

URP 431/ URP 431L Community Planning Studio Fall 2012

MW 1:00-5:00, Building 7 Room 201B

Instructor: Ramzi Farhat

Office: 1413, Building 3

Office Hours: Monday 5:00-6:00, Tuesday 9:00-12:00, Wednesday 5:00-6:00

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From the catalogue

Theory, process, design, and method for strategic planning demonstrated by studio problems based on field and archival studies. (excerpt)

Purpose

This course is designed for students to generate and synthesize knowledge relevant to planning using skills and techniques acquired during their studies, in the context of a practical application.

Specifically, the knowledge, skills and techniques to be employed and synthesized will include:

- Archival and historical research
- Legislative and regulatory research and analysis
- Demographic research and analysis
- Policy research and analysis
- Physical inventory surveys
- Technical and policy report preparation
- Public presentation techniques, public speaking, and communication skills

Brief notes about the studio format

Our studio (431 and 432) provides experience in preparing a plan or policy study. Though we will learn much about the specifics of our quarter's topic in the process, the studio's other important goal is to learn about other important aspects of planning practice: doing background research, working in teams, developing solutions, producing reports, and presenting before an audience.

As in all of our studios, we start with some uncertainty about what the studio's direction will be and what our final report will look like. This time, too, we will be figuring out our parameters in the first weeks of study. Though we are very interested in shaping a plan that can be implemented (implementation is a fundamental part of the planner's job), don't lose sight of the fact that we are producing this work in an educational setting. What this means is that you are expected to 'think

outside the box’, be bold in your ideas, and speak to contemporary issues. This is a fail proof recipe to generate strong interest in our advice.

Format of the studio

We will organize our work as if we were a professional planning consultancy. The instructor assigns students to work on specific tasks as groups, but also sometimes as individuals. We will regularly be reporting to each other on what we have learned.

This is not your typical class. We will proceed with minimal lecturing, and much discussion, memo-writing, one-to-one meetings with the instructor, class presentations to each other, and frequent assignments for library research, mapping or GIS studies, data collection, data presentation, interviewing, and writing. Please do not ‘wait’ for me to come to class or talk to you before you start working. Treat studio time as a typical job: show up and start working.

We are assigned two afternoons a week, Mondays, and Wednesdays. Please expect that it is very likely that we might have to complete assignments outside studio hours. On the rare occasion that we do not meet as group, students may meet individually with the instructor, work with each other on group projects, or go on interviews or tours. Nevertheless, we must keep those hours open, since we will often have to schedule on short notice.

Our project might bring us into contact with actual professionals, who are subject to their own pressures and priorities. As we are interested in simulating actual experience, we may have to shuffle things around on short notice. Please try to as flexible as possible. Changes in scope and time frames are nothing unusual in professional practice.

Our Project

Brief description of focus area:

Both URP 431 and URP 432 will be concerned with the same topic of investigation, with URP 432 building on the work produced in URP 431. For this year, the studio will be investigating the South Park area of downtown Los Angeles, and its environs. South Park has in the last number of years witnessed growing interest by developers as part of the transformation of downtown to a 24 hr live-work environment. South Park has been a preferred investment area for developers given the current planning framework that has concentrated much of the residential activity in downtown in this district. Development in the area however has its challenges, from overcoming the stigma of underutilized lots, to potential incompatibilities between the resurgence of interest in residential uses and current commercial uses (and light industrial, in the vicinity). How a district identity can develop with the thriving LA Live complex and the Fashion District in the backdrop is a driving concern. The larger residential population also raises the issues of how demands for services and amenities

that can support further expansion can be satisfied, as in the potential idea of an ‘urban lifestyle center’.

The studio will be tackling these and other questions in concordance with the general ongoing effort to revamp the city of Los Angeles zoning code. In URP 431, we will do research and distill community concerns. In URP 432, we will produce a policy report.

