A Dallas, TX, Brownfield Development Project:  
Does This Contribute to Creating a Sustainable City?

Austin Energy’s Wind Turbine Farm in West Texas:  
Is the Development of Renewable Energy Sources the Way for Sustainable Cities to go?

A Green Roof in Atlanta  
An electric bus manufactured and used in Chattanooga, TN
PS 195

*Seminar on the Politics of Sustainable Cities and Communities*

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*About this Course*

This is an advanced research seminar that is dedicated to the study of the relationship between local political processes and the pursuit of sustainable development. It focuses on the theoretical underpinnings of the concepts of sustainability and sustainable development as applied in the local city context of the United States. It examines the ways that these concepts actually get defined through local political and policy making processes. Readings and class discussions are designed to interweave several themes, including the obvious tension between maximizing economic growth and protecting the environment, local politics and policy decision making in the context of the U.S. federal system, and the practice of planning for the environment.

This is referred to as a research seminar because students will engage in conducting original research as a capstone experience. After addressing various conceptions of sustainability and sustainability policies, as well as important issues of research design and hypothesis testing, the class will embark on a research project designed to examine a central hypothesis to be defined by the class. Each student will be required to prepare a final research paper. Details on the content of this paper will be presented in class.

As a seminar, the class meets once a week for two and a half hours. One of the defining characteristics of a seminar is that it involves extensive in-class discussion. So there is an expectation that each student will take responsibility for doing the assigned readings and for being prepared to discuss them in class. Another characteristic of a seminar is that it typically involves the preparation of a substantial term paper. For this class, students will prepare their term papers based on topics and hypotheses developed over the course of the semester. The term paper will be described in more detail later.

*Books Available for Purchase:*

Because a substantial amount of reading can be found in these books, they should be available in the Tufts bookstore. You should feel free to purchase these books from whatever source you wish, including Amazon.com. Readings from these materials should be considered required unless otherwise indicated. Copies of additional readings will be given out in class.


Optional (not available in the bookstore):


Additional readings will be made available as photocopies distributed in class or on-line through the course’s Blackboard web site. To access this site, go to [http://blackboard.tufts.edu/](http://blackboard.tufts.edu/), log in, and click on PS 195. Links to online readings are found in the “External Links” section, or in the course’s reading list.

**Grading:**

The final grade for the course will be based on the average of the grade on the take-home mid-term exam and the final research paper. There will be no other graded assignments. The grading of these papers will be based on assessment of three categories: 1) writing and organization; 2) factual accuracy and completeness; and 3) idea synthesis and creativity. Writing and organization includes all the mechanics of writing, spelling, word usage, and diction, and also includes the effectiveness of the logical presentation of the paper. In other words, is the argument in the paper presented in a logical way? Factual accuracy and completeness focuses on whether the statements made can be said to be correct, and whether there is directly relevant information that was omitted. Idea synthesis and creativity focuses on the extent to which the paper develops some fresh ideas or approaches the argument from a novel or unique perspective. Each of these categories can earn up to 33.3 points, and the sum of the three categories points will be used to determine the final grade (97.0 - 99.9 = A+, 93.0 - 96.9 = A, 90.0 - 92.9 = A-, etc.)

The final term paper will be due on Friday, May 6, by noon. No extensions will be granted and no grades of Incomplete can be issued without the requisite signed contract.

**The Research Challenge:**

This course is both a seminar and a methodologically-focused research class. Therefore, a good portion of what we do in the class will be dedicated to conducting research on sustainable cities in the U.S. The primary issue of interest in this course will be the relationship between local governance and politics, on one hand, and the pursuit of sustainability on the other. In short, we would like to know whether there is any relationship between the ways cities are governed and
whether (and to what extent) they decide to try to become more sustainable. Much of the time we spend in class will be dedicated to understanding what local sustainability is, what cities can and actually do to try to become more sustainable, and how cities are governed. The exact hypotheses we will focus on will evolve over the course of the semester.

The Syllabus:

The syllabus that follows presents the class-by-class topics for discussion and the associated readings. **Required readings are in bold typeface.** For the dates that correspond to the class meeting numbers, consult the separate listing. The syllabus is available through the course website.
Class Meeting 1: An Introduction to the Concepts of Sustainable Cities and Sustainable Communities; An Introduction to the Research Endeavor

Today we will begin discussing the broad concept of sustainability, and how it is thought to apply to communities and cities. We will develop an introduction to the course, along with an explanation of the “logic” of the syllabus and its topics. We will begin a discussion of conducting research on or about sustainable cities with special emphasis on “analytical” rather than “descriptive” research.

Read:


Class Meeting 2: The General Concepts of Sustainability, Sustainable Development, and Sustainable Communities and Cities

Today we will devote our time to discussing readings on the concept of sustainability and sustainable development. Most of these readings will be fairly general, consisting of broad conceptual works that set the stage for more concrete and better-defined concepts that will be of use to us in our effort to apply the concept to local areas, and in our task of operationalizing sustainability. We will also discuss efforts to apply the broader concepts to small geographic areas, especially cities.

Read:


Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., 1994. *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future*. Beacon Press.


