A. Subject Designation and Number of Hours

This is a full-term course (60 hours over 12 weeks). It meets for three sessions per week on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The sessions on Monday and Wednesday, 1.5 hours each, will be devoted to lectures on two sides of a current debate in urban planning. The instructor will present the conventional view of the issue on Monday, delineating its key underlying assumptions and asking students to scrutinize whether the assumptions are valid, need revision or, in light of actual planning experiences, should be rejected. On Wednesday, the instructor will present alternative views regarding the same issue, delineate their underlying assumptions, again asking the students to check whether what they know about planning practice affirms, rejects, or suggests modifications of such assumptions. The role of the course instructor is to raise the students' skepticism about all assumptions, conventional as well as alternatives, by pointing out empirical evidence that suggests other plausible views of the same planning issue.

In the Friday session the students, divided into small groups of 8 to 10, will meet by themselves for two hours to deliberate on the issue presented in the previous two class lectures. Each group will need to reach a collective judgment on the debate topic, drawing not on lectures but on their group deliberations, and all group statements should be posted on the class website by the end of the Friday session.

Each student will also write a brief personal reflection of no more than two pages on how their particular group deliberated on the topic, commenting on the nature of the group’s dynamics, and highlighting how their own views might have evolved as a result of the deliberation. They will share these personal reflections with the instructor so that the course instructor can have a sense of each student’s intellectual journey.

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To attend this course, each student will need to devote a total of ten hours per week, of which three hours will be in a classroom setting, two hours will be in group discussions, and the remaining five hours will be devoted to reading the assigned literature, collecting information on how planning ideas worked in practice and writing personal reflective notes each week.

B. Minimum Learner Standards/Prerequisites

This is a required course for all MUP students specializing in New Urban Planning. It could be open to students from other specializations as well. Advanced undergraduate students in Urban Studies and Planning who have some work experience and decent writing skills can also participate. It is important that the course instructor divide the students into small groups by the end of the first week of classes and that each group be heterogeneous in terms of the students’ prior education, whether that be in architecture, economics, sociology, literature, or any other discipline. The small group should also be heterogeneous in terms of gender, work experience, life experiences (such as whether the student previously lived in a big or small city) and other such variables, which are likely to influence planning sensibilities.

C. Justification/Rationale

This introductory course is structured on the assumption that to be a new type of urban practitioner requires a new mindset with new sensibilities, and that the best way to cultivate new sensibilities is to subject conventional sensibilities to critical questioning nurtured through informed debate and discussion. Though a new mindset with new sensibilities is necessary, it is not sufficient for effective practice, however. The students will need to learn about a variety of sectoral issues, such as housing markets, mobility patterns and environmental challenges, and to acquire some technical skills, such how to assess the financial viability of projects, model transportation systems, gather statistically valid data for policy analysis, and so on. But, smart application of such knowledge and skill ultimately requires an innovative and pragmatic mindset which can define problems in such ways that something can be done about them. Planners with sophisticated mindsets will also be wary of too much intervention, or interventions that are difficult to implement and monitor. Many such issues will be discussed in the course, and
discussions will rely less on theoretical models than on knowledge from practice, which often turns conventional theories on their heads.

One particular sensibility this course will cultivate is that there are no generic right answers to the question of how to meet the multifaceted and varying challenges of the massive urban transformations underway in India. Even though students often seek generic solutions, the course will deliberately discourage such effort: this course will deliberately encourage skepticism toward standard recipes, and make the students aware that they have to craft specific intervention strategies to address specific problems at specific places with distinctly different political economies and implement them through specific institutions, each with different institutional strengths and weaknesses. The aim is for the students to develop mindsets that are fine-tuned to the specificities of contextual variables and distrustful of the broad general principles that marked grandiose planning thinking in the past.

This course will help the students to question and transcend many elements of old planning thinking as they formulate a fresh sensibility about what it takes to be an effective urban practitioner. Discussion of eleven such issues, framed as debates, will constitute this course. Depending on the course instructor’s research and practice interests, other topics may be added while some from the current list may be dropped. Nonetheless, the rationale for this course should not be lost in any such rearranging: its central purpose is to scrutinize conventional thinking, from the left, right, and middle of the ideological spectrum, to develop a deep curiosity about how states, markets and communities actually work in practice and a keen awareness of organizational realities—why organizations in the three domains perform well or poorly. In cultivating such awareness, the course must rely on the knowledge of practitioners, however unfamiliar they may be with academic language. In the new sensibility, practice does not need to conform to theory: it is theory that needs to be revised based on practice.
D. Learning Goals

