“Laboratories for Democracy:” Making American Cities Better

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Time: Thursday, 4:55-7:25 pm

This course examines the intersection of ideas, politics, and action. We study best practices from around the country (and the world), evaluate their effectiveness, and determine whether and how successful programs can be replicated. This course asks students to not only think critically about issues of public policy, but also to think anew about the role you play in shaping it.

Cities, states and municipalities serve as what Justice Brandeis called “little laboratories for democracy”—where ideas flourish and problems get solved. From fighting crime in the streets of New York City, to banning smoking in bars and restaurants, to making the power grid more efficient, to encouraging the arts and culture in urban environments, innovations in American cities have spread across the globe.

Topics for student projects are drawn from current issues and problems facing decision-makers and elected officials in America today. We will also discuss politics, elections, and their interplay with public policy. In particular we will discuss the 2018 US Congressional midterm election and the policy ideas presented by the candidates.

Grading Criteria:
10% Participation
15% Oral Final Presentations
25% Midterm Exam and Essay (Take home exam, essay approx 5 pages.)
25% Final Exam and Essay (Take home exam, essay approx 5 pages.)
25% Final Paper

Students are expected to attend all classes and to finish the assigned reading prior to class. You should be prepared to discuss each week’s reading in class. Because this is a small, discussion-based course, your attendance and participation are essential. Please inform me by email if you are forced to miss a class. Required readings will come from the assigned books or by following the links in this syllabus.

Final Project
Identify a problem in an American city, state or municipality and propose an implementable policy solution to address it. It is preferable but not required that this idea have been modeled or tested previously in an alternate setting or location. The paper should outline the problem (it may be helpful to use Osbourne and Hutchinson’s 5 critical decisions) and articulate why the solution is appropriate. It should describe barriers to implementation and recommendations to overcome those barriers.

A one page analysis of a public policy challenge you have identified is due the first class in October, the format should follow the Facts, Issue, Answer, Reasoning method we will discuss in class. A one-page
proposal outlining your final project is due our last class in October. The final paper/presentation, of
about 1,200-1,500 words and 5-10 slides, is due for all students on the last class. Each student will
prepare a 10-minute presentation to be presented in class, followed by 5-10 minute Q&A and discussion
with fellow students. We will discuss expectations for the paper and presentations in greater detail in
class.

As with any class at NYU, you will be held to the highest standards of academic integrity, and all work
submitted should be your own. When referencing other people’s work, proper citation is required,
whether you are quoting exact lines or summarizing ideas or concepts. Information on citation styles can

Learning Objectives:

In this seminar, students will:

1. Use primary sources, both qualitative and quantitative, especially in their research projects, to
understand community institutions, the local economy, and the role of government.
2. Develop an understanding of how power differentially affects New York City’s people. Its built
environment, and its institutions through site visits, case studies and research projects.
3. Develop the ability to engage in key contemporary debates that shape the future of the city
through in-class discussions, presentations, and colloquia.
4. Develop an understanding of the formal and informal institutions underlying decision making in
the city by analyzing historical and contemporary planning and policy issues.
Required Books:

- Osborne, David and Peter Hutchinson. *The Price of Government: Getting the Results We Need in an Age of Permanent Fiscal Crisis*. 2006
- Gladwell, Malcolm. *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Building Giants*

Session 1 – Introduction

Session 2 - Understanding the Landscape

Reading:
- *Price of Government*, p. 1-20
- *Triumph of the City*, p. 1-34
- *Creative Class*, p. 1-35

Session 3 - Determining Priorities

Reading:
- *Price of Government*, ch. 1-3
- *David and Goliath*, Introduction and ch. 1
- *NY Times*: *Cities See The Other Side of the Tracks.*
- *NY Times*: *Bringing the High Line Back to Earth.*
- *Washington Post*: *Why the Highline is so Popular*
- View *TED talk by Robert Hammond*
- *NY Times*: *In Queens, Taking the High Line as a Model*

Session 4 - Barriers and How to Overcome Them

Reading:
- *Price of Government*, ch. 14-15
- Schaller, Bruce. *“New York City’s Congestion Pricing Experience and Implications for Road Pricing Acceptance in the United States.”*
- *Billips, Mike. “Congestion Pricing: To Skip Traffic, Atlanta Says Pay Up,” Time*

Session 5 - Managing toward Common Goals

Reading:
- *Nudge*, Introduction and ch. 1-5
- *Power Broker* ch. 34
- *NY Times*: *We Need a Little Fear*
- *NY Times*: *Taxing Sugar to Fund a City*
- *NY Times*: *A California Dream for Paid Leave Has an Old Problem: How to Pay for It*
- *Vox*: *Gavin Newsom’s ambitious plan to cut poverty in California*
Session 6 - Laboratories of Democracy – Ideas, Issues, Challenges from Around the Country

Reading:

- Nudge, ch. 16
- NY Times: Idled City Airports Are Finding a Second Life as Housing
- NY Times: How to Build Affordable Housing in New York City
- NY Times: A Simple Way to Send Poor Kids to Top Colleges
- The Atlantic: The Global Cities Where Tech Venture Capital Is Concentrated
- NY Times: Think Positive, Climb Out of Poverty? It Just Might Work
- NY Times: A Billionaire and a Nurse Shouldn’t Pay the Same Fine for Speeding
- NY Times: Some Workers Need Jobs as Much as Builders Need Workers. Cities Connect Them.

Session 7 - Case Study - Education

Reading:

- NY Times: The Opportunity Gap
- Case Study: Are High-Quality Schools Enough to Close the Achievement Gap? Evidence from a Bold Social Experiment in Harlem.
- NY Times: Technology Changing How Students Learn, Teachers Say
- The New Yorker: Schooled
- NY Times: How to Fix the Country’s Failing Schools. And How Not To
- NYTimes: Why American Schools Are Even More Unequal Than We Thought
- NY Times: No Tuition, but You Pay a Percentage of Your Income (if You Find a Job)

Session 8 - Case Study - Crime and Justice

Reading:

- WSJ: Hard Times, Fewer Crimes
- Price of Government, ch. 8
- Making Cities Work, ch. 10
- City Journal: Why we need Broken Windows
- The Atlantic: Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety
- The New Yorker: Fixing Broken Windows
- NYTimes: How Community Policing Can Work
- National Review: We were wrong
- NY Times: Confronting Implicit Bias in the New York Police Department
Session 9 – Case Study – Technology, the Environment, the Future City
Reading:
- New York Magazine: The Controversial Crime-Fighting Program That Changed Big-City Policing Forever
- NY Times: Why the Eric Garner Case Is a Critical Test for the N.Y.P.D. Commissioner

Session 10 - Case Study – Race and Poverty
Reading:
- Creative Class, p. 353-383
- NY Times: Invisible Child
- NYTimes: A Housing Solution Gone Awry
- NY Times: A Payoff Out of Poverty?
- NY Times: City Will Stop Paying the Poor for Good Behavior
- New Yorker: Swamp Nurse: What’s the Best Hope for the First Child of a Poor Mother?
- NY Times: How the Coastline Became a Place to Put the Poor
- Evidence-Based Partnership Initiative: The Nurse-Family Partnership Program
- NY Times: The Myth of Welfare’s Corrupting Influence on the Poor
- NY Times: A Universal Basic Income Is a Poor Tool to Fight Poverty
- NY Times: The Outsize Hold of the Word ‘Welfare’ on the Public Imagination
- Atlantic Monthly - CITYLAB: Can Baby Bonds Help Shrink the Wealth Gap?
- New Yorker: Who Really Stands to Win from Universal Basic Income?
- NY Times: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s Tax Hike Idea Is Not About Soaking the Rich
- NY Times: Americans want to believe jobs are a Solution to Poverty.

Session 11 - Why Do Cities Fail? Inequality in the 21st Century
Reading:
- Triumph of the City, ch. 2
- Creative Class, p. 35-65
- NYTimes: Dasani article
- NYTimes: Chicago Finds a Way to Improve Public Housing: Libraries
- The New Yorker: What America Can Learn From Detroit
- NY Times: Fresh Proof That Strong Unions Help Reduce Income Inequality
- Wall Street Journal: World Governments Test Minimum-Wage Raises
● NY Times: Is American Becoming an Oligarchy?
● NY Times: The Tragedy of Baltimore

Session 12 – Why Do Cities Succeed? New Ideas and Old Perceptions

Reading:
● Triumph of the City, ch. 9 and conclusion
● Creative Class, p. 228-280

Class Visit Eric Koch, former Communications Director for the New York City Council

Session 13: Class Conclusion and Review

Disability Disclosure Statement: Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.