



Boston University Graduate Program in
Urban Biogeoscience & Environmental Health



BU URBAN Graduate Program in Urban Biogeoscience and Environmental Health

Trainee Handbook

2026/2027 Academic Year



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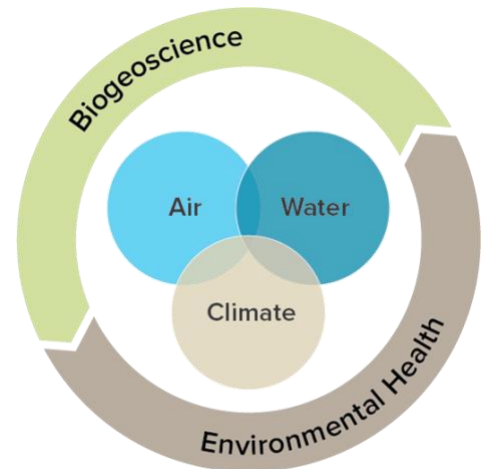
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About the Program

More than half of the world's population lives in cities and this proportion will grow in the next few decades. People living in cities can face elevated levels of air and water pollution and extreme weather events such as heat waves and storm surges.

The Boston University Graduate Program in Urban Biogeoscience and Environmental Health ("BU URBAN") was founded as a National Science Foundation (NSF) Research Traineeship (NRT) Program to prepare graduate students to tackle the major environmental problems confronting cities using an interdisciplinary approach that fuses Biogeoscience and Environmental Health. Trainees design research projects whose results are scientifically transformative and useful for decision-makers, with a common focus on urban air and water quality, climate impacts, and urban greenspace.



Mission, Vision, and Values

The **mission** of BU URBAN is to prepare graduate students to tackle urban environmental challenges using interdisciplinary methods and a co-production approach centered on partnerships with governments, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector.

Our **vision** is to create a diverse workforce of scientists and practitioners equipped with the technical knowledge and communication skills necessary for building a sustainable, healthy, and equitable future.

We strive to be an inclusive and welcoming community where all members develop a sense of belonging and truly thrive. We **value**:

- Training of students for a variety of career paths
- Diversity in all its intersectional forms, embracing the full range of contexts, experiences, and futures that our community members hold
- Communication and operations that are open, accessible, inclusive, respectful, and consider all voices
- Equitable relationships within the Boston University community and beyond
- Solutions to environmental challenges faced by cities and their residents, especially the most exposed and vulnerable

For our statement on shared community values, [visit our program website](#).

Program Leadership, Faculty, and Staff

The BU URBAN Leadership Team consists of Pamela Templer (Director; Department of Biology), Lucy Hutyra (Associate Director; Department of Earth & Environment), Jon Levy (Associate Director; Department of Environmental Health), and Emily Walton (Program Manager).

Participating faculty from the Departments of Biology and Earth & Environment have expertise in biogeochemistry in terrestrial and aquatic systems, microbial and plant ecology, hydrology, geomorphology, biogeophysics, and remote sensing. Participating faculty from the Department of Environmental Health have expertise in epidemiology, exposure science, risk assessment, and toxicology, with applications that span air pollution and climate change, chemicals in soil, water and food, as well as non-chemical hazards such as noise, heat, and social stressors. Participating faculty from the Department of Mathematics & Statistics have expertise in hierarchical modeling, spatial and temporal modeling of data, multivariate analysis, network analysis, Bayesian statistics, and computational

biology. Participating faculty from the Faculty of Computing & Data Sciences have expertise in agent-based modeling, algorithmic mechanism design and techniques for working with big data, ecosystem value mapping, systematic conservation planning, policy instrument design, impact evaluation, decision theory, and data visualization. Affiliated Staff bring expertise in communications, urban governance, sustainability, energy, and accessibility. See our [program website](#) for the current list of [Faculty](#) and [Staff](#).

Policies and Procedures

Participation in the Program

Upon notification that you have been selected to participate in BU URBAN, you will be asked to sign an agreement to complete all required program elements. Your enrollment in the program starts in the semester that you are accepted and lasts until the completion of your degree at Boston University.

Advising and Mentorship

The BU URBAN Program provides interdisciplinary training for graduate students interested in a variety of career options. To ensure proper balance of coursework, research interests, professional development, and other activities, we provide trainees and their departmental advisors with an Annual Activities Report Form, which explains program requirements and tracks trainee progress. The Annual Activities Report Form is populated from the Self Report Survey that trainees complete at the end of the Fall and Spring semesters. The Program Manager also provides mentorship through 1) Semesterly Group Check-in's, 2) Weekly Office Hours, and 3) easy-to-schedule individual meetings.

Commuting between Campuses

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of this program and the layout of Boston University, trainees often commute between the Charles River Campus (CRC), where Computing & Data Sciences and the Biology, Earth & Environment, Mathematics & Statistics Departments are housed, and the Boston University Medical Campus (BUMC), where the Department of Environmental Health is housed. To help you plan your travel between campuses we created this list of options:

1. Take the [BU Shuttle \(BUS\)](#). The BUS runs approximately every 10-20 minutes and stops at several locations on the Charles River and the BU Medical Campuses to provide transportation between the two. The trip takes approximately 30 minutes, but varies with traffic. Keep in mind that during the summer months the BU Shuttle does not operate as frequently as during the academic year.
2. There is a bike lane that connects the two campuses. The trip takes between 15 and 20 minutes.
3. Take a nice 45-minute walk between the two campuses.
4. Uber/Lyft. Install the App and hail a ride. The App will tell you how long your trip will take, but count on approximately 20-30 minutes.
5. Drive and [park](#).

Class Registration and Course Petitions

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the program, trainees enroll in classes outside of their discipline and may encounter conflicts due to specific course prerequisites. If this is the case, email the course instructor and copy your departmental advisor, the URBAN Program Director (ptempler@bu.edu) and Program Manager (URBAN@bu.edu), and explain your concerns and/or questions.

We carefully created a suite of required courses for Ph.D. students and URBAN *Master's Coursework Track* students that provide a broad background in Urban Biogeoscience and Environmental Health. If you think that a non-BU URBAN listed course you have taken should count towards your requirements, please complete a [course petition form](#). Please be aware that filling out this petition does not guarantee approval.

NSF Acknowledgement

All presentations and publications generated during your enrollment in this program must acknowledge funding support from NSF with the following statement: “This work was initiated with support from a National Science Foundation Research Traineeship (NRT) grant to Boston University (DGE 1735087) and has also been supported by institutional funds from Boston University.”

Funding

Scholarships and Stipends: Ph.D. students at Boston University often receive funding through various sources, including teaching fellowship, research grants, and training grants. There are also external financial sources you can apply for to support your work (e.g. NSF GRFP, Switzer Fellowship). Ph.D. students and their advisors can apply for URBAN non-service stipends in the spring for the following academic year. Master’s students can inquire about scholarships and funding opportunities within their home departments.

Research and Travel Awards: There are competitive funds set aside for BU URBAN Trainees to carry out individual interdisciplinary research projects and/or for conference participation. Calls for application to these competitive funds are only open to BU URBAN Trainees and have deadlines in October and February, annually. Both Ph.D. and master’s students in the URBAN program can apply for Research and Travel Award funding.

Internship Awards: For BU URBAN Trainees who have lined up an unpaid URBAN internship or MPH practicum over the summer, there may be competitive funds available that are equivalent to 80 hours of departmental funding (4 weeks). These Internship Awards are based on availability of funds and are determined by financial need and a trainee’s level of participation in URBAN workshops and other events. The earlier a trainee has their summer internship identified and coordinated, the more likely they are to receive these funds.

Social Committee

The BU URBAN Social Committee organizes events for trainees that are fun (e.g., URBAN outings) and productive (e.g., pitch nights). If you are interested, please contact the Program Manager at URBAN@bu.edu.

Evaluation

The BU URBAN Program internally evaluates our events and operations through both post-event surveys and end-of-semester feedback sessions with trainees and with faculty. We take feedback seriously and make program adjustments frequently. BU URBAN has an open-door policy and our leadership team welcomes your questions, suggestions, and concerns so we can improve the program. We encourage proactive, open communication, feedback, and discussion about any concerns you may have. Please visit <https://sites.bu.edu/urban/program-feedback/> to leave feedback anonymously at any time.

Program Requirements

Workshops (Ph.D. and both Master’s Tracks)

Participation in four workshops and URBAN’s Annual Symposium is required for trainees in their first year of the program. Trainees who are still at Boston University following the first year are required to participate in *at least* one of the following each year: Science Communication, Urban Governance Series, Professional Development, and the Annual Symposium.

- Introduction to the BU URBAN Program – 3-hour workshop, Fall semester
 - Workshop introduces trainees to each other, the leadership team, and the program.
- Science Communication – 1-2 hours, Fall semester
 - This short workshop has a rotating theme each year, covering anything from communicating with a journalist, to writing a blog post or news story, or making short videos.
- Urban Governance Series – 3-4 lectures, events, and/or workshops, Spring semester
 - A multi-part lecture and discussion series held by [BU’s Initiative on Cities](#)

- Professional Development – 1-2 hour workshop, Fall or Spring semester
 - This workshop has a different focus each year, ranging from career panels to networking or making a personal website. Trainees are also encouraged to participate in Professional Development opportunities provided by [BU Graduate & Postdoctoral Success](#).
- Annual Symposium—3 hour event, Fall or Spring semester
 - This event focuses on URBAN program-related themes and features lightning talks, panels, roundtables, and/or networking opportunities with trainees, program alumni, affiliated faculty and staff, stakeholders, and partners.

Coursework (Ph.D. and *Master's Coursework Track*)

- *CAS BI/EE 764 / SPH EH 799: Colloquium in Urban Biogeoscience and Environmental Health* (Fall, 2 credits) (required for Ph.D. students, optional for all master's students)
- One course in Biogeoscience (4 credits)
- One course in Environmental Health (4 credits)
- One course in Statistics or Data Analysis (4 credits)
- *CDS DS 795: Urban Biogeoscience and Environmental Health: From Research to Policy* – completed concurrently with URBAN internship (variable credits, see internship below) (required for Ph.D. students and *Master's Internship Track* students)

The courses are designed to provide trainees with a foundation in Biogeoscience and Environmental Health, with skills and techniques in Statistics and Data Sciences, applied to topics that span air, water, and climate in urban environments. In general, courses that meet URBAN requirements also fulfill elective requirements in each department. For a complete listing of courses, check the [program website](#).

Internship (Ph.D. and MPH or *Master's Internship Track*)

Trainees within the Ph.D. program, MPH program, and *Master's Internship Track* are required to carry out an internship or MPH practicum with a city government office, NGO, and/or the private sector. The internship is required to be a minimum of 80 hours and is flexible in terms of number of days per week and timing. Please note that trainees are required to simultaneously enroll in the companion internship course (CDS DS 795 or SPH EH 961, though MPH students can apply to waive this requirement). The course covers professional development associated with the internship experience, lessons about science policy integration, and science communication skills.

Seminars (Optional but recommended for all)

Both the Biogeoscience and Environmental Health programs have seminar series that you are encouraged to attend. You can find relevant seminar listings in our weekly e-newsletters. You can attend many of the seminars remotely via Zoom.

Ph.D. Dissertation Research (Ph.D. only)

Ph.D. trainees fulfill dissertation research requirements of their home department and are required to form an interdisciplinary dissertation committee. Trainees in the Departments of Biology, Earth & Environment, and Environmental Health must form a dissertation committee with at least A) one faculty member from [Environmental Health](#); and B) one faculty member from either [BU URBAN](#) with a Biology or Earth & Environment affiliation or the [Biogeoscience Program](#). Trainees in the School of Public Health outside of the Environmental Health department should include at least A) one faculty member from the School of Public Health; and B) one faculty member from either BU URBAN with a Biology or Earth & Environment affiliation or the [Biogeoscience Program](#). Trainees in the Department of Mathematics & Statistics, the Faculty of Computing & Data Sciences, or other associated departments must form a dissertation committee with at least one faculty member from either [Environmental Health](#), [BU URBAN](#) with a Biology or Earth & Environment affiliation, or the [Biogeoscience Program](#). The URBAN Colloquium course provides students with the opportunity to get acquainted with URBAN faculty research in their

first semester with URBAN. If a trainee would like additional support with meeting the URBAN dissertation committee requirement, they are highly encouraged to reach out to the URBAN leadership team by sending the Program Manager (urban@bu.edu) a 1-page summary of the focus of their dissertation.

Example Timelines

The tables below each demonstrate two *sample* timelines for a trainee participating in BU URBAN.