The central purpose of the course, as mentioned earlier, is to develop a new mindset/sensibility/awareness/instinct—whichever of these terms the instructor chooses to use—for effective urban practice. This will require some unlearning of popular and conventional views. The unlearning process can be perplexing; and unless it is nurtured with empathy and care, students may lose self-confidence, which can hurt their ability to learn. For this reason, the course is structured such that students will have extensive discussions amongst themselves, in small groups, every Friday for two hours. These group meetings will be the forum where students can share their anxieties and doubts about letting go of old ideas and also share the excitement at being able to understand the urban development process in a new way. Critical reflection of the kind required for this course cannot be done in isolation: regular and extensive deliberations with other students, particularly from different backgrounds, and conducted in forums which are “safe” places without power hierarchies are absolutely necessary. This will create a learning environment—and in the best-case scenario, a learning community—conducive to self-reflection and revision of old ideas and biases. In other words, it is not the instructor who should disrupt the students’ old conceptual framework through harsh questioning; the students themselves need to question their own ways of thinking, revising their conceptual frameworks and old habits of the mind as they participate in free and frank exchanges with other students experiencing similar frustrations, fears and educational challenges.

It is essential that the students reflect on this experience by writing brief notes, which the instructor should read carefully. At the beginning of the course, it should be made clear that these notes are not meant to be a reiteration of what the instructor might have mentioned in class: they should signify what the students are questioning, and how they are grappling with the intellectual challenges. Throughout this intellectual journey, it is the instructor’s responsibility to draw the students’ attention to the reality on the ground: how cities evolve and change; why planning interventions create inadvertent side-effects; why markets, governments and civil society do not always behave in line with conventional understanding of their social roles. The more the instructor can provide concrete examples, the more likely are the students to revise their old ways of thinking. Yet, the process of revision and rethinking will depend less on
lecturing and more on give-and-take between the students and the instructor and among the students themselves. It will be useful to invite urban practitioners to participate in such give-and-takes because they will be able to share with the students how they have had to revise their academic understanding of planning issues as they dealt with the sometimes unpleasant surprises as urban practitioners.

E. Learning Units and Objectives

The central objective of the course is to create a new sensibility for effective urban practice. The new mode will be historically and empirically grounded in a nuanced understanding of how past planning efforts actually worked in practice. This will be different from old sensibilities based on normative ideas of how planning should work. The new sensibility will not be devoid of idealism, however: it will still inspire students to imagine how the urban environment can be improved, but their imagination needs to be grounded in a pragmatic understanding of how institutions—public, private or non-profit—work, how politics affects economics and vice versa.

The new sensibility should be free of ideological baggage of any kind—both left and right—and instead be motivated by pragmatic concerns: how policy preferences are shaped; how projects and policies can be executed more effectively, and how best to learn from planned efforts. The debates, if based on a thorough understanding of both sides of the same issue, should serve as the key mechanism of cultivating this sensibility—particularly, if the students are constantly reminded that the litmus test of whether a planning idea is really good is the ease with which it can be implemented without institutional upheaval. Also, the students should be keenly aware of political realities without becoming cynical about urban practice. This sensibility can only be cultivated by exploring and debating examples from practice which demonstrate that progressive changes do happen as a result of institutional policies, and that the political support necessary for successful interventions can be mustered if practitioners use technical and institutional knowledge to craft projects and policies, not as a-political measures, but to articulate political preferences with technical and organizational knowledge.
This course should also provide students the opportunity to work in groups of individuals with multidisciplinary backgrounds and varying points of views. This is essential because effective practice requires that students be equipped to lead discussions, modify their positions when challenged with convincing arguments which run counter to their position, and use such occasions for self-reflection and intellectual growth. That is why the group meetings on Fridays and the personal reflection pieces written by the students every week need to be given utmost attention. It may be useful to have professionals observe the group dynamics and advise students how they could improve their interactions and arguments, both to convince others and to be acknowledged by others for their leadership qualities.

**Suggested Topics for Weekly Debates**

**Week 1: Overview**

An overview of the debates selected for the term, why they were selected, and their historical chronology (why they emerged at particular moments) and why such debates are still relevant for informing practice.

A questionnaire regarding the student’s background should be distributed on the first day of class, which the instructor will use to assign students to groups by the second session (Wednesday of the first week). In the first group session on Friday, students will introduce themselves by discussing why and how they became interested in urban and regional planning, the institutional setting and spatial scale (local to national) in which they would like to practice, and two or three of their strongly held views (such as governments are corrupt, the private sector is only interested in profit, religious identity is critical for leading a meaningful life, and so on). At this session each group may also decide who will write the group statement on the debate topic for each week—they would know by then which debates interest them most—and also decide on the ground rules on how the group sessions will be conducted and what will be expected from each group member.
Week 2: Social Progress and Modernization

What is the relationship between social progress, modernization, large-scale urban transformations and urban planning?

