Q: Hi, I'm looking at the City Planning program...can you tell me why you guys choose Penn?

MSHP Student: I am a preservation student, but we do have a lot of opportunities to work with the Planning Department. Penn for me has been really great because of the atmosphere, it's progressive, challenging, with great people and great places. I hope that helps.

MLA/M.Arch Student: I'm a dual architecture/landscape student in my final year, and I chose PennDesign because of its encouragement of interdisciplinary work and the interactions the program lends itself to through a breadth of coursework and bringing in people from diverse backgrounds.

Q: What kind of work do you do with the Planning Department? I'm interested in more collaboration with other departments since I've already done a bit of planning in undergrad.

MLA/M.Arch Student: Some students are able to work with planning students through urban-scale competitions outside of coursework, in addition to choosing elective courses offering cross-disciplinary enrollment.

MSHP Student: We have opportunities to work with other departments in a lot of classes. But recently in a class I have taken a city planning student in their department was working on the same area I was. This means we were able to share our notes about the area to complete very different projects. It was great because we were able to share information and how we got it from different perspectives.

Q: I'm a prospective MCP candidate, and I am hoping to learn more about Spring Workshop held in the spring of your first year. I understand that you work in developing communities in the Philly area. My interest is specifically in transportation design, would this be a possible area of focus for the Workshop project?

Admissions Staff: Yes, this would definitely be possible.

MFA Student: There is a spring high speed rail studio taught by the dean that in past years has traveled to London to meet with members of congress to present their work.

Q: Hi, I'm looking into the MCP program. I am interested in urban sustainable development, but I'm not sure which concentration to choose. I like the courses that are offered in the sustainable transportation, land use, and urban design concentrations. Do we need to decide between the concentrations before applying? Also, is it possible to take classes from multiple concentrations?

Admissions Staff: You don't need to decide on your concentration before you apply. Some students enter the program, take some classes and then decide.
Q: This kind of echoes Janet’s question-Do MCP students with an urban design concentration take studio
classes with only other MCP urban design students, or are they mixed in with architecture and landscape
architecture students?

Admissions Staff: Yes, out of the ten or so studio options, there's about 2-3 that are more
interdisciplinary where they take a certain amount of students from each program.

MSHP Student: Recent studios have included designing Beijing Olympics, and sustainable housing in Rio,
and rebuilding after Hurricane Sandy.

Q: Hi! I was wondering how specific the statement of purpose should be.

Admissions Staff: The statement of purpose is a place for you to introduce yourself and your
interests/goals and explain how PennDesign will help you reach those goals. You can certainly be
specific, however there is a 500 word limit, so really as specific as you can be within that requirement.

Q: In addition, are you paired with an advisor/faculty member when first admitted to PennPlanning, and
if so, do you get to offer suggestions for who you would like as an advisor?

MSHP Student: You are given an advisor, but there is a strong mentoring program that is linked to the
real estate club. You are assigned advisor but you can choose a mentor.

Q: For the studio courses that do require travel, is the cost included tuition or is airfare, hotels, etc.
extra?

Admissions Staff: It actually depends on the budget that each department has (it varies from year to
year), but they often have some form of stipend available. If you are accepted, please be sure to check
in with the department and see what their plans are for travel/expenses.

Q: For the MFA program how much is teaching a part of the program? Do first years have teaching
assistantships?

MFA Student: Teaching Assistantships are given at least once per year, often each semester. Also, there
are outside TAs and fellowships in teaching across departments. MFAs can also propose to syllabus to
teach core courses

Q: It says that a portfolio is recommended for the MCP urban design concentration. I’m coming from a
different undergrad background, so I do not have that many design projects to submit. Should I submit a
portfolio if it is not that strong, or would it be better not to include one in my application?

Admissions Staff: You should still submit your portfolio.

Q: Would it be helpful to submit a portfolio even if I don’t choose the Urban Design concentration?

Admissions Staff: No, those faculty members won't look at your portfolio, only the Urban Design faculty.
Q: I have only done a B.Art and so is it okay to give a broader vision in my personal statement of whereabouts I want my academic career to take me, since I am sure I will discover a lot more through the MArch studios.

Admissions Staff: Yes, that is perfectly okay.

