

Urban Policy

SOC317H1S

Department of Sociology

Winter 2025

Meeting Time: Tuesdays, 2:10 PM – 5 PM

Location: Sidney Smith Hall 1074

Instructor

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Introduction

Urban policies reflect how cities and urban areas are designed, built, and managed. They actively shape the ways in which people live. From transportation to housing, crime prevention to climate change, urban policies cover a number of areas of great concern. While cities are heralded as sites of innovation and economic activity, they are also sites of deep inequality. Cities across the world have produced different responses to address these issues. However, urban policy is not only shaped by policymakers; rather, many different institutions shape the policy process. Given the range of issues facing urban areas, it is important to understand how policies are designed and implemented, and the multiple actors engaged.

Course Description

Cities are where many of our most pressing social, economic, cultural and environmental problems are addressed: economic development, infrastructure expansion, and environmental sustainability are all subject to the policies and investment priorities of national and subnational governments. In this course, we will examine different theories and forms of public policymaking, their ability to address pressing urban issues, and their intended and unintended consequences. This course focuses primarily on cities in Canada and the United States, but will also consider the ways in which cities elsewhere face and address similar conditions.

Course Objectives

- To understand the public policymaking process across different contexts
- To examine the range of institutional actors engaged in shaping urban policy
- To understand the potential intended and unintended consequences of policymaking
- To apply theoretical concepts of governance to case studies across a range of issues around the world

Prerequisites

This is a program-only course and is restricted to sociology majors and specialists. Completion of SOC201H1, SOC202H1, SOC204H1 plus two of the following (1.0 FCE): SOC251H1, SOC252H1, SOC254H1. Students without this prerequisite will be removed from the course.

Required Text

Carolyn Whitzman. 2024. *Home Truths: Fixing Canada's Housing Crisis*. UBC Press, On Point Press.

Students are required to buy, rent or borrow the required books. All other readings will be posted on Quercus for their viewing. It is the student's responsibility to download and review all assigned material PRIOR TO CLASS. Additional readings and course materials may be assigned, but at no cost to the student. All additional material can be downloaded from Quercus as well.

Course Grading

The University of Toronto Grading Scheme will be used to evaluate individual assignments as well as the overall grade for each student in this class.

Course Evaluations

Each student's grade will be based on four areas. The purpose of designing the course in this manner is to allow students to the opportunity to engage in different areas of evaluation including traditional examinations and diverse writing assignments. The following lists depicts the course breakdown:

I. Discussion Questions (15%)

A good question is both answerable and challenging. It will inspire analysis, synthesis, interpretation, and critical thinking. A discussion question that is truly great is challenging and inspires people to think critically and respond with well thought-out answers. These questions are a framework for creating prompts that encourage inquiry, challenging us to think bigger by connecting the classroom to real world ideas and events. For this course, you are to provide one discussion question each week based on the assigned readings (unless otherwise instructed). Discussion questions are due Mondays by 5 PM. You are also expected to respond to at least one other discussion question posed by one of your peers. Responses to your peers' questions are due Tuesday by 12 PM (unless otherwise instructed). Discussion questions are only due on days where new content is required. Discussion questions should not exceed 125 words. Please review the course schedule and Quercus for further clarification.

II. Midterm Test (30%)

There will be one online midterm test covering theories and concepts introduced in the course up to that point in time. You will have approximately one week to complete this exam. The exam will include a series of questions such as fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, and true/false. The exam will be delivered through Quercus allowing each student to take the exam from any location. While students cannot consult each other regarding the exam, they are allowed to review any of the required readings while taking the exam. The purpose of the exam is not to test memorization but familiarity with, and understanding of, theories, concepts, and approaches to understanding urban policy. Additional information will be given by January 28th.

II. Group Project – Policy Briefs (30%)

Over the course of the term, students will conduct individual group research projects under the supervision of the instructor. The class will be divided into teams to cover different aspects of a larger research project focused on creating a series of policy briefs. This will include a literature review, policy overview, and practical recommendations. Given that most groups will be working on their own, progress meetings will be held with the instructor and TA in the second half of the class in order to make sure that each group is contributing to a cohesive deliverable. Students will also offer peer grades that will account for a portion of their overall grade for this assignment. Additional guidelines will be given and discussed by February 4th.

III. Critical Review Essays (25%)

A book review in itself does not only tell you what a book is about, but also whether it achieves what it is trying to do. Therefore, a critical book review is more than a summary of the content (even though this is an important component), but a critical analysis of the book and your reactions to it. It presents several areas for inquiry. Critical review essays are written in the form of a short scholarly essay rather than as a descriptive review of the books. The purpose is to compare and contrast the work under review, identifying key themes and critical issues and assessing the writer's contributions to understanding the general topics discussed in the book.