Is there a consensus on what is meant by the term social progress? When was the notion accepted as a key planning objective? Does social progress require modernization of the economy (from subsistence agriculture to industrialization), of polity (from communitarianism to democracy), of individuals (from subjects to rational and autonomous citizens), and of patterns of human settlements (subsistence villages to well functioning cities)?

Is there only one model of modernization, or could multiple modernities be crafted by different social formations with distinctly different social values? Would different models of modernity lead to different types of spatial patterns, requiring different types of planning?

What is meant by the term planning? What is the history of the idea of planning? What form of planning is necessary for progress, modernization and large-scale transformations? What kinds of institutions are necessary for such planning? How should such institutions be held accountable to minimize the dangers of a totalitarian vision of social progress? Considering India’s planning experience over the last 60 years, what kinds of relationships among markets, states and civil society will create the best conditions for democratic articulation and efficient implementation of social progress? What should be the role of urban planning in this process? What kinds of institutions are necessary for fulfilling the promise of progress?

Week 3: Holistic Versus Pragmatic Approaches

It is generally assumed that to influence the pace and trajectories of progress, modernization and development, a scientific (meaning analytical) and comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted process is required, and that such a holistic understanding is necessary for the crafting of an integrated set of private and public efforts to reach developmental goals. In this mode, urban planning needs to be synoptic and rational—comprehensive in style. This would involve a synoptic understanding of all problems, a comprehensive list of all possible solutions, a
thorough assessment of such solutions, selection of the best solutions and their methodical implementation, and then a thorough evaluation of policy impacts to inform the next round of policy choices.

The alternative approach is pragmatic and strategic. It assumes that because of a multitude of cognitive and institutional constraints, the rational comprehensive model is utopian and not implementable. The alternative model recommends that planning be incremental and strategic in identifying a few critical problems, and be built on past planning efforts without radical restructuring and over-ambitious all-encompassing efforts. The alternative approach is also justified as more fitting for planning in democratic societies, and less likely to lead to autocratic and coercive policies and enforcement.

**Week 4: Top-Down Versus Bottom-Up Planning**

To create the necessary conditions for progress, modernization and development, should planning be top-down or bottom-up?

The top-down approach ensures a strong role for dominant social institutions, such as government, large private enterprises, and major political parties, and for other key institutions, such as private banks, established business groups (chambers of commerce), labor unions and so on. The assumption is that initiatives must be planned and implemented by such institutions from the top in order to break the structural constraints which impede development. In this model, the role of government—at national, state and local levels—and public sector agencies is considered vital to unlocking the full potential of markets and communities and creating the developmental momentum necessary for large-scale economic and urban transformations.

In contrast, the bottom-up model assumes that institutions which were created to foster top-down development are the main obstacles hindering broad-based development. In the bottom-up model, emphasis is shifted from government to non-governmental organizations, from large private enterprises to small micro entrepreneurs, and from organized political parties to “new social movements” that cannot be co-opted by the institutions at the top. One key assumption of the bottom-up approach is that conventional planning mechanisms and institutions cannot
articulate the preferences of people at the bottom of society; hence, a new type of planning is necessary, particularly if the goal is not just the creation of procedural democracy manipulated by established political parties and the government. Bottom-up planning celebrates the notion of substantive democracy in which people at the bottom participate not only in periodic elections, but also in the regular functions of government, such as the budgetary process.

**Week 5: Public Sector and Public Interest**

One of the key justifications for public planning is that it is necessary for protecting and enhancing public interests; and public sector agencies are created with that purpose in mind. Yet, the very notion of public interest has come under scrutiny; and critiques from both ends of the ideological spectrum have questioned whether public sector agencies actually protect public interest. On the ideological right, rational choice theorists have pointed out that bureaucrats first and foremost protect their own interests and devise policies to extract rents from individuals and firms. On the left, critics dismiss the reformist intentions of the capitalist state as, at best, co-opting the poor or, at worst, enforcing class dominance and state coercion and control of the poor. In both cases, they see public sector agencies as the apparatus of the repressive state, which cannot initiate the pro-poor and progressive social transformations that are necessary for broad-based development.