Q: Are teaching assistantships available to international students too?

Admissions Staff: Yes, they are available to international students.

Q: If I have a specific focus and interest, will it hurt me to include this in the Personal Statement, or would you advise that I list a more broad range of interests?

Admissions Staff: No, if you do have a specific interest that you hope to pursue, it wouldn't hurt you to include that in your personal statement. Really, this is place to introduce yourself to the Admissions Committee. I recommend simply being honest. The Admissions Committees like to admit applicants with a variety of backgrounds and interests that will further complement our current student body.

Q: I am applying for the MCP program so I'm not sure how different it is for the other students here but I was wondering if you could talk about who you asked for recommendations. I am planning on asking for one academic and two professional.

MSHP Student: I asked two professors from my undergrad and a place where I had worked during the summer.

Admissions Staff: It depends on your experience. We recommend at least 2 academic. Our system will take up to 4 letters, so you might consider 2 each (academic and professional).

MLA/M. Arch Student: I asked three professors, one within my architecture program, one from a study abroad and one from an academic semester I did outside of my undergrad to gain a range of input from significant experiences.

Q: From an admissions standpoint, how heavily do you focus on GPA and GRE scores?

Admissions Staff: It actually depends on which department. Typically test scores are kept on a fairly even level, though if a program requires a portfolio, that will be considered the more important part of the application. It isn't uncommon that a portfolio could outweigh less-than-stellar scores, but if you're applying and don't need a portfolio then your test scores could certainly way heavier as the Admissions Committees have less to judge regarding the applicant.

Q: Another question about the MFA program: I'm interested in social practices - does the program encourage or support those in any way?

MFA Student: Being that the program is interdisciplinary, we are open for all types of art practices. I will say that in terms of faculty, we don't have anyone working directly in that lineage, but the students are all grappling with different modes and problems in art making. It is also worth noting that our visiting
artist program gives us access and opportunities to speak with a broad range of artists about our work. We get to meet with visiting artists and a rotating senior critic panel whose different approaches give us a lot of access to varied practices. ALSO you should check out the Slought foundation, they are right here on campus and have a lot of interesting projects going on that intersect more socially engaged practices.

Q: I have been reading a lot about the summer internship and most of the information suggests that internships are completed in the Philly area. Would it be okay to do the internship elsewhere, for instance, if you have a connection with a government department in a different city?

MLA Student: Of course! A lot are completed in the Philly area because connections happen over lectures and with professors, but a good number of people go to work all over the country. I think the biggest reason people like to stay is also because of cats and sublets. The architecture students travel A LOT though.

Q: I like how interdisciplinary the program is and that's why I'm interested. Do MFA students have any input into the visiting artist program?

MFA Student: Yes, we are able to request artists for nomination. Also, once a set of artists have agreed to visit, students are able to make top choices for studio visits. Most visiting artists give one on one studio visits as well as present slide talks at the Institute of Contemporary Art.

Q: Would it be beneficial to come to UPenn's campus to learn more about the program? If so, who could we talk to when we visit?

Admissions Staff: Yes, it would certainly be beneficial to visit campus. You will want to contact the department you're interested in first to schedule a time to visit. If it's City Planning, you can reach them at cityplan@design.upenn.edu. Once you schedule a time, they will be able to arrange for a tour guide, set appointments for you meet with faculty, etc. Whatever day you visit, stop by the Admissions Office, we're open every weekday 9-5.

Q: How can I get confirmation for the delivery of my TOEFL and GRE scores. Also, what are the job opportunities after the MEBD course? What do UPenn students generally opt for?

Admissions Staff: TOEFL and GRE scores are sent to us online using ETS (Education Testing Service). Use our institution code 2926 (no department code is needed) and we will receive them within 2 weeks. After you submit your application, you will be able to log back on and see that your application materials, including test scores, have been received.

MEBD Student: Most of the previous MEBD students are working with Sustainable Firms as architects or consultants. Some of them are researching for centers like the TC Chan Center, while some have gone on to PhD.

Q: Back to the letters of recommendation...One of my letters is coming from my employer, but I'm slightly concerned because I do not work in a field related to planning. What do you typically look for in letters of this sort?
Admissions Staff: That's fine. The faculty will be looking at things like work ethic, ability to communicate, etc.

