

Urban Studies 105
Urban Politics

II. Criteria for Perspectives Courses

Justification

Please describe how the course will address criteria for Perspectives on the Liberal Arts courses. Be sure to include an explanation of the course's specific learning goals for students to make a connection between these and the general criteria for Perspectives courses.

URBST 105 provides students with both a history of urban politics in America and an introduction to scholarly approaches that analyze power relationships and municipal regimes in the United States. At the center of this course is urban studies' multidisciplinary approach, which combines research methodologies and theoretical paradigms from across the social sciences to create innovative, real-world knowledge of the challenges and opportunities of city life. Students learn how this orientation, when applied to the study of urban politics and the workings of municipal government, distinguishes the field from related disciplines including political science, sociology, history, anthropology and disciplines in the humanities.

Given the urban character of our college and our student body, this course addresses themes that should be an essential part of Queens College's General Education curriculum. It contributes to the liberal arts curriculum by showing the historical and contemporary importance of urban policies in American society and exploring the role of interest and activist groups in shaping urban life and government. The course exposes students to concrete knowledge that can enhance their capacity to act as urban citizens and to engage effectively in civic life.

The course is comparative in several senses: it compares US urban regimes across historical periods, contrasting the machine politics and reform movements of late 19th century cities with the urban regimes that have emerged in more recent years as cities have become post-industrial. It also compares political dynamics and governing coalitions across US cities, exploring how regional, economic, demographic and political differences create distinct histories of urban politics. It also explores the ways municipal government relates to, and functions differently from, state and federal government. Different sections may emphasize one axis of comparison more than another, depending upon the backgrounds and experience of the instructor.

Urban Politics deals directly with diversity and difference by identifying the ways disenfranchised and marginalized groups have fought, through history, for a stake in municipal government and how immigration, union activism, identity politics, and other social and political factors shape urban politics. Coursework will engage students in active inquiry (see examples below in Section III).

The course fulfills the criteria for the Analyzing Social Structures (SS) Area of Knowledge and Inquiry. With careful attention directed at the problems, limitations and ongoing need to rethink various paradigms for analyzing how power works in an urban setting, this course addresses the structural and institutional forces that shape how cities work and that produce and reproduce differing patterns of power and inequality.

The course also emphasizes the United States (US) Context of Experience. Recognizing that cities have played an important role in shaping American political history, and that they have been important sites of civic engagement and democratic practice, URBST 105 addresses ongoing contests over inclusion and exclusion from the unique vantage point of urban residents.

Please note that URBST 105 as it is currently taught fulfills most of the Perspectives criteria. It fulfills Area of Knowledge and Context of Experience criteria, is comparative and historical in approach, focuses on structural forces, and considers diversity and forms of difference. Yet this proposal also reflects minor changes designed to make URBST 105 more effective as part of the new General Education curriculum. The following criteria, previously recommended but not required for each section, will now be required:

- 1) An overview of the field of urban studies, as applied to urban politics, within the wider social science context
- 2) Assignments and/or classroom exercises emphasizing active inquiry.

Criteria Checklist

Please be sure that your justification addresses all three criteria 1-3, below. For criteria 4-8, please check all that apply and discuss these in your justification.

A Perspectives course must:

1. Be designed to introduce students to how a particular discipline creates knowledge and understanding.
2. Position the discipline(s) within the liberal arts and the larger society.
3. Address the goals defined for the particular Area(s) of Knowledge the course is designed to fulfill.

In addition, a Perspectives course will, where appropriate to its discipline(s) and subject matter:

- ☒ 4. Be global or comparative in approach.
- ☒ 5. Consider diversity and the nature and construction of forms of difference.
- ☒ 6. Engage students in active inquiry.
- ☒ 7. Reveal the existence and importance of change over time.
- ☒ 8. Use primary documents and materials.

III. Course Materials, Assignments, and Activities

Please provide an annotated list of course readings and descriptions of major assignments or exams for the course, as well as distinctive student activities that will engage students in working toward the course goals discussed in the course description and/or justification.

Please include the author and title for each reading or text, along with a short description providing information about how the reading will contribute to course goals.

Course Materials:

A broad range of course material is appropriate for this course. The texts described below exemplify the kinds of material that could be used to meet course objectives.

Dennis R. Judd and Todd Swanstrom (2007) *City Politics: The Political Economy of Urban America*, an accessible text which frames urban politics in terms of three “imperatives”-- the “politics of growth”, the “politics of governance” and the “politics of defended space”. This political economy perspective explains both historical urban political developments such as the machine-reform conflict and federal policies supporting suburbanization and contemporary issues such as development/gentrification, urban education, and environmental racism.

Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*, both a history of development policies in NYC and the metropolitan region and a study of the use of personal power within a governmental context.

Rufus P. Browning, Dale Rogers Marshall and David H. Tabb, *Racial Politics in American Cities*, a set of essays on African- Americans, Hispanics, and Asian-Americans in electoral coalitions and serving as public officials in various US cities, including New York. It is useful as a comparative and historical text on the relationship between political incorporation of ethnic minorities and policy outcomes.