Is the notion of public interest still valid? And if it is not valid, can state action—particularly in the form of planning—be justified? One way to answer this question is to scrutinize past actions of public sector agencies to assess whether they can be dismissed as either rent-seeking entities or enforcing class domination by the so-called capitalist states. Could bureaucratic behavior and public policies be motivated by other reasons, as espoused originally by the proponents of bureaucracy that it is an institutional form necessary for modernization of economy and society? Will the understanding of bureaucracies, public sector agencies and public planning alter if one analyzes the variations in performance of such agencies, and explains relatively good performance without attributing it to individual leaders, as the popular press commonly does? Is it possible that in-depth studies of relatively good performance by public sector agencies will demonstrate that bureaucrats and planners are motivated by many factors, including their group interest, and
that under certain circumstances bureaucrats do perform reasonably well, considering the institutional constraints. What are those circumstances, one may ask, and do private institutions and civil groups play any role in influencing these circumstances? And what is the impact of bureaucratic discretion on performance of public sector agencies? Does bureaucratic discretion always lead to corruption and rent-seeking, or can it also contribute to institutional innovations? Is bureaucracy always inflexible, rigid and corrupt, or can it be an instrument for crafting innovative social policies?

**Week 6: Regulations or Partnerships?**

In the not so distant past, public planning was justified as being necessary to correct market imperfections or failures and to regulate market behaviors, such as land speculation, or exploitation of the poor by loan sharks. This kind of thinking pits states against markets—and vice versa—though early development planners were convinced that strong states were necessary for the creation and protection of domestic markets. What kind of sensibility regarding the state-market relationship can best guide the large-scale spatial transformations already underway in India? Do market forces always hurt the poor and the vulnerable, necessitating state intervention to protect them? Or, is it market agents who currently provide opportunities for the poor to make a living and/or find shelter because public efforts have failed? In other words, if the fear of market failures justified public planning in the past, what must be done now to correct state failures?

The idea of public-private partnerships (PPP) emerged as a response to the distinctly different comparative advantages and deficiencies of private and public sectors. At first hearing, PPP sounds rational and cooperative: It promises to combine the comparative strengths of both types of institutions, creating a synergy that no one type of institution can produce by themselves. The private sector can be a source of capital, entrepreneurship with an astute understanding of markets, and provide an efficient no-nonsense operational culture. The public sector can provide complementary assets, like land, the ability to alter rules and regulations, and the power to increase the profitability of projects, share risks and channel project benefits to groups who are usually bypassed by purely market-driven initiatives. That is why PPP as a planning tool was acknowledged in Western nations in the 1980s, when the welfare state was straddled with
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structural fiscal problems. Now, the idea is pervasive in newly industrializing nations, and it is prominently featured in India's most recent urban initiatives, such as JNNURM, as a way for cities to upgrade infrastructure, provide housing, and even offer public amenities.

What has been the impact of PPP so far? Is the strategy really as efficient and equitable as it sounds? Drawing on the experiences of both industrialized and newly industrializing nations, the discussion on this question should probe into how PPP contracts are forged. What types of disagreements, and sometimes outright conflicts, between the two sectors flare up and need to be managed? How are costs and benefits shared between the two sectors? Who absorbs the risks when projects fail due to the volatility of markets? Does the new type of interface between the private and public sectors create new opportunities for corruption? What kinds of institutional mechanisms can be put in place to minimize such risks of corruption without creating the long bureaucratic delays that are common in projects managed solely by public-sector entities?

Most important, is PPP the right approach for all projects and all constituencies at all times, or are different types of private sector involvement appropriate for different circumstances? And, would certain activities—because of their scale and scope, the nature of risks that must be minimized, the type of technology they require—be better addressed by only one sector, be it private or public?

**Week 7: Implementation in Planning?**

A common viewpoint among planners is that many good plans have failed because of bad implementation, or have been shelved as well-written reports but never executed because of a lack of political will or outright political opposition. In this mode of thinking, planning and implementation are regarded as separate domains, with planning shaped by technical knowledge and scientific understanding of the issues, while implementation is often bungled by corrupt politicians and inept bureaucrats. It is commonly assumed that this divide can only be bridged when there are enlightened political leaders, who are able to enforce rules, disciplines and deadlines, and political zeal is matched by unusual bureaucratic efficiency enforced by determined and incorruptible project administrators. Since this alignment of favorable circumstances is rare,
more analysis and understanding is necessary to learn how the gulf between planning and implementation can be bridged under ordinary circumstances.