Q: How often do visiting artists come?

MFA Student: All the time, every week. Another great thing about Penn is that our options for taking classes outside of Fine Arts which broaden our knowledge base in different areas of interest pertaining to our work.

Q: What are some of your favorite aspects of the program or why did you decide to go to UPenn?

MFA Student: I really like to work across disciplines. Also, UPenn is a major research university, so the amount of resources on hand is fantastic. Also, the faculty is really accessible and involved.

MFA Student: I chose Penn for many of the reasons mentioned above. It was important to me to be in an interdisciplinary program as my work is always changing. I also value academic rigor and wanted to be a part of a larger university system as my undergrad was a small fine arts school. Also, the recent development of having the thesis show abroad was very appealing, in addition to the many travel opportunities. AND the faculty. Also, when I came to visit, I saw such a diverse range of work happening, nothing cookie cutter, it seemed like an exciting place.

Q: What type of jobs do students usually have after completing the MCP program?

Admissions Staff: The City Planning department keeps in touch with their alumni and has a running list of different organizations/institutions that are currently employing their alumni. Unfortunately, since we don't have a City Planning student here with us, I recommend contacting them at the e-mail address above (cityplan@design.upenn.edu) to inquire about recent alumni.

MLA Student: Some students work with state/federal agencies, think tanks, non-profits/NGOs, international companies such as AECOM and Sasaki... but I believe everyone is trying to follow their individual passion. It is a really wide and diverse field.

Q: How much is the involvement of students in the TC Chan center during the MEBD course?

MEBD Student: A couple of students from our class are pursuing Independent Study this semester and have been collaborating with the TC Chan center on their research a bit, but other than this semester we have not collaborated with them much. We hear that our studio is going to involve more inputs from them.

Q: What are some of the travel opportunities?

MFA Student: There are several. The one upcoming this winter is a fellowship in Lugoland, Italy. Also, there is a travel seminar which went to Istanbul last year. It is photo based.

Q: Can students whose work isn't photo based still participate.

MFA Student: Yes, anyone is able to apply.
MFA Student: I think photo can be a loose thing.

Q: What do you think of Philly as a city? What about the arts? How much is going on?

MLA/ M. Arch Student: It’s pretty baller. I’m from Minneapolis! Easy transition, less green spaces within immediate proximity but way better for biking year-round and getting around.

MLA Student: It's a GREAT city to be a student in...the cost of living is low enough to enjoy life. There's a lot of opportunities if you are young and energetic...every time I walk around I see cranes and art and temporary beer gardens and block parties.

MFA Student: Philly is great for walker and is biker friendly. Good scene, good community. First Fridays are a gallery hop that happens every month. Also, students have access to a lot of great museums.

Admissions Staff: If you're a bicyclist, Philly is a very bike-friendly city as well. It's flat and has a grid-system so getting around is a breeze.

MFA Student: The art scene here is very active, there are a lot of artist run spaces, and the museums are amazing. Check out VOX Populi. One of the students in my year is involved with Fjord, a really great space. There are so many art schools so lots of artists.

Admissions Staff: Philly is a great city. I've lived in Philadelphia and the surrounding areas for my whole life. Really, I've never had an urge to move elsewhere because everything is at my fingertips here, great universities, lively neighborhoods, excellent food, nightly shows, performances, and exhibitions. Also, there is a really accessible art community here that has many opportunities open to local artists.

MFA Student: and NYC is 2 hours away so we can go see the big shows there too. Cheap transport, megabus and bolt bus and Chinatown bus.

Admissions Staff: My favorite -- BYOB restaurants!

Q: Wow! Thanks everyone, I'm as excited about Philly now as I am about UPenn.

MSHP Student: There are also great sports leagues around if you are into that. Penn has events, but there is also NFL, baseball, basketball, etc. There is also an ice skating rink here students can use. Plus, there are community sports leagues, pick up teams with the school and in the community. I play soccer here and I know that there is a roller derby league.

MFA Student: Yeah, one of the first years is on the women's ice hockey team too, that’s fun.

Admissions Staff: Thanks everyone for joining us. We’re about to close the chat room. If you have any remaining questions, feel free to get in touch with us at admissions@design.upenn.edu.