

PS126D: Urban Politics and Policy

Instructor: Prof. Davin L. Phoenix, Ph.D.

Date & Time: TTH 11:00-12:20pm, HH262

Office: SSPB 5201

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30-3:30pm, or by appt.

Email: dphoenix@uci.edu

Purpose of Course

This course guides students in critical exploration of the most pressing economic and policy issues facing the American city. The class will use insight from the fields of American political development, economics and political behavior to illuminate the following key concepts:

- How the unique features of American *federalism* affect local governments' capacity to govern
- The intersecting impacts of historical and contemporary phenomena such as post-war *urban development*, *segregation*, *suburbanization* and *gentrification*
- How power and influence over policy outcomes are distributed and shared at the city level, from *political machines* and *reformed* council structures to business elites and local activists.

Course Description & Objectives

This course will utilize lectures, group discussion, case studies, films and guest lectures. The assigned readings fall into two categories: (1) book chapters and analytical pieces that provide our baseline understanding of city politics, and (2) articles and blog posts that illuminate the practical issues facing cities in real time.

The course is organized around three modules. First, we will trace how sociocultural, economic, and political forces have shaped American cities today. Second we will assess who truly holds power in American cities and how that power is welded, from elected officials to non-elected elites to rank and file residents. Finally, we will explore some of the most urgent policy challenges facing American cities, and evaluate potential solutions to them.

1. The making of the American city (federalism, devolution, suburbanization, gentrification)

2. Governing the American city (structure of city government, limits on power, participation)
3. Policy challenges (poverty, employment, schooling, policing)

Course Requirements¹

- 5%** Attendance (1 free absence, one-point deduction for all unexcused absences)
- 10%** Class Participation (includes taking part in small and large group discussion and completing in-class assignments; also includes office hour visits)
- 20%** Short reflection papers (respond to 2 out of 3 prompts, each 10 points)
- 30%** Out-of class Midterm Essay Exam
- 35%** City Voices Project

All out-of-class written assignments must be submitted to the Drop Box by the specified date and time. **Late submissions will receive a 10% penalty.**

Short reflection papers

These 2-3 paged double spaced papers must use both information from the readings and real world examples to address a specified prompt. **You must provide papers in response to 2 of the 3 prompts.**

PAPER ONE DUE: **Friday April 17th by 8:00pm** (week 3)

Do the potential benefits of gentrification outweigh its potential costs to poorer residents? Why?

PAPER TWO DUE: **Friday May 1st by 8:00pm** (week 5)

Who possesses more localized power: elected officials or unelected elites? Why?

PAPER THREE DUE: **Friday May 22nd by 8:00pm** (week 8)

What is the better strategy for combating poverty: improving public schooling or improving job creation?

Midterm Essay Exam, ASSIGNED Tue May 5, DUE Tue May 12 (weeks 6/7)

You will be given one week to complete an out-of-class, open book short essay exam with two components. The first component is four questions. **You must respond to 2 of the 3 questions.** Answers to each question must be no longer than three pages double spaced, so be efficient.

¹ More detailed information on all assignments will be provided in class.

The second component is to provide basic information about the two people you will interview for your city voices project, as well as the questionnaire you have created for both.

City Voices Project, DUE Thu June 4 (Week 10)

For this project, you must identify a specific problem or challenge that you think is important to your local community. You will conduct interviews with two people for whom that issue is relevant—(1) an activist, community leader or elected official, and (2) a rank and file member of the community. You must gather the interviewees' perceptions of why the problem/challenge is important to them, how it can best be solved, and what role the interviewee does (or does not) play in bringing about a solution to the problem. You must supplement the perspectives of your interviewees with your own research on the issue, drawing upon readings from within and beyond the class to guide your own perspective.

Required Texts

There are three required texts for the course:

Ross, Bernard H., and Myron A. Levine. *Urban politics: Cities and suburbs in a global age*. ME Sharpe, 2011.

Peterson, Paul E. *City limits*. University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Sugrue, Thomas J. *The origins of the urban crisis: Race and inequality in postwar Detroit*. Princeton University Press, 2014.

Additionally, required readings will come from journal and news articles and essays. All readings not from the required text will be made available on the course website.

Course Expectations

I expect much of you. I expect you to come to class having read the assigned material and ready to answer questions in class. I expect you to engage both me and your fellow students in discussion about class concepts, and their applicability to the real world. I expect you to seek assistance or further understanding whenever you are in need of it, either in class, in office hours, or over email. I expect you to submit thoughtful, well written and edited assignments that follow the guidelines. Finally, I expect you to challenge yourselves to explore new viewpoints, to take ownership of and share the valuable contributions you have to make to the class, and to treat one another with respect.

I also expect much of myself. I expect to prepare diligently for each class session and be ready to teach the course material and answer your questions about it. I expect to be readily available to provide support and assistance to you, over email and in person. I expect to equip you with the tools necessary to take an informed and critical perspective on US politics, particularly at the local level. I expect to help you sharpen your ability to both evaluate arguments and to present your own more effectively. Finally, I expect to empower you to leverage your unique capabilities to improve the conditions of the communities about which you care the most.

Accommodations

Students with disabilities who need accommodations are encouraged to contact me. The UCI Disability Services Center is available to accommodate students. You can learn more about programs and support by visiting the UCI Disability Services Center website at www.disability.uci.edu, by phone: 949-824-7494 and by TDD: 949-824-6272.

Policy on Plagiarism and Grade Grievances

There is a strictly enforced, zero-tolerance policy regarding both cheating and plagiarism. There is a strictly enforced, zero-tolerance policy regarding both cheating and plagiarism. An overview and resources for UC Irvine's policies related to academic honesty is located at: <http://honesty.uci.edu>

In the event that you disagree with a grade handed down on an assignment, you must follow a specific procedure to contest the grade. Within one week after the assignment is returned to you, you must provide me with a written explanation of why you believe your grade is incorrect. This explanation must cite relevant sources from the texts or lecture in support of your grievance. I will review your complaint and re-grade your assignment. Please be aware that the new grade may be lower than your original grade.

If warranted, this syllabus is subject to change.

Course Schedule

Week 1 (Mar 31–Apr 2): Introduction/Transformation of the U.S. City

- Ross & Levine Ch. 2
- David A. Graham. "The 21 Mile Walk to Work" *The Atlantic*, Feb 2, 2015

Week 2 (Oct Apr 7-9): Federalism, Devolution & the Budget Crunch

- Peterson, Ch. 4
- Congressional Budget Office. "Fiscal Stress Faced by Local Governments" 2010

Week 3 (April 14-16): Consequences of Suburbanization & Gentrification

****SHORT REFLECTION PAPER ONE DUE APRIL 17****

- Ross and Levine, Chs. 3, 9
- Sugrue, Chs. 2, 7
- Alana Semuels, "Suburbs and the New American Poverty," *The Atlantic*, Jan 7, 2015

Week 4 (April 21-23): The Structure & Bounds of Local Governing Power

- Ross & Levine, Chs. 5, 6, 8
- Kenneth J. Meier and Laurence J. O'Toole, Jr. "Political Control versus Bureaucratic Values: Reframing the Debate" *Public Administration Review*, 2006 **[SKIM]**

Week 5 (April 28-30): "City Limits" on Power Holders

****SHORT REFLECTION PAPER TWO DUE MAY 1****

- Peterson, Chs. 7-9
- Ross & Levine, Ch. 4

Week 6 (May 5-7): Power to the People? Local Participation

*****MIDTERM ESSAY EXAMS DISTRIBUTED MAY 5*****

- Ross & Levine, Ch. 7
- Peterson, Ch. 6
- Sugrue, Ch. 8
- Alana Semuels. "The City That Gave Its Residents \$3 Million." *The Atlantic*, Nov 6, 2014.

Week 7 (May 12-14): Policy Challenges—Poverty & Employment

MIDTERM ESSAY EXAMS DUE MAY 12

- Sugrue, Chs. 4, 6
- "Domestic Poverty: Is A New Approach Needed to Help the Poorest Americans?" *CQ Researcher*, Sept 7, 2007.
- Michael R. Strain. "A Jobs Agenda for the Right." *National Review*, Winter 2014

Week 8 (May 19-21): Policy Challenges—Schooling

SHORT REFLECTION PAPER THREE DUE MAY 22

- "Fixing Urban Schools: Has No Child Left Behind Helped Minority Students?" *CQ Researcher*, April 27, 2007.
- Alia Wong. "The Cutthroat World of Elite Public Schools." *The Atlantic*, Dec 4, 2014.

Week 9 (May 26-28): Policy challenges—Policing

- US Department of Justice. *Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department*, March 4, 2014 [PAGES 1-41, 90-101]

Week 10 (June 2-4): Conclusion (Readings TBD)

CITY VOICES PAPER DUE JUNE 4