One way is to consider implementation issues as part of the planning process. A plan would have to address how it could be executed amidst bureaucratic apathy, likely political opposition, and the usual procedural delays that result from the need to coordinate activities among different agencies and multiple levels of government. Why not subject all plans to the question of whether they are implementable? To what extent will the organizational set up proposed for plan implementation address the real-life challenges experienced by project administrators? Since project administrators rarely document their frustrations with implementation, not much codified knowledge exists; it remains as tacit knowledge, which is rarely taken into account in the formal preparation of planning documents. As a result, the gulf between planning and implementation is never bridged. The planners continue to blame the practitioners for bad implementation of “good” plans, which in fact are unrealistic, and even ignore how the implementing institutions actually work.

One way planners can begin to address this deficiency is by anticipating the kinds of resistance, institutional and otherwise, that the various components of the plan are likely to generate and the institutional strategies that will be necessary to get around such resistance. This may require rethinking the conventional sequencing of public projects. In planning efforts to house the urban poor for example, water and sewers could not be provided until the housing areas had been formalized. Most public policies rest on similar assumptions about a sequence of steps necessary for proper implementation. Even though the proposed sequence of steps may sound logical, it may be necessary to verify whether, in reality, that sequence is followed. What needs scrutiny is the assumption that for any policy to be successfully implemented, certain prerequisites must be in place. For example, for the urban economy to grow, a city must have well-developed infrastructure or a well-educated workforce. Such statements underestimate the complexity of tasks involved in planning and implementation by stating as prerequisites what are actually outcomes of the developmental process! Any discussion of implementation issues must consider the futility of such conventional thinking.
Week 8: Does Globalization Reduce Planning Capacity?

Since the term globalization became popular in the social sciences and public discourse, there has been much speculation about the effects of interconnectedness on the autonomy of nation-states as well as cities, and whether these entities can any longer plan their developmental priorities independently.

At least two arguments support the proposition that increased global interconnectedness has reduced the traditional power of territorially based planning entities. The first argument is that territorial entities cannot control global financial flows, and they must accept this new reality if they want to benefit from increased interconnections. This requires less regulation of and more incentives for external investors as territorial entities compete against one another, weakening their ability to address other long-standing problems. The second argument is that globalization leads to a convergence of public policies and planning styles, not at a higher level as in the case of product standards, but in a downward spiral in which labor and environmental standards are lowered to attract external investments. In this depressing scenario, planning has to serve, first, the demands of external investors and export markets, so that territorial entities can compete in the new global economy.

The counter-argument—that globalization has increased the need for planning—is rooted in empirical studies which demonstrate more, not less, state involvement and planning, as territorial entities try to exploit globalization’s benefits of but also guard against its adverse impacts. This argument points out that contrary to the prediction that there would be policy convergence because of global competition, public policies regarding cities, labor laws, and environmental standards remain distinctly different in different nations. As for urban planning, cities do compete for external investment—and some cities have provided huge subsidies to attract such investment, straining their capabilities to meet other expenses. Yet, globalization has not led to a downward spiral; in fact, many cities have invested to improve infrastructure and create new public amenities to compete for global investors that seek livable cities for their executives and other employees. In short, there is no evidence that globalization has curtailed the planning capacity of cities and nations. Though city planning has taken an “entrepreneurial turn”, relying
less on regulations and more on attracting private investments, both domestic and international, entrepreneurial efforts require public planning, coordination, and prompt delivery on the promises made to attract investments. This pressure to deliver is likely to enhance the public sector’s performance, ultimately enhancing its reputation for efficiency, which will further strengthen its planning capabilities.

**Week 9: Technological Change and Planning Capacity**

Even though urban planning emerged as a new field of professional expertise only after industrialization and urbanization, urban planners in general do not appreciate fully how technological changes influence both the built form and the practice of urban planning. This was not always the case. In fact, technological changes, such as those that allowed the construction of high-rise buildings or helped create computerized models of land-use or transportation layouts, were celebrated until the mid-1960s. Soon after, however, the term “technological determinism” was coined to challenge the primacy of technology in shaping urban environments. The critique of technology lasted for the next 20 years: it was not a panacea; it diverted attention away from more important social, economic and political issues; it was expensive and did not deliver on its promise. Planners who relied on technology for problem-solving were considered “technocratic” and politically naïve, and therefore not effective in influencing urban policies. There was also significant distrust of “data” and “positivism” as an approach to problem-solving. Professional reports filled with expensively collected data were commonly shelved soon after completion because they did not address important institutional issues which had to be dealt with in influencing the urban environment. Technological pessimism became widespread as technological changes failed to solve social and economic problems, such as declining growth rates, deepening environmental pollution, persistent poverty and unemployment, and unpredictable markets for goods and services.