Ph.D. Trainees:

	Example A (meet minimum requirements)		Example B (get the most out of URBAN)	
	Courses, Internship, Research	Workshops and Events	Courses, Internship, Research	Workshops and Events
Year 1	• URBAN Colloquium Course • Statistics Course • Biogeoscience Course	• Intro Workshop • Professional Development • Science Communication • Urban Governance • Annual Symposium	• Same as A • Apply for URBAN Research Award to pilot interdisciplinary project	• Same as A • Participate in URBAN-sponsored events (social gatherings, networking, seminars, etc.) • Join URBAN Social Committee
Year 2	• Environmental Health Course • Interdisciplinary committee formation • URBAN Internship & Internship Course	• Pick one: ○ Professional Development ○ Science Communication ○ Urban Governance • Annual Symposium	• Same as A • Apply for URBAN Travel Award to present research at conference	• Participate in multiple workshops • Join Internal Advisory Board
Year 3 onward		• Pick one: ○ Professional Development ○ Science Communication ○ Urban Governance • Annual Symposium	• Continue partnering with internship host; write dissertation chapter based on internship	• Same as A but participate in multiple workshops

Master's Trainees:

	Example C - Master's Coursework Track		Example D - Master's Internship Track	
	Courses	Workshops and Events	Internship/Practicum	Workshops and Events
Year 1 Fall	• Statistics Course • Biogeoscience Course	• Intro Workshop • Professional Development • Science Communication		• Intro Workshop • Professional Development • Science Communication
Year 1 Spring	• Environmental Health Course • Apply for URBAN Travel Award to attend conference	• Urban Governance • Annual Symposium		• Urban Governance • Annual Symposium
Year 1 Summer			• URBAN Internship & Internship Course	

Other Resources for BU URBAN Trainees

The BU URBAN Program is committed to help trainees complete their graduate work and forge their career. Below are programs and resources that Boston University offers its students to succeed in graduate school and beyond.

Stay current. Each week we alternate between emailing a TRAINEE TRIBUNE (for trainees and faculty advisors only) and URBAN UPDATE (for the broader URBAN community) newsletter that includes information on upcoming program events, relevant webinars, interesting events on campus, and other useful information.

Follow us on Social Media. Follow BU URBAN on LinkedIn @bu-urban, Bluesky @buurban.bsky.social, and Instagram @bu_urban. Feel free to tag us in your own posts so we can amplify your posts, or send us information about something you are working on so we can post it for you.

Stay in Touch. If you know of relevant upcoming events on campus or elsewhere, we want to know so we can share with the community. If you have any newsworthy items (e.g. you won an award, published a paper, presented at a conference), please tell us so we can amplify your work! Please send all news to URBAN@bu.edu. BU URBAN Trainees also stay connected with our **BU URBANites slack channel**. New students will be invited to join by the Program Manager.

Other BU Resources

In addition to the professional development opportunities that the BU URBAN program offers, there are many other resources on campus:

- [GWISE](https://www.bu.edu/gwise/) (<https://www.bu.edu/gwise/>) keeps a current list of funding sources, volunteer opportunities, and career resources for graduate students.
- [BU Center for Career Development](http://www.bu.edu/careers/) (<http://www.bu.edu/careers/>) offers many career resources and professional development opportunities for STEM graduate students.
- [BU Graduate & Postdoctoral Success](https://www.bu.edu/gps/) (<https://www.bu.edu/gps/>) is a community for socializing, networking, and advocacy at Boston University and has online training programs that provide you with modules, or badges, to support your career & professional development during your PhD, and help you prepare for your post-PhD career.
- [Office of the Associate Provost for Graduate Affairs and Professional Development & Postdoctoral Affairs](https://www.bu.edu/grad/) (<https://www.bu.edu/grad/>) A central place to connect with information and resources for graduate students at Boston University. Find information here to tap into available resources and to connect with the graduate community at BU.

Boston University is home to numerous resources and organizations that can support you in other ways:

- BU Sexual Assault Response & Prevention Center (www.bu.edu/cgsa/resources/sexual-assault-resources/)
- Center for Gender, Sexuality, and Activism (CGSA - <http://www.bu.edu/cgsa/>)
- Howard Thurman Center for Common Ground (HTC - <https://www.bu.edu/thurman/>)
- Out in STEM (oSTEM - <https://sites.bu.edu/ostem/>)
- Underrepresented Graduate Students Organization (UGSO - <https://sites.google.com/view/buugso/>)

And many more: <https://www.bu.edu/grad/community/>

Trainee Handbook Acknowledgement Form

Thank you for reviewing the URBAN Trainee Handbook for Academic Year 2026-2027. You're almost done! Please visit <https://sites.bu.edu/urban/trainee-handbook-acknowledgement/> to complete the Trainee Handbook Acknowledgement Form.