Occidental's Urban and Environmental Policy (UEP) major is an interdisciplinary program for students who want to change the world. It combines politics, planning, environmental policy, public health, urban studies, economics, sociology, and other disciplinary approaches. The UEP program recognizes that "urban" and "environmental" are very much interconnected and that issues of economic and environmental justice are integrally linked to where and how we live, work, play, eat, and go to school. Topics covered in the program include housing and community development, public health, land use and transportation, environmental health, food and resource issues, education, environmental justice, immigration, climate change, air and water quality, water and energy supply, poverty and social welfare, criminal justice, race and gender and class relations, globalization, and other topics at the local, state, national and international levels. Students interested in the UEP major should have a strong commitment to public service and social change, be interested in working on group projects with other students, and be available to become involved in community activities and internships.

The UEP major is a unique combination of classroom learning and hands-on experience in the field of public affairs and civic action. Students learn the skills of social science and public policy analysis with special emphasis on applying those skills in the real world. It is an intensive major designed for students with a strong interest in public service careers such as government, law, human services, urban and/or environmental planning, public health, community organizing, social work, journalism and communications, socially responsible business, or academia.

The goal of Occidental's UEP program is not simply to produce policy experts, but to educate students to think and to act critically in the realm of public affairs. The program includes careful consideration of ethical issues that arise in the formulation and implementation of public policy. It trains the next generation of change agents and future leaders how to think critically and creatively and act effectively to solve problems and improve society.

A major dimension of UEP’s problem-solving and social change-related work is its connection to the research, education, and community-based activities of the Urban &
Environmental Policy Institute (UEPI). UEPI is the research and advocacy program arm of UEP and a key component of Occidental’s focus on community engagement. UEPI's mission is to connect ideas and action to create a more just and livable region, nation and world. UEPI frequently partners with grassroots community, environmental, and labor organizations as well as the public sector. It serves as the umbrella for a variety of affiliated programs addressing food justice, public health, the built environment, and transportation, and includes programs and internship opportunities around these issues. UEPI staff has helped facilitate College-wide initiatives such as programs in Public Health and a China-Environment program that links students to universities and NGOs in Hong Kong, Nanjing, and other partners in China. UEPI provides opportunities for students to participate in real-world research, community action, and policy arenas. Information about UEPI is available at www.oxy.edu/uepi.

Through a range of classroom-based and independent internships, students engage in the real world of urban and environmental policy through government agencies, political campaigns, grassroots community and environmental organizations, public interest groups, social service agencies, labor unions, health organizations, food justice groups, and other settings. Students also learn how to conduct practical applied research by working with and for community partners in the Los Angeles area and across the country and abroad under the supervision of faculty as well as the UEPI program staff.

The UEP major coursework includes a series of intensive seminars in the junior and senior years, with introductory courses available in the frosh and sophomore years. The course of study includes developing skills in public policy analysis, internships, community participation, a research project with an applied policy focus, and leadership training. In addition to the prerequisites and the core seminars, students are encouraged to take electives in a variety of disciplines to sharpen their expertise in different policy areas and approaches.

Another important part of the program will be attendance at meetings with visiting public policymakers, journalists, and other practitioners in addition to regular course work.

Some students may choose to spend a fall semester in the Campaign Semester program (offered in alternate Presidential and Congressional election years); summer research and/or internships in Los Angeles or abroad (e.g., through the China-Environment program), through the Occidental-at-the-United Nations program, or in one of the fall or spring semester abroad programs sponsored or approved by the college.
During their senior year, students will design and complete a policy-oriented comprehensive project that has an applied focus and includes original research. This project may take several forms. It would be a traditional research paper, a hands-on policy research report, a project in collaboration with other students, or a study conducted for a community-based "client" group.