The turn from pessimism toward a relatively more positive view of technology began by the early 1990s with the spread of information and communication technologies (ICTs). New theories and speculation about how ICTs would influence both urban built forms and urban planning as a profession began to emerge. Not all such theories were optimistic about ICTs’ impact, however. From early on, there were those who warned of an impending digital divide, and the deterioration
of human relationships with the decline of face-to-face interactions. On the whole, however, the
general attitude toward technological change improved as ICTs became more affordable to both
institutions and individuals.

At present, the urban planning profession seems quite aware that continuous improvement in
ICTs should not be ignored. In fact, technological awareness and institutional concerns, which
until recently were considered to be separate domains, have come together under the broad
umbrella of e-governance. New advancements in mapping techniques using Geographic
Information Systems (GIS), coupled with higher computing capabilities, have opened up new
possibilities for planning, monitoring, and evaluation. ICTs have also opened up a new sector of
economic activity, prompting some to predict that economic growth is now influenced largely by
how nations and cities nurture “information economies”, not old-style manufacturing.

What will be the judicious approach to technological change for urban practitioners? In the
spectrum of social attitudes marked by technological optimism and pessimism at the two ends,
where do urban practitioners belong? Could ICTs and other new technologies help address old
problems of chronic poverty, social inequalities, and political battles over limited resources?
Could ICTs help planners design and manage cities better? Or, is this yet another mirage, alluring
planners once again with the promise that there are technological fixes to social problems?

**Week 10: Technocratic Neutrality or Political Savvy?**

How should urban planners think about their relationship to politicians? Should they present
themselves as technocrats who are politically neutral, or should they appreciate the political
agendas of elected officials, and try to translate such agendas into the design of projects and
policies? Are planning professionals expected to subject political objectives to technocratic
scrutiny and bureaucratic procedures? Or, should they understand political priorities and be able
to mold projects and policies to fit such priorities with technically sound but also politically savvy
solutions?

This debate rests on a key assumption about the appropriate role of politics in planning. If one
assumes that politicians in general are corrupt and that politics undermines the technical
rationality of planning, and thereby adversely affects its capability to achieve optimal outcomes, then one would be inclined to institutionally shield planning from politics to the extent possible. In this mode of thinking, planning is primarily a technical activity based on rigorous analysis which are “value neutral” in calculating costs and benefits. The technical planners would then forward their analysis and recommendations to the politicians. Planning and politics are viewed as domains with opposite objectives. Planners are thought to hold a long-term view of social reality with “public interest” in their minds. They are equipped with the technical knowledge and know-how to solve such problems at least cost. Politicians, in contrast, are assumed to be motivated by short-term objectives and interested primarily in benefiting from political corruption at the cost of the urban poor, to whom they give scant attention only prior to elections. Politicians lack a good understanding of urban problems and maintain a patron-client relationship with the urban poor.

The opposite view acknowledges that planners need to have technical expertise, but it also argues that to be effective, planners must seriously consider political constraints and opportunities created by elections and unexpected events when they analyze and propose projects and policies. In this view, the planner can never be totally a-political and simply a technocrat; he/she should be aware that planning is an intensely political process with outcomes that have political impact. Planners should also understand the political aspirations of politicians. This view does not dismiss all politicians as having short-term perspectives, or not protecting the public interest; it considers the political process as legitimate, though not perfect, respects politicians’ need to be responsive to their constituencies, and understands that projects and policies have to be crafted to meet the politicians’ preferences. It is the planners’ responsibility to use their technical knowledge to design projects and policies that are technically sound, economically cost-effective and will also help the politicians to deliver on their promises to their constituencies. Thus the relationship between planners and politicians is not adversarial but symbiotic; yet, this view is not utopian. It acknowledges hierarchies of power but does not assume that all planning outcomes are “structurally determined”. There is room for agency in the sense that individual planners can influence planning outcomes by the particular way they blend technical knowledge with political priorities, instead of assuming that they know better than the politicians what voters really want and are willing to pay for.
Week 11: Conviction or Compromise?

As professionals, should planners strictly adhere to a professionally approved code of ethics? Or, does planning always require some compromises? Is making compromises that do not jeopardize the public interest the best a planner can do?

