

PLAN 247-SOLVING URBAN PROBLEMS

Department of City and Regional Planning • University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill • Fall 2020

Instructor: Dr. [Nichola Lowe](#)

Teaching Assistants: [Lauren Turner](#) and [Amy Sechrist](#)

**Synchronous Remote Teaching Format
Tuesdays & Thursdays 1:15 – 2:30pm**

American cities are creative, vibrant, dynamic and diverse places. They are bustling with life, with improvised and innovative activities, with industrious and productive businesses and workers, and with neighborhoods and communities creatively thinking and acting to improve conditions on the ground. Yet the prosperity, opportunity and creativity that we so often celebrate and associate with urban life is not evenly shared or universally experienced. Cities are also sites of systemic racism and economic inequality. Structural and insidious barriers limit livelihood, mobility and opportunity, and also suppress life for some city dwellers, reinforcing structural divides of class and race. Cities produce tremendous benefits for some, but those gains are not widely experienced or shared.

It is in this uneven context that city planning, broadly defined, takes shape—this is the urban environment under which decisions get made, strategies get implemented and policies enacted and interpreted, but also contested, reframed and reshaped. Some actions are promising and hopeful but others intensify structural inequities, even if their intention was the opposite. This means the work of cities is messy, ongoing and iterative—as is the underlying ‘politics of place.’ City actions and decisions—including groups with influence and power who make them—need constant assessment and in some cases, need to be challenged, critiqued and confronted.

This class is designed to help us think through the ‘problems’ of cities and the potential (but also the limits) of solutions that are designed with those problems in mind. But the problems and promise of cities are endless and evolving and not limited to what can be absorbed in one semester. For this reason, we will dig most deeply in to only a few substantive areas, but ones that also reveal deep sources of inequity and racial disparity, that have intensified in this uncertain moment of global pandemic. These three areas are **urban health (including environmental health), housing and employment.**

My own expertise is workforce and economic development planning, so we will dedicate the second half of this semester to exploring urban solutions that are designed to advance economic mobility through improved job quality standards, access and commitments. With the topics of urban health and housing, we will draw on the knowledge and experience of others—scholars, planners, policy-makers, advocates—to help us understand what is happening in these respective spaces, but also to explore cross-connections that can reinforce structural inequities and also the need for institutional coordination.

Urban Studies and Planning Minor: This course is required for students who want to pursue the **Minor in Urban Studies and Planning** as well as anyone who is interested in learning about US cities, their contemporary challenges and the solutions being proposed to address them. This course is a companion course for **PLAN 246: Cities of the Future** which focuses on the history of US cities and early urban planning movements.

Format: Classes will be a “live” remote format, using the Zoom platform. This is synchronous teaching format and this means your **attendance is required at the scheduled class time**. This class will utilize a mix of learning styles, including peer-to-peer learning. Most sessions will include a structured overview to provide background or motivate small group discussion. Most sessions will include presentation slides and a video or audio clip relevant to the theme or topic of the day. Most sessions will also involve a small group activity (10 students or less), designed to encourage active debate and dialog among students. Guests—including scholars, planners, policy-makers and advocates—will join us throughout the semester. Approximately half of the class sessions will include a guest appearance and there will be opportunities for students to interact with and ask questions of these guests. Additionally, the class will include skills modules throughout the semester, including sessions on mapping and housing and labor market data analysis, along with opportunities to learn additional analytical skills through connections to Davis Library and the Odum Institute.

Analytical methods and tools: In this class you will get exposure to ArcGIS, Excel, PowerPoint, Data visualization (Tableau, Excel) and Census data. You will review planning-related reports and documents. You will regularly participate in small activities via Zoom break-out groups, rotating through various roles and responsibilities. You will develop writing, research, presentation and team-building skills through your group urban solution pitch. You will also gain experience with equitable development evaluation and scoring.

At the completion of this course, students are expected to gain the following knowledge and skills:

- A general understanding of contemporary urban challenges in the areas of health (environmental health), affordable housing and employment
- A familiarity with the mix of strategies that are designed to solve these urban challenges
- Ability to assess and debate the strengths and weaknesses of urban strategies and policies
- Ability to present complex information through written, oral, and visual presentations.