International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), 2000. *Local Agenda 21 Model Communities Programme*. Toronto, ON: ICLEI. Found at:  
http://www.iclei.org/la21/la21updt.htm
Class Meeting 3: Sustainable Cities, the Biophysical Environment, Ecosystem Health, and Pollution Prevention

Today we will focus on what some people would argue is the key element to sustainable cities: the environment and eco-system health. We will look at the wide array of environmental issues that sustainability addresses, and the relationship between what goes on in cities and the quality of the environment and related eco-systems. We will develop a number of different ways of looking at the city’s environment and eco-systems, including “ecological footprints,” environmental bubbles, and “closed loops,” to name a few.

Read:


Frederic O. Sargent, Paul Lusk, Jose A. Rivera, and Maria Varela, 1991, Rural Environmental Planning for Sustainable Communities. Island Press.


**Class Meeting 4: Sustainable Cities, Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation, Energy, Water, and Transportation**

Today we will discuss the central issue of climate change as an element of sustainability, and the role of energy conservation, transportation planning, and related issues, such as "green building" programs. Energy and transportation play important roles in initiatives that seem to take sustainability seriously. Today’s topics will focus on how these issues manifest themselves in the operations of sustainable cities in the U.S.

Read:


Class Meeting 5: Sustainable Cities and Economic Development – Land Use, Zoning, Smart Growth, Regional Growth Management, and the Role of Comprehensive Planning

Today we will examine the ways that sustainable communities do (or do not) engage in economic development activities. We will look at the conceptual tension between economic development and sustainability. We will address the question of whether any amount of economic growth is necessarily bad for the environment. Then we will look at various ways that cities have tried to engage in economic development or to pursue economic growth without complete disregard for the environment. So we will look at the general issue of “smart growth” approaches to development, and some of debates concerning the issue of urban sprawl.

Read:


Class Meeting 6: Sustainable Cities and the Critical Importance of Environmental and Social Justice

Today we will look at the argument that a sustainable city is necessarily a more socially just city. We will examine the general issue of environmental justice and social justice in urban settings, and compare and contrast these with the concepts of sustainability and sustainable communities.

Read:


Class Meeting 7: Mainstream Views of the City Governance: Politics (and Economics) as Usual; Economic and Financial Causes of Local (Un)Sustainability; The Environmental Kuznets Curve; “Vulnerability” and “Capacity”

Before we begin to develop a deeper understanding of the idea of sustainable communities and cities, we will take a look at what might be called “mainstream views” of city politics and economics; the relationship between economic growth and environmental quality; and the relationship of city politics to local economies. This is done so that we can contrast these mainstream views with the alternative conceptions of cities that tend to be associated with sustainability.

Read:


Kee Warner and Harvey Molotch. 2000. Building Rules: How Local Controls Shape Community

Class Meeting 8: Social and Demographic Influences on Local Sustainability -- Education, Postmaterialism, “Social Culture,” the “Creative Class,” “The Consumer City” and the Pursuit of “Amenities”

Today we will look at several related specific explanations for why some cities seem to do more to advance the cause of local sustainability than others. Broadly, these “social and demographic” influences focus on education and postmaterial values, and the attraction of urban amenities as the possible primary forces behind city decisions to pursue sustainability policies and programs.

Read:


Class Meeting 9: Governance and Sustainability – Urban Governance Regimes

Today we will look at the concept of “urban governance regimes” -- what they are, what their components are, how cities differ – and what differences in governance regime types might imply for the kinds of local policies and programs that get adopted and implemented.

Read:


Today we will revisit the issues of city politics and economics as usual, and we will examine the ways in which these conspire to act as impediments to achieving progress on sustainability at the local level. We will look specifically at the role of aspects of “civil society” in helping to shape the pursuit of sustainability. We will also at whether these aspects of civil society offer realistic prescriptions for overcoming these impediments, particularly at ways in which the sustainable communities process can be integrated with economic development types of activities.

Read:


Class Meeting 11: Implementing Local Sustainability Policies and Programs: Measurement and Sustainable Indicators Issues; The Natural Step; Triple Bottom Line; CitiStat Approaches.

Today we will look at a variety of issues related to how sustainability policies and programs are implemented. For the most part, this focuses our attention on the dynamics of management internal to municipal government, with special emphasis on systems and approaches that have been developed in specific cities around the U.S. and Europe.

Read:


Kate Besleme, Elisa Maser, and Judith Silverstein. 1999. *A Community Indicators Case Study: Addressing the Quality of Life in Two Communities.* San Francisco, Calif.: Redefining Progress, March.


Class Meeting 12: Some Case Studies of Sustainable Cities – Seattle, Portland, Chattanooga, Boulder, San Francisco, Austin, Jacksonville, and Toronto; Student Presentations; Semester Summary.

Today we will look at three specific examples and case studies of sustainable cities projects around the country, as described in the literature. We will take a critical look at what seem to be the underlying motivations for embarking on a sustainability effort, and we will try to understand some of the locality-specific pre-conditions that contribute to such an effort. We will also entertain the question of whether the sustainable cities process has been able to change aspects of local economics, business, politics, and the environment. We will focus on three cities that are considered by many to be among the best examples of what cities can do – Seattle, Portland, and Chattanooga serve as the case examples. We will also have one or two presentations from fellow students based on their respective final papers; there will also be a semester summary.

Read:


Steven Reed Johnson, The Ark of Sustainability: The Shape of Portland’s Sustainability Infrastructure at the Turn of the Century. Unpublished manuscript.