This debate is between two contending perspectives of what it takes to be an effective planner. On one side, proponents of professionalism argue that to be respected as a planner, one must adhere strictly to professionally set standards and norms that should not be compromised under any circumstance. In this view, professionals are respected precisely because of their uncompromising stance on how problems are to be analyzed and addressed. They are suspicious of any compromise as corrupting the purity of professional objectivity and question the moral integrity of planners and politicians who change their views of problems and solutions. This orthodox stance on ethics, morality and pure professionalism is based on the notion that to be a good individual and professional, one must believe in and strictly adhere to a set of principles—both in personal and in professional life—and that only morally weak and opportunistic individuals change their views. Compromise is seen as a form of giving in to power, which is the opposite of what respected professionals do: they speak truth to power.

The contending view rests on the assumption that democracy by its very nature requires compromise and that successful professionals make such compromises without jeopardizing the public interest. This view rejects professionally developed codes of ethics that do not take into account contextual complexities of specific moments. Operating principles are not posed as moral absolutes but must be thought through by individual professionals, who must take into account a variety of factors, ranging from interpersonal relationships to institutional opportunities and constraints, to historical conjunctures, before deciding what is right in that specific circumstance. This contextual and somewhat relativist approach, in contrast to the moral absolutist approach of “the purists”, celebrates compromise as necessary for social change in democratic societies. Yet, this view does not approve of all compromises: it proposes that effective professionals use their judgment in structuring compromises, and are usually skillful in understanding how there may be more room for institutional maneuvering as compromised
policy objectives are implemented through projects on the ground. This, of course, raises questions regarding how professional planners construct their personal code of ethics and what kind of morality underpins their professional practice. The relativist view of ethics assumes that such personal codes are socially and institutionally constructed, and that the process of construction and revision never ends, but that personal experience, when critically examined, shapes ethical and moral intuitions which ultimately guide good practice. There is room for error in the relativist view: mistakes, misunderstandings and missed opportunities are not indicators of unprofessional behavior as long as one learns from such experiences.

**Week 12: Professional Autonomy or Collaborative Learning?**

This debate rests on two alternative models of professional knowledge and its application for effective practice. In the classical model, professional knowledge is assumed to be free of any influence from either the state or market forces. This autonomy is considered essential for the intellectual legitimacy of professional knowledge. It is assumed that objectivity and technical rationality would be lost if either market forces with profit-making motives or the state apparatus with coercive social tendencies shaped professional planning’s purpose and practice. To remain objective and neutral, professional knowledge needs to be constructed through empirically grounded and scientifically tested methods, similar to the way that natural and applied sciences have evolved over the years in the search for truth and the right answers. The emphasis on rigorous analytical methods, free of any kind of bias, is central to this model. This emphasis on method is justified by a surety of purpose, of scientific inquiry in which there is professional consensus about both the nature of the problems to be solved, and the established methods of how to solve them. In urban planning this model of professional expertise is exemplified by computerized models of various relationships, say between land-use and transportation, or housing values and property taxes, or land-use and energy consumption. Such models are constructed to predict the outcomes of public policies and evaluate the likely impacts of alternative policy choices based on a set of professionally constructed criteria. The need for professional autonomy in this mode of problem solving is obvious; urban planners often highlight this need by equating themselves with medical doctors who cure physical ills based on professional knowledge, not political interference.
In the alternative model of professional knowledge and practice, professional autonomy is not a concern. Instead, the focus is on planners’ reflective capacity, particularly their ability to learn from complex and uncertain situations, so that they can craft policy responses for specific situations, and not rely on generic solutions. In this view, there is no surety that problems can be well understood before professionals act. In fact, it assumes that problems can be understood in their full complexity only after interventions have been made, almost always with insufficient knowledge. This alternative style of practice does not require large-scale data collection of the kind that empiricists ask of competent professionals; instead, it emphasizes the need for continuous learning from action, and argues that effective practice requires that organizations create learning environments. This is not to say that in this mode of professional conduct, no effort is made to understand problems before policy interventions. What differentiates this approach from a relatively more positivist view is its valorization of “stories”—personal and group reflections of how public efforts played out in reality. There is no pretense to create a bias-free knowledge for constructing either descriptive or predictive models; the focus is on understanding the origins of biases and how they influence public policies and often fuel debates among different groups regarding the benefits of public policies. In this mode, story telling is an art that effective planners must learn in order to create social consensus about which problems are deserving of public intervention and how they can be addressed in pluralist societies experiencing rapid socioeconomic changes and uncertainties.