Background on the zoning reform effort:

The City of Los Angeles has recently embarked on a comprehensive code reform effort that represents the first major redesign of the 1946 zoning code. The piecemeal adaptation of that code over the years has resulted in a document that has been criticized as being unwieldy, impenetrable to the public, and wanting for better alignment of its regulations and the policies outlined in the city’s various community plans. Due to the piecemeal nature of its evolution, many standards in the current code do not add up to a unified vision of the urban realm. This is true, for example, of many open space and setback standards in the code.

Otherwise, the code had also necessitated the dedication of large resources to administration. The code reform effort is actually concurrent with broader development approval streamlining effort by the city. This effort had gained momentum, especially so the component that involves the city planning department, in late 2010. The “The Multiple Approvals Ordinance” recently signed by the mayor for example implements one goal the department has, namely a ‘one project, one planner’ approach to case processing. It is hoped that a new zoning code employing contemporary best practices in development control would further this mission of developing regulations that are clear to the public, contribute to a streamlined entitlement process, and efficient to administer.

The code reform effort has garnered support from a wide spectrum of stakeholders. For example, business groups such as the Central City Association, the Building Industry Association, the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation, and the Valley Industry and Commerce Association all spoke in favor. Considering that the funding for the studies will be generated from an increase in the general fund maintenance fee on the private sector, this endorsement is significant. A majority of resident groups also came out in favor. The sentiment is best expressed by the Westchester-Playa Neighborhood Council, which offered its support of the work given that it will not ‘override any existing specific plans or overlays’. This statement is important because the new zoning must still be consistent with the 35 community plans the form the City of Los Angeles’s land use element.

In 2008, the staff of the City Planning Department released a report on suggested reforms of the code, including ones related to multiple entitlements/ approvals, the plan approvals process, and site plan review. Neighborhood activists had since been lobbying for more substantive reforms, including city-wide design standards, pedestrian design, and sign regulation. Obviously this concern for ‘place-making’ is a major challenge of the current round of reforms, which partially explains the strong support being expressed. Community outreach, naturally, is going to be an integral component of the consultation process. Neighborhood councils and other organized groups are

going to be involved in articulating the views of local residents. The City-NC partnership, PlanCheck LA, is an current experiment in early consultation on code changes and entitlements that could offer a blueprint on the structure of any consultations moving forward.

Scope of City of Los Angeles reform effort:

The city is expected to enter into contract with a reputed consultancy for this effort. The request for proposals has been made public, and you are expected to familiarize yourself with it as soon as possible. Briefly, the City is expecting four major project deliverables, summarized as follows: 1. A new citywide zoning code addressing the needs of the neighborhoods 2. A web-based system, an 'online code' that allows for a customized and interactive online experience, 3. A series of easy-to-read guides to the Zoning Code that will help people navigate through regulations and procedures, and 4. A Unified Downtown Development Code. The focus on the unified downtown development code represents the city's aspirations to further downtown's role in leading the economic recovery through various residential, mixed use, and industrial development initiatives, and to capitalize on and direct the growing interest in a downtown that has successfully turned the tide after years of neglect and stalled initiatives.

The RFP lists a number of concerns arising from the administration of the current code that the city would like addressed. These include: consistency and predictability, consolidating similar subjects, repetitive lists, use of graphics, clear and effective use matrices, complete set of definitions, narrowing and strengthening discretionary review procedures and criteria, a clear articulation of the role of review bodies, decision makers, and appeal bodies for each type of approval, and modernized public notice requirements which include ample opportunity for review, or input.

The RFP, naturally, says little about the conceptual approach the new code should take. The city predictably would like to see a code that better addresses issues of the public realm, but the specific approach, whether form-based, hybrid, or any other, will be subject to discussion. The city has, however, made indications that the three pillars of use, form, and orientation are legitimate guiding principals that should be investigated through this effort. This is a position that emphasizes the regulatory concerns with those aspects of development that impact the spatial and pedestrian experience. As downtown is specifically concerned, the city has called for the document 'that focuses on Downtown as the primary economic, governmental, and social focal point of the region with an enhanced residential community' at 'scale and intensity that distinguishes and uniquely identifies the various districts throughout Downtown'. Again, the document is expected to respect all existing community and specific plans and overlays, and express their goals.

