URP 580: METROPOLITAN STRUCTURES

Winter 2021
Instructor: Robert Pfaff (robpfaff@umich.edu)

This reading seminar explores the political, social, and economic forces shaping cities around the world at the present moment. Through case studies, course readings, and synchronous zoom discussions, this class explores key issues of critical importance to urban planners from the perspective of social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion, political economy, and sustainability. Key themes include racial segregation, urban sprawl, metropolitan governance, poverty, the delivery of services, and environmental degradation. Students will learn about a variety of urban governance structures and will discuss emerging trends in regional governing that address structural inequity. We will read and discuss political economic theories of urban growth, and explore opportunities for local decision-making within the constraints of international political and economic systems. Students will explore the tensions between planning for economic growth and planning for social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Exploring these themes prepares students to engage with the broad forces shaping cities. Through this understanding, students will gain the foundation of knowledge needed in other courses to craft meaningful, effective planning interventions that respond to structural restraints while capitalizing upon local strengths to plan for a just and equitable urban future.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the term, students will be able to:

- Conceptualize the city as a set of interconnected material, economic, and political systems in motion shaping potential patterns of economic development
- Explain several approaches to urban governing and assess their relative capacities, strengths, and weakness as it relates to economic growth, infrastructure provisioning, and social justice.
- Understand the market dynamics shaping urban growth, redevelopment, uneven development, and decline.
- Critically assess emerging trends regarding the changing role of government and non-government entities, as well as local and nonlocal actors, in city planning and development processes.
- Evaluate the practical and political effect globalization trends have on the underlying systems shaping urban development.

Course Requirements:

Students are expected to show up to class having done the assigned readings in advance, as well as participate in classroom discussions and exercises. Student grades are assigned based on two open-note exams and three reaction papers to case study or course reading material.