Such uncertainties about the nature of problems, and how to construct public policies when cookie-cutter approaches are clearly inappropriate, make planners less arrogant professionally. As a result, in this alternative mode, planners have to cooperate with others in understanding problems as well as in structuring public-policy responses. This requires that planners appreciate the limitations of professional knowledge, and the way such knowledge is constructed, conventionally. The proverbial baby does not need to be thrown out with the bathwater, however. Planners must tap into whichever combination of data, information, wisdom, insights, and intuition may be helpful to understand the social reality, and to do that they need to be humble about what they already know. More important, they need to be curious about what others know and how others understand social reality. Most important, new urban planners
should be open to surprises, rather than be upset about how unexpected changes ruin their preconceived plans. This is not a matter of personal preference for a certain style of planning, however. New urban planners can only flourish in a new organizational setting that encourages experimentation and accepts mistakes when they lead to learning.

G. Pedagogic Approaches

This course relies primarily on the use of debates and disagreements to sharpen the students’ awareness of their beliefs, dogmas and biases. This style of engagement with students should not undermine their confidence, however. That is why the instructor should take every comment or question from students seriously and also turn every question into an opportunity to clarify the assumptions underlying it. The ultimate goal is to make students more confident in their ability to learn, not ruin their confidence by questioning the validity of their previous knowledge. The group sessions, held on Fridays, should be particularly useful in this regard. The instructor should read the memos from individual students and each group to identify the key points of agreement and disagreement, be empathetic to how students grapple with old habits of thinking, and help them to see how criticality can lead to the gradual construction of new mindsets. Since criticality and questioning of one’s old frame of reference can create anxiety, it is very important that the instructor create a non-hierarchical, open, and friendly environment for classroom discussions. It is also important that the instructor himself/herself understand well the contending positions in each debate, defend both positions vigorously, and by the end of the semester, share with the students where he/she stands intellectually vis-à-vis the debated issues. It is essential to create an ongoing discussion among the students, drawing on the weekly posting on their class website. The instructor should read all such postings every week, and provide his/her comments on the web. He/she should use the opportunity to unravel complicated arguments, identify the key assumptions underlying such arguments, and raise questions for further analysis. All along, the instructor should encourage the students to draw on real-life examples and their own work and life experiences to support their arguments. The instructor must do the same, providing many examples to help the students determine what, if any, planning principles can be generalized and, more important, how contextual variables such as particular institutions, political and economic moments, and specific individuals influence planning outcomes.
H. Support and Mentoring

Instructors who have not been educated themselves in this new mode of teaching will need assistance to learn how to structure healthy debates, and provide speaking opportunities to all students, particularly those who are quiet. The instructor as well as the students must learn how to listen well, meaning that they should understand the motives and sentiments underlying verbal statements, as well as what is not being said. The goal is to develop minds that can appreciate not only what is being said, but also why something is said. It may be useful for the instructor to have some of the earlier class sessions videotaped and review these recordings as a tool to upgrade his/her skills in facilitating debates and to turn such debates into a forum for rethinking previously held positions. The instructor should also be trained in reviewing the students’ reflection papers to appreciate and encourage rethinking and revisioning of their views. Students often like to reiterate the instructor’s position, hoping that is what the instructor wants to hear. Sharing their hesitations, doubts and biases may make them feel vulnerable. To change from one mode of expression to another is not going to be smooth and easy; that is why the instructor should be as reflective about his/her style of teaching as he/she encourages the students to be reflective, reviewing their old long-held views and submitting their knowledge for critical scrutiny in public.

I. Assessment

The students should be graded on their ability and willingness to reflect and intellectually grow by (i) reading carefully the assigned articles and books, (ii) actively participating in class discussions in ways that enhance the quality of the debates, (iii) writing thoughtful reflection papers on how they are revising their previous thinking, (iv) participating actively in group discussions and posting group position statements each week, and (v) writing a final paper for the course on any one of the debates covered in the course. The final paper should demonstrate that the student not only read all the assigned material pertaining to the debate on which he/she selected to write, but also introduced some new articles or some new examples from real life, which the instructor can incorporate in revising the course for future students. The students and
instructor should decide collectively what percentage of the grades will be assigned to each of these five components of student responsibilities, based on a discussion in the very first session of the course. In fact, this discussion can itself be used to reflect on how educational priorities are set, and on how the evaluation criteria for student performance should be revised to create the new urban planner.

J. Guidance for Educators

In many ways, facilitating lively and productive discussion and debate is more challenging than lecturing or arranging for guest speakers and panels. The instructor must carefully tread the fine line between broadly empowering student expression and weighting all contributions equally, regardless of merit. And occasionally, to force students to examine deeply held assumptions and eschew facile agreement, the instructor must implicitly or explicitly play “devil’s advocate” by championing unpopular or counterintuitive ideas or approaches.

K. Reading and Resource Materials

Please see Appendix