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Prairie Project Assignment #1
January 14, 2010

Course: UP 204, Chicgo: Planning and Urban Life, Spring 2011

This course provides an introduction to urban planning and is intended as a gateway for students considering the Bachelor of Arts in Urban Planning. The city of Chicago is used a semester-long case study and sustainability lends structure to course and offers a lens for reflection and critical thinking about the topics and issues covered in the course.

Learning Outcomes

The learning outcomes listed below are taken directly from the first page of the UP 204 syllabus. Outcomes directly related to sustainability infusion are highlighted. Students who have successfully completed UP 204 will be able to:

1. Distinguish key historical phases of urban development.
2. Discuss the process, forces, and factors of urbanization.
3. Apply fundamental social science theories and models of urban and regional structure.
4. Identify the three fundamental dimensions of sustainability.
5. Summarize each of these dimensions and articulate examples of how they are related within an urban planning context.
6. Debate issues and topics related to contemporary urban life.
7. Describe the social life, activities, and interactions of people in urban environments.
8. Develop skills and gain experience in using publicly available data and standard computer software.
9. Develop an integrated vision for sustainability that embraces their personal lives, professions, local communities, and the world-at-large.
10. Understand relationships between global environmental and economic trends and their impact on diverse cultures and communities.

Activities and Connection to Outcomes

- In Week 1 the lecture and reading will introduce the notion of sustainability and its three fundamental dimensions (i.e., economy, environment, and equity). On Friday, the lab exercise involves choosing an indicator related to each of the three dimensions and using Microsoft Excel to assess and track general progress towards sustainability over time in the Chicago metropolitan area. (see Learning Outcome 4)
- In Week 2 the Wednesday lecture introduces planning process and emphasizes public participation as a key component that lends legitimacy to policy decisions and is directly related to the equity dimension of (urban) sustainability. The Friday discussion session focuses on the Chicago River Corridor Development Plan as a case study of successful participatory planning. (see Learning Outcome 9)
- In Week 4 the negative consequences of industrialization are presented through the lens of sustainability during lecture—for example pollution from the advent of coal-powered factories, sanitation and public health issues as a result of overcrowding in slum areas, and accelerating economic inequality made possible by the transition to the factory system. (see Learning Outcomes 5 & 9)
• In Week 5 the environmental and equity implications of suburbanization are discussed during the lecture and recitation. (see Learning Outcomes 5 & 9)

• In Week 6 the impact of globalization, deindustrialization, and intensifying segregation on low-income and minority residents of Chicago (and beyond) are presented and explored within the context of the equity dimension of (urban) sustainability. (see Learning Outcomes 5, 9 & 10)

• The midterm exam provides an opportunity to assess how well key concepts from the course have been conveyed and the ability of students to apply many of those concepts to new circumstances.

• Weeks 11 through 13 focus specifically on key aspects of (urban) sustainability and the linkages between the three dimensions when considering issues like crime, affordable housing, and homelessness. (see Learning Outcomes 5, 9 & 10)

• Week 14 introduces theoretical perspectives on how cities should be designed and constructed then, offers specific strategies for achieving more sustainable urban form. The earlier focus on the social and economic aspects of sustainability is supplemented here with attention to the built (physical) environment of the city. (see Learning Outcome 9)

• Week 15 is an opportunity to reflect on the themes from the course and to consider the future outlook—what are the emerging challenges? Are we moving closer to the ideal of a sustainable city? (see Learning Outcomes 5, 9 & 10)

Assessment Strategy

• The first week’s lecture introduces the sustainability concept and the lab exercise asks students to analyze historical data and draw conclusions regarding progress towards sustainability in each of the three fundamental dimensions. The lab report (attached) provides specific guidelines for what should be included and poses questions that require synthesis.

• The readings, lectures, and discussion sessions are well-integrated and will help students to gain a wider perspective on what (urban) sustainability is, a deeper appreciation for why changes are warranted, and a firm grasp on what urban planners bring to the table in terms of being part of the solution. Because sustainability themes permeate the course, all aspects of student evaluation provide insight into how well the sustainability themes are being conveyed and understood.

• The final paper assignment (attached) asks students to reflect on the course in its entirety and to articulate their own understanding of what it means to have a sustainable city. Students are also asked to formulate conclusions regarding Chicago’s progress towards sustainability and to provide a specific example to support their argument with respect to each of the three fundamental dimensions. Finally, the term paper asks students to identify potential obstacles to achieving (urban) sustainability as well as ways that they might personally contribute to positive change.