding the MUSA waitlist: can we submit updates/any additional LORs to improve chances of getting off it?

A: I think if you reach out to Ken Steif and express your interest in being admitted from the wait list, that might start a dialogue that could possibly help your case.

A2: Ken is a great resource! I'd think about what you want to do in the program and why you think that you would be a good fit, and try to have a dialogue with Ken as mentioned. Good luck!

Q: I also want to ask for the improving chances of getting off the MCP wait list. For I am on the wait list, too.

A: There are about 15 on the MCP wait list. We will have a better idea of your status after April 15.

Q: How are waitlists reviewed? Is it only dependent on the slots that open up?

A: We don't have ranked waitlists, when we get closer to April 15th, the faculty will look at the group of students that have committed to the program and determine if they would like to admit students from the waitlist. They determine the selection by considering the diversity of the committed group and trying to round out the class. They like to have a diversity of backgrounds and experiences in the class.

Q: Can I select courses from other schools in Penn?

A: You absolutely can! I've taken a few absolutely awesome courses at Wharton. I know people who are taking courses in the computer science department as well.

Q: What is the extent of collaboration between MUSA and Penn IUR - do students have the option to be part of IUR through the MUSA program courses or do we need to approach individual faculty members for our specific areas of interest?

A: Any collaboration would depend on your interests. I was able to get into a very competitive course in part because the professor was an IUR fellow. I would look at the various interests/projects of IUR fellows and reach out directly to learn more.

Q: I've encountered the reputation that PennDesign doesn't always graduate students with all the hard skills employers are looking for. Can anyone speak to this? Perhaps Penn is more focused on research, theory, and academia, somewhat like Berkeley?

A1: In my personal experience this is not the case. It ultimately comes down to your concentration and research interests but there is plenty of opportunities and requirements that will build your hard skills, and plenty of interaction with working professionals that allow you to ask questions and make sure you're set up to enter the workforce.

A2: I'd also say that a number of the MCP Smart Cities students participate in a number of our courses which are not just geospatial in nature but also include everything from advanced Machine Learning (ML) algorithms to Javascript.

A3: I am in the transportation concentration and I have learned a lot of hard skills so far this year. As a first year MCP Student all students in any concentration are required to take a quantitative methods course and an introduction course to GIS. These classes teach you very quickly some marketable hard skills. I have learned how to use RStudio, ArcGIS and have beefed up my skills in the Adobe Suite, Rhino and Sketchup. The program really lends itself to learning hard skills - the opportunities are there!

Q: As I've been talking with many different schools around the nation, I've noticed an artificial binary being propagated between theory-based programs and practice-based programs. Georgia Tech and U. Washington for example really push their practice focus, while I've heard a lot about Berkeley being very academic. Any truth to this, in your experience? And even so, does it make any difference?

A: Are there specific skills that you are looking for? Also, come over to the dark side and apply for a dual degree with MUSA! WhooHoo!

Q: I'm returning to school to be exposed to as much as possible regarding city planning and urban design, less so for specific skills. But gaining marketable skills (in general) is something I want to make sure will happen (sounds like it will!)

A: Naturally, there are intersections among each of the disciplines. At Penn, you will definitely have the flexibility to get what you need out of the program (to land where you want).

Q: Is there much intermingling between the transportation concentration and the urban design concentration? That intersection is where my design interests focus, as an architect who's fascinated by the design of public space and movement infrastructures.

A: the design concentration is pretty different from the other MCP concentrations. That being said, if your interests are with both concentrations, you could take many of the design courses to fulfill your method requirements and make transportation your main concentration. The hard skills gained in both concentrations are pretty different. In Transportation we develop hard skills by using RStudio and occasionally ArcGIS as we handle a lot of very large data sets. My suggestion would be to consider concentrating in Transportation and take design courses as your electives or to fulfill your method requirements.

Q: I've been researching into the inter-disciplinary programs and am quite interested in the Certificate of Real Estate Design and Development course - as I definitely see the potential for architecture graduates to move into development. Would surveying internships help in applying for this course? Also what is your stance on architects going into more of a development oriented role, rather than going the route of a traditional architect?

A1: The first thing I would say is to reach out to the Director of the Real Estate Design and Development Certificate (REDD), Professor John Landis, to see what they look for in applicants to the REDD certificate because it is a very competitive certificate program to get into. He may also have some insight into your questions about architects that have completed the certificate and where they are now. You can reach him at [jan@design.upenn.edu](mailto:jan@design.upenn.edu).

A2: If you are really interested in the Real Estate Certificate try reaching out to John Landis to show interest and see what they look for in candidates in the certificate. As to internships that is really up to you to determine where to apply and what to pursue. If you are interested in development maybe getting to know some development firms and what they look for in employees will help. Frankly, students at Penn carve their own paths through their approaches to studio, independent study, internships, and outside interests so if you are interested in something then pursue it.

If you still have questions, email us at [admissions@design.upenn.edu](mailto:admissions@design.upenn.edu)...or check out our students' profiles on "Get To Know Us" <https://www.design.upenn.edu/graduate-admissions/get-know-us/>. Our students would be happy to answer them!