Dennis R. Judd, Paul Kantor and Dennis R. Judd, *American Urban Politics in a Global Age* (2008), a collection of mostly new essays on contemporary urban policy issues such as the urban economy in relation to globalization, terrorism (“defended space and the politics of fear”), urban sprawl and regionalism, immigrants in suburbia, and new relationships between the federal government and the cities.

Major Assignments

In addition to exams, course assignments will be designed to emphasize active learning among the students. Here are some sample assignments:

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT # 1 - Fieldwork Assignment on Community Boards

Students are instructed to go to the website of the Mayor’s Community Assistance Unit and find, from the list of Community Districts, the one in which they live. They must find the phone number, meeting times, and location of their Community Boards. They must also find out the neighborhoods covered by their Community Board. They must attend a Board Meeting and set up a short interview with the District Manager of the Community Board after attending the Board meeting. Using their own observations and informal information about their neighborhoods, and using “Infoshare”(a data source discussed in class), they must answer the following questions about their neighborhood and their Community District.

- Which neighborhood do you live in?
- What type of jobs do most people in your neighborhood have- skilled workers like plumbers or electricians, office workers, service jobs, for example hospital workers or those who care for the elderly, small business owners or workers, professionals such as doctors, nurses, accountants, lawyers, etc.
- What are the major types of housing in your neighborhood? What are the major types of housing in the Community District?
- What is the ethnic composition of your neighborhood? What is the ethnic composition of the Community District?

- What proportion of your neighborhood do you think is foreign born? What proportion of the Community District population is foreign born?
- What are the names of local organizations, such as block associations, ethnic associations, homeowners or tenant groups in your neighborhood?
- What do you think are the major issues that are currently important to most of the people in your neighborhood? Why?

Attend one meeting of the Community Board in your area and answer the following questions:

- What geographical areas does the Community District cover?
- What kinds of people were at the meeting that you attended? Describe them in terms of numbers (how many people were there), age, gender, ethnicity and any other social characteristics that occur to you. (Dress, for instance)
- Describe the characteristics of the Members of the Community Board.
- Do you think that the Members of the Community Board are “representative” of your neighborhood in terms of social characteristics? Why or why not?
- Do you think that the people attending this meeting who were not Community Board members were “representative” of your neighborhood?
- What were the issues or topics discussed at this meeting?
- Which one (or several) of these issues or topics seemed to be most important to the people at the meeting? Why?
- Take one of the important issues and summarize the discussion. What were the main points made?

Interview the District Manager of the Community Board and ask her/him the following questions:

- What kinds of complaints about neighborhood services are most often called into the Community Board office?
- What are the main issues of concern to the residents of the neighborhood?
- What actions have been taken by the Manager and Community Board members to deal with these concerns?
- With which city agencies do the Manager and Board work most closely?
- Which capital projects are the Board’s highest priorities this year?

Write an essay which integrates all of the information above and in which you reflect on your Community Board as an institution of neighborhood/community government.

Students who live in Nassau county can either choose a Community Board and neighborhood to study within the five boroughs (for instance where a relative or friend lives) or do the assignment on Nassau County. Students who live other than in NYC or Nassau should see me in order to jointly devise another paper topic on local government

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT # 2. Description of a Policy Network in NYC

Choose an area of city policy such as education, economic development, health services, child welfare, transportation, energy, environmental policy. Using the New York Times archives (in QC and other libraries and on the Web) and other sources, explore the network of policy actors and institutions that

influence policy in this policy area and some of the current issues in this area. The answers to the following questions will be the basis of an essay describing this policy network.

- What problems/issues are currently (during the last year) being discussed within this policy arena / network? What are some of the major issues on the agenda in education or child welfare or transportation policy in NYC.? What are some of the proposals that have been presented to deal with these problems or issues? Which public officials and/or private organizations have made these proposals?
- Which institutions and agencies of city government are responsible for creating and implementing (carrying-out) policy in this area?
- If the City Council is one such institution, which committee(s) is/are involved? Who is/are the committee chair(s)? Which districts do they represent?
- How is (are) the city agency /agencies that deal with this policy area structured? Include an organizational chart of this agency or agencies. (Many are included on agency web sites.) To which elected officials is this (are these) agency (ies) accountable?
- Which state, regional, federal agencies are involved in this policy area? How are they involved?
- Which private groups, organizations or associations are involved in this policy area? This includes business groups, unions, “good government” organizations and advocacy groups. Name them.
- What “political resources” do each of these groups have? What type of activities do they engage in this policy area? What positions have they taken in recent issues in this policy area?
- What kind of information has been presented in the media about this policy area during this semester? What ideological lens do the media organizations seem to use in discussing this issue?

We will discuss both of these assignments in class.

IV. Assessment

Perspectives courses must be recertified every five years, and we are seