Course Description

This course will explore theories and methods of planning at the neighborhood level both in the United States and internationally. In the context of the United States, the focus will be on poor inner-city neighborhoods. Such neighborhoods have experienced wrenching issues of depopulation, housing abandonment, increased poverty and social problems in recent decades. Yet many are experiencing significant revitalization based in large part on the energies and efforts of local residents who are committed to making them livable places. Internationally, the focus will be on so-called ‘squatter’ or ‘informal’ settlements in developing countries—low-income areas that lack legal land tenure and often do not have access to such basic necessities of life as water and sanitation. Here too, planners have increasingly recognized the potential to build on the neighborhood improvement efforts already being undertaken by residents. In both contexts, planners working on neighborhood issues face fundamental questions: How do we understand the social, economic, and cultural development of neighborhoods? When and why do neighborhoods experience economic growth or decline? What is the relationship between economic, social and physical revitalization, and where should we focus our efforts? What role can local collective action in the form of community organizations play in community development, and when and how does collective action begin? What place to neighborhoods play within city and regional politics and economies? To what extent can we address issues at the neighborhood level when the source of these issues (disinvestment, political manipulation, racial discrimination, social inequity) extend beyond the neighborhood to the city, region, and broader society? How do we use planning as a tool to build on the distinct strengths of poor neighborhoods—their locational advantages, the skill and commitment of their residents, and their cultural and social resources?

During the first part of the semester, this class will begin to seek answers to these questions through an examination of a number of basic theoretical and practical issues, including: the historical development of neighborhoods in the United States and developing countries; theories of neighborhood change; issues of race, class and gender in community development; the role of community-based organizations and community participation; the current policy framework for implementing neighborhood planning in the United States, and debates about its effectiveness in initiating neighborhood revitalization; and debates about neighborhood development in developing countries taking place among such institutions as the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program, international non-governmental organizations, and developing country governments. During the second half, the class will move on to specific issues in neighborhood development, including: the role of non-profit organizations; neighborhood economic development; housing; urban design, and others.
Prerequisites

Graduate or upper class undergraduate standing. An interest in discussing issues related to neighborhood planning.
Course Objectives

By the end of the course students will:

1. Be able to critically analyze major neighborhood planning initiatives being discussed and implemented in the United States and developing countries;

2. Be familiar with the theoretical foundations of neighborhood planning programs and policies.

Required Course Materials

The reader for this course will be available on the Coursetools website.

Course Requirements

There are three requirements for the course: attendance and class participation, reflection papers, and a final paper.

Attendance and class participation (10 percent): Attendance is mandatory. You will be expected to participate in class discussions. You will also be required to do a presentation for the final paper that will be included in your class participation grade.

Reflection papers (30 percent): During the semester you will be required to write six reflection papers on the readings for a session. You can choose to do the reflection papers for any week for which there are readings. They are due on the day the readings are to be discussed—no late papers will be accepted. These papers should be about 2 pages in length. They should not simply present a summary of the readings, but should also provide your critique and reflection on the main points addressed. The reflection papers will be graded based on the following criterion:

- Your ability to synthesize and critically discuss the main ideas of the readings.
- Your ability to provide your own reflections and critique of the material.
- Organization, grammar and spelling.

The class participation and reflection paper assignments require that you read the materials for the class actively and critically. You should read with the following questions in mind: What are the main points the author is trying to impart? How does the author’s perspective differ from others you have read on this subject? What assumptions does the author make? Are these assumptions valid? What do you agree and disagree with? Maintaining a critical stance towards the readings will help you to develop perspectives on the issues addressed in the course and articulate these perspectives. You are encourage to be creative, and to draw on a variety of sources, including your personal experience, in crafting these essays. However, they should also demonstrate your understanding of all of the readings for the week.

Final paper: Proposal, first draft, and final draft (10 percent, 15 percent and 35 percent respectively, for a total of 60 percent): The final paper will be on a topic of your choosing, and should be approximately 25 pages in length including cover page and bibliography. This paper will be the final product of your research on an issue related to neighborhood planning of your choice. It may be a literature review on a specific topic (such as the effectiveness of the Empowerment Zone program, or the relationship between economic restructuring and gentrification), or a case study of a particular experience in neighborhood planning (such as the Surabaya’s experience with the Kampung Improvement Program, or the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston). In either case, the objective will be to answer a research question defined by you: Do microcredit programs empower women? Why did the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative succeed while
community organizations in neighboring areas failed? What impact does the Section 8 housing program have on poor neighborhoods?

In answering this question, you will engage the scholarly literature on the issue, examining journal articles, books, research reports, and other documentation. As there are likely to be multiple perspectives on the issue, it will be necessary to read widely so that you can accurately address these perspectives in your paper, and develop your own argument or thesis.

The final paper requirement has two objectives. First, it is intended to provide you an opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge of a specific issue related to neighborhood planning. Second, it will sharpen your skills at research and critical thinking.

As an alternative to the research paper, you may also choose to do a project with a community partner identified by you and write a report on that experience. If you would like to explore this option, please contact me.

The paper proposal is due on October 1. It will be 1-2 pages in length and will briefly describe the topic and the research question in 2-3 paragraphs. It will also provide a preliminary list of references, including scholarly references such as books and journal articles. I will provide feedback on this proposal soon after receiving it.

The first draft is due on October 29. This draft does not have to be polished—you should hand in whatever text you have written so far, even if there are grammatical errors and some paragraphs remain unfinished. However, it should reflect substantial research and thought, and should lay out the main ideas to be presented in the paper, the data to be used, and the format in some detail. The purpose is to give you some initial feedback for you to incorporate into the final draft of the paper.

The final paper is due on the last day of class, December 10, at the beginning of class.

Class Schedule

The following is an outline of the material to be covered during each class session. The reading schedule is tentative and may change.

Sept. 3: Introduction

Sept. 10: Defining ‘neighborhood’ and ‘community’, history of American neighborhoods, urban communities in developing countries, theories of neighborhood change


Auyero, J. 1999. “'This is a Lot Like the Bronx, isn’t it?’ Lived Experiences of Marginality in an Argentine Slum,” International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 23:1, pp. 45-69.

Sept. 17: History of neighborhood planning


Sept. 24: Neighborhood planning and difference; Gentrification

Guest speaker: Bev Manick


Oct. 1: Civil society and participation in neighborhood planning: How do we approach working with communities?

Proposals due, discussion of paper proposals


Oct. 8: The role of non-profits

Video: Holding Our Ground


Oct. 15: Neighborhood economies and economic development


Oct. 22: Neighborhood economies continued: microcredit, enterprise zones

Guest speaker: Sujata Shetty


Oct. 29: Institutions: Schools and churches in neighborhood development

First draft due.


Nov. 5: Housing policy and community development


November 12: Politics and neighborhoods

Guest speaker: Kate Warner


Nov. 19: Wrap-up

Nov. 26: Thanksgiving recess: No class

December 3: Presentations

December 10: Presentations

Final paper due.