As a student, you are expected to:

- Complete all readings prior to class and come prepared to discuss
- Submit your completed individual assignments on time
- Contribute to the timely completion and quality standards for all group assignments
- Engage in and contribute to peer-to-peer learning
- Ask questions via Zoom chat, email or at office hours, if you’re unclear about a concept

Class Schedule (weekly readings, assignment schedule and grading policy): This semester I am using a google sheet to share information on the class schedule. Here is the link (it is in view mode and cannot be edited by students):

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1lrgFHdgSEFMKNXmPLIOBX1mu2Dvj6LEfSQer5II-X8U/edit?usp=sharing>

I will use this sheet to identify topics covered for each class session; indicate what you need to prepare in advance of each class session; note which guests are visiting our class; list assignments by their due date; outline the grading policy for individual assignments and group work. This format is easier for me to update regularly, so please check weekly as some items might change to accommodate emerging issues or guest schedules.

Readings and Other Assigned Resources

Some classes will not cover all of the material in the readings and audio/video clips I assign, but it is still important that you keep up with the required materials. For class sessions that involve a guest, readings and other materials will offer background on the topic they are speaking to and will be useful as you formulate questions to ask them. If you have any questions on the readings-audio/video links or if certain concepts are unclear, please let your TA know, or use the Zoom chat option during or after lecture.

Other Academic Business

Academic Assistance

My purpose is to help you to excel in this learning environment. Should you need further assistance beyond my help, please consult the following on-campus resources:

The Writing Center: <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/>

Center for Student Success and Academic Counseling: <http://cssac.unc.edu/>

Learning Center: <https://learningcenter.unc.edu/>

Counseling and Psychological Services: <https://caps.unc.edu/>

Honor code

The UNC honor Code states: "Conduct all academic work within the letter and spirit of the Honor Code, which prohibits the giving or receiving of unauthorized aid in all academic processes." We are committed to treating Honor Code violations seriously and urge all students to become familiar with its terms set out at <https://catalog.unc.edu/policies-procedures/honor-code/> If you have questions it is your responsibility to ask the professor about the Code's application.

Attendance/Absences

There is a lot of uncertainty this semester and I recognize that this could affect regular attendance. Please try to attend most classes! Those that are especially critical are the **3 end of semester group "pitch" presentations, both exam days and the 2-3 class sessions** where you are pre-assigned a small group role. In these cases, you **must** notify your TA in advance of missing class and present a valid or approved reason (see link below).

For all other classes, you are permitted to miss up to 7 class sessions and still earn some share of your attendance points. If you miss more than 7 classes (unexcused) you will lose **all** attendance points. See table below for the break down.

Classes missed (unexcused absence)	Attendance points (10 total)
1	10 of 10
2-3	8 of 10
4-5 classes	7 of 10
6-7	6 of 10
More than 7	0 of 10

For a list of approved or excused absences, see below: <https://catalog.unc.edu/policies-procedures/attendance-grading-examination/>

“For situations when an absence is not University approved (e.g., a job interview or club activity), instructors determine their own approach to missed classes and make-up assessments and assignments.”

Cell phones and Email Use

Please turn off your cellphones before joining class and avoid checking email.

Disability

If you have a documented disability that may require assistance, you may need to contact the Academic Services office that houses the Academic Success Program for coordination in your academic accommodations. Please contact me to discuss any accommodations that may be required to satisfy your needs.

Community Standards in Mask Use.

This fall semester, while we are in the midst of a global pandemic, all enrolled students in an in-person class are required to wear a mask covering your mouth and nose at all times. This requirement is to protect our educational community as we learn together. If you choose not to wear a mask, or wear it improperly, your instructors can ask you to leave immediately, and will submit a report to the [Office of Student Conduct](#). At that point you will be disenrolled from the course for the protection of our educational community.

Our class is remote. But in the eventuality that you will be on campus, or plan to meet in-person for group work, please note that these community standards apply and must be adhered to.

An exemption to the mask wearing community standard will not typically be considered to be a reasonable accommodation. Individuals with a disability or health condition that prevents them from safely wearing a face mask must seek alternative accommodations through the [Accessibility Resources and Service](#). For additional information, see [Carolina Together](#).

Title IX Resources

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Please contact the Director of Title IX Compliance (Adrienne Allison – Adrienne.allison@unc.edu), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (gvsc@unc.edu; confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.