Charge to the studio

For URP 431, the studio will be charged with two tasks.

The first task will consist in producing a background report on the area that furthers our understanding of the planning issues, helps direct our attention to pressing concerns, and constitutes a foundation that we can consult and build on for our policy work in URP 432. The group will

divided into a number of teams, each in charge of an aspect of the community within the study area. Typical focus topics include: history and demographics; health, safety, and land use; open space and community design; transportation; social and cultural issues; and economics, housing, and business. We will make executive decisions in class.

Second task: We will be culminating our quarter with a community outreach effort in which we will use the material we have prepared to engage local residents in a discussion and a visioning session on their priorities and ideas as development in the district moves forward. Residents of South Park, like residents of other districts in downtown L.A., will be part of the community and stakeholder outreach effort as the zoning study process moves forward. Our community visioning work in URP 431, in addition to its translation in URP 432, will contribute to this effort. In essence, the studio will produce information and recommendations that, if professionally and thoughtfully conceived, would help residents and stakeholders in one downtown district better articulate their vision for their community in the code reform consultation process.

Our Community Partner

Our community partner will be the City of Los Angeles City Planning Department. Although our relationship is one of guidance and not of a contractual nature, I expect that we provide a planning document and presentations, as you would expect of any professional consultant.

You might want to contact other officials and organizations in your data collection efforts. Please consult with me before you do so, so I keep tab of the scope of our outreach, can be sure we are not duplicating effort and approaching the wrong people for the information we are looking for.

Readings

I will setup a dropbox folder that will be the main way I share resources and readings and to collaborate on and exchange large files.

Attendance, Timeliness, and Participation

- a. Please attend all sessions. Not only will it help your grade (see below), but effective learning in a studio environment typically proceeds through lively interaction with classmates. Studios work only when the student brings to the class all work in progress for comment, presentation and critique. Studios are informal, they are meant for working. Have your materials with you for all sessions.
- b. Please insure the timely completion and submission of all activity assignments. I will deduct 5 points for every day you are late. There is really no reason not to be on time as I view all submissions as 'work in progress' towards the final report.
- c. Learning to work collaboratively is an important part of a planning education and the planning profession.

Writing

Writing is a tool for communication, but it is also be a tool for fleshing out ideas and concepts. I have high expectations concerning the quality of your writing.

You may consult the following reference for writing tips:

Macris, Natalie (2000). *Planning in Plain English. Writing Tips for Urban and Environmental Planners*, Washington, DC, Planners Press, American Planning Association.

Special Needs

Students with special needs of which the instructor should be aware should register with the Disability Resource Center and advise the instructor as soon as possible.

<http://dsa.csupomona.edu/drc/>

University Policies

Students must adhere to University policies with regard to academic integrity (plagiarism), health (drug and alcohol abuse), conduct and discipline and proper relations between students, faculty and staff, including policies on sexual harassment. The policies are contained in the University Catalog, available online. Students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with these policies. In addition, each Department has established policies that are specific to each major and the use of the studio spaces. The policies with respect to studio space in Building 1 are:

- ⤴ Students will be held responsible on the appropriate use of studio space, furniture and equipment.
- ⤴ Students are responsible in cleaning up their desks at the end of each studio class.
- ⤴ Students are responsible for transportation to and from field trip destinations.
- ⤴ Students are encouraged to bring their own personal computer to the studio, though the security of such item will be the sole responsibility of the owner.

On academic integrity:

You are reminded that the university has a policy on academic integrity. This course strictly adheres to this policy. Among its requirements are the following: honest completion and representation of your work, appropriate citation of sources, and respect for others' academic endeavors. When you place your name on academic work, you certify the originality of all contents not otherwise identified by appropriate acknowledgments. Your obligations include not cheating, not submitting previously completed work as original work, and not submitting work done for one class to fulfill the requirements of another course without permission from the instructor.

Retention of Student Work

All work submitted will become the property of the College of Environmental Design. This does not mean I will keep everything. We do however maintain an archive of class work for accreditation, and shows in the College's gallery. Make copies for yourself before submitting your projects. Material not to be kept by the College shall be removed from the studio in a timely manner along with construction material and tools.

Grading

We have a Blackboard page for this class. I will periodically post grades to the Blackboard site and inform you when I do. Please remember to access the 431 Lecture Bb. I will not be posting to the Lab section.

Since the studio is an exercise that aims to prepare for professional planning practice, students will have to show initiative and contribute to the overall success of our effort. There will be no exams. Students will be graded on the one hand on participation, initiative, and cooperation; and, on the other hand on the quality of work revealed by their individual and group assignments. Grading will follow these principles:

A: Excellent effort and accomplishment on individual assignments and excellent contribution to the success of the entire project.

A-: Excellent work on individual assignments and good contribution to the entire project; or good work on individual assignments and excellent contribution to the entire project.

B+: Good work on individual assignments and good contributions to the entire project.

B: Good work on individual assignments and professionally adequate contribution to the entire project, or professionally adequate work on individual assignments and good contribution to the entire project.

B- Professionally adequate work.

Below B-: Less than professionally adequate work.

Failure: Students who impede the progress of the studio through absences, inadequate work and missed deadlines, or who engage in plagiarism.

Since individual activities will differ greatly, and there are varied group projects, the grading will depend to a great extent on the instructor's judgment. You are encouraged to ask the instructor during the semester about your progress in the studio.

Grade breakdown:

Student with more than two unexcused absences will be subject to a lower letter grade. The instructor may exercise the right to administratively drop the student if absences to class sessions exceed four in number.

Class participation	10%
Exercise 1	15%
Exercise 2	15%
Exercise 3	15%
Exercise 4	15%
Exercise 5	20%
<u>FINAL BOOKLET</u>	<u>10%</u>
TOTAL:	100%

Exercise 1: Data Gathering

Exercise 2: Data Analysis

Exercise 3: Data Visualization

Exercise 4: Visioning exercise material

Exercise 5: Community Visioning meeting execution.

STUDIO SCHEDULE*

Wk 01 (09/24-26):

Mon: Introduction. Form student teams.

Wed: Work in class.

Wk 02 (10/01-03):

Mon: Work in Class.

Wed: Site Visit. Meet community partners.

Wk 03 (10/08-10):

Mon: Progress Report Exercise 1: Data Gathering.

Wed: Work in Class.

Wk 04 (10/15-17):

Mon: Work in Class.

Wed: Work in Class.

Wk 05 (10/22-24):

Mon: Progress Report Exercise 2: Data Analysis.

Wed: Work in Class.

Wk 06 (10/29-31):

Mon: Work in Class.

Wed: Work in Class.

Wk 07 (11/05-07):

Mon: Progress Report Exercise 3: Data Visualization.

Wed: Work in Class.

Wk 08 (11/12-14):

Mon: Progress report to community partners.

Wed: Work in Class.

Wk 09 (11/19-21):

Mon: Exercise 4: Visioning exercise tools.

Wed: Work in Class.

Wk 10 (11/26-28):

Mon: Exercise 5 Community Visioning exercise.

Wed: Work in Class.

Monday December 3: Turn in Final Book.

*Tentative

Work in class sessions might include site visits, meetings, or guest lectures

A Final Word

The flexible conditions under which we start should not discourage you. Indeed, such ambiguity in mission and scope frequently characterizes planning practice. Let me reassure you that studios of the past have faced similar uncertainties, yet completed their work on time, and to high standards, many of them winning state or local awards. Please take special note that our reports and presentations will put us under firm deadlines. Each participant must be ready to put in adequate effort to help us succeed under the pressure of deadlines. I look forward to a memorable collaborative experience!