Here are a series of questions to focus your thinking:

1. What is the thesis—or main argument—of the book? If the author wanted you to get one idea from the book, what would it be? How does it compare or contrast to the world you know? What has the book accomplished?
2. What exactly is the subject or topic of the book? Does the author cover the subject adequately? Does the author cover all aspects of the subject in a balanced fashion? Can you detect any biases? What is the approach to the subject [topical, analytical, chronological, descriptive]?
3. How does the author of the book support his or her argument? What evidence [i.e., sources cited and data collection] does the author use to prove his or her point? Do you find that evidence convincing? Why or why not? Does any of the author's information [or conclusions] conflict

with other books you've read, courses you've taken, or just previous assumptions you had about the research problem under study?

4. How does the author structure his or her argument? What are the parts that make up the whole? Does the argument make sense to you? Does it persuade you? Why or why not? Were there any questions left unanswered? Were limitations to the study effectively addressed?

5. How has the book helped you understand the subject? Would you recommend the books to others? Why or why not?

The format should be Times New Roman, 12 pt. font with 1-inch margins, double – spaced using ASA citation formatting. Papers should not exceed 800 words excluding references. Papers should be typed and saved as a word document or PDF and then uploaded to Quercus. Late submissions will not be accepted. Additional information is available on Quercus. All papers are due Tuesday, April 1st by 2 PM.

Grading Rationale

For the written assignments, I consider an “A” to denote work of excellence, rising above the merely sufficient and competent to incorporate new insights as well as creative and critical thinking. It will, of course, be well written and demonstrate depth of thought and clarity of conception. A “B” denotes a mastery of the concepts and issues, competent and well-written work. A “C” is given for work with logical inconsistencies, which fails to adequately explore all the arguments related to the topic, which has errors of fact, or which is badly written and poorly organized or conceptualized. A “D” is for work that fails to meet even these minimal standards. An “NC” is for work of exceedingly poor quality, including work that is plagiarized, unintelligible, and/or handed in extremely late. There is no extra credit offered in this course and no replacement assignments will be entertained.

Plagiarism

Be careful to avoid plagiarism. It is a serious academic offense with serious penalties (see the “Code of Behavior on Academic Matters”). If you are using someone else’s ideas, do not present them as your own. Give proper references if you are using somebody else’s ideas, and use quotation marks if you are quoting them directly. When in doubt, it is always safer to over-reference (you will never be penalized for that). Please also be aware that turning in an old paper from another class, or large parts thereof, for credit in a second (third, etc.) course, is considered an academic offense that results in students being referred off to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Sometimes, students will be required to submit their assignments to the University’s plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool’s reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University’s use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>).

For some of your assignments, we will be using the software Turnitin. It uses text matching technology as a method to uphold the University's high academic integrity standards to detect any potential plagiarism. Turnitin is integrated into Quercus. For the assignments set up to use Turnitin, the software will review your paper when you upload it to Quercus. To learn more about Turnitin's privacy policy please review its [Privacy Policy](#).

Students not wishing their assignment to be submitted through Turnitin will not be assessed unless a student instead provides, along with their work, sufficient secondary material (e.g., reading notes, outlines of the paper, rough drafts of the final draft, etc.) to establish that the paper submitted is truly their own.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

The use of generative artificial intelligence tools or apps for assignments in this course, including tools like ChatGPT and other AI writing or coding assistants, is prohibited. The knowing use of generative artificial intelligence tools, including ChatGPT and other AI writing and coding assistants, for the completion of, or to support the completion of, an examination, term test, assignment, or any other form of academic assessment, may be considered an academic offense in this course. Representing as one's own an idea, or expression of an idea, that was AI-generated may be considered an academic offense in this course. Students may not copy or paraphrase from any generative artificial intelligence applications, including ChatGPT and other AI writing and coding assistants, for the purpose of completing assignments in this course. This course policy is designed to promote your learning and intellectual development and to help you reach course learning outcomes.

Accessibility Needs

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible: disability.services@utoronto.ca or <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility>.

Policies for Lateness and Absences

Missed deadlines and tests: Students who miss a paper deadline or a test will receive a mark of zero for that paper or test unless the reason is a circumstance beyond their control. **Within three days** of missing a paper deadline or test, students must send the instructor a request for consideration. Students must document their request with **one of the following:**

Absence declaration via ACORN

U of T Verification of Illness or Injury Form

College Registrar's letter (e.g., in case of personal/family crisis or emergency)

Letter of Academic Accommodation from Accessibility Services

Students who miss the test or are late in submitting an assignment for other reasons, such as family or other personal reasons, should request their College Registrar to email the instructor.

Policy Regarding Changes to the Syllabus

As the instructor, I reserve the right to make changes to the schedule and structure of this syllabus in order to provide a better learning environment for the students. All changes will be made with advanced notice at no additional costs to the students. Changes to the structure has to be by unanimous vote with the class. Concerns or issues with changes to the syllabus should be addressed to me as soon as possible so a suitable alternative can be determined.

Course Schedule

January 7th – Introduction and Course Requirements

- Introductions
- Review of Course Syllabus
- Video: [“How to Make an Attractive City.”](#) *The School of Life*. 2015, January 26.

January 14th – Cities and Urban Life

- Louis Wirth. “Urbanism as a Way of Life.” *The City Reader*.
- Borer, Michael Ian. 2013. "Being in the City: The Sociology of Urban Experiences." *Sociology Compass* 7(11): 965-983.
- Molotch, Harvey. “The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place.” *The City Reader*.
- Jacobs, Jane. “The Uses of Sidewalks: Safety” *The City Reader*
- **Discussion Questions Due**

January 21st – Power, Politics & Policymaking

- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. 2017. “The State of National Urban Policy in Canada.” *OECD*.
- Bradford, Neil. 2018. “A National Urban Policy for Canada? The Implicit Federal Agenda. Institute for Research on Public Policy.” *Institute for Research on Public Policy*.
- Schneider, Anne, and Helen Ingram. 1993. "Social Construction of Target Populations: Implications for Politics and Policy." *American Political Science Review* 87(2): 334-347.
- Smith, Alison, and Zachary Spicer. 2018. "The Local Autonomy of Canada’s Largest Cities." *Urban Affairs Review* 54(5): 931-961.
- **Discussion Questions Due**

January 28th – Urban Development Strategies

- Crane, Randall, and Michael Manville. 2008. "People or Place? Revisiting the Who Versus the Where of Urban Development." *Land Lines* 20(3): 2-7.
- [City of Toronto. Official Plan: Chapter 1 – Making Choices.](#)
- [City of Toronto. Official Plan: Chapter 2 – Shaping the City.](#)
- Iveson, Don, and Gabriel Eidelman. 2023. “Toward the Metropolitan Mindset: A Playbook for Stronger Cities in Canada.” *School of Cities*.
- **Discussion Questions Due**

February 4th – Governmental and Non-Governmental Policy Actors

- Eidelman, Gabriel, Tomas Hachard, and Enid Slack (Eds.). 2022. "The Municipal Role in Economic Development." *Institute on Municipal Finance and Governance*.
- McGregor, Michael, and Zachary Spicer. 2016. "The Canadian Homevoter: Property Values and Municipal Politics in Canada." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 38(1): 123-139.
- Sancton, Andrew. 2005. "The Governance of Metropolitan Areas in Canada." *Public Administration and Development: The International Journal of Management Research and Practice* (25)4: 317-327.
- da Cruz, Nuno F., Philipp Rode, and Michael McQuarrie. 2019. "New Urban Governance: A Review of Current Themes and Future Priorities." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 41(1): 1-19.
- **Discussion Questions Due**

February 11th – Theories of Social Justice

- Peake, Linda, and Brian Ray. 2001. "Racializing the Canadian Landscape: Whiteness, Uneven Geographies and Social justice." *Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien* 45(1): 180-186.
- Florida, Richard, Andrés Rodríguez-Pose, and Michael Storper. 2023. "Critical Commentary: Cities in a Post-COVID World." *Urban Studies* 60(8): 1509-1531.
- St. Louis-McBurnie, Keisha, Nikki Mary Pagaling, and David J. Roberts. 2021. "The Work of Crisis Framing: Claims of Social Justice Obscuring a History and, likely Future, of Uneven Investment in Moss Park, Toronto." *Journal of Urban Affairs*: 1-18.
- **Discussion Questions Due**
- **Midterm Review**
- **Midterms must be completed by Friday, February 21st by 12 PM**

February 18th – Reading Week (No Class)

- Watch *Citizen Jane: Battle for the City*

February 25th – Group Introductions and Project Overview (Mandatory)

March 4th – Group Work Meetings (No Class)

March 11th – Progress Meetings with Groups (Mandatory)

March 18th – Progress Meetings with Groups (Optional)

March 25th – Group Project Presentations

April 1st – Critical Book Reviews Due

- Author Meet Critics and In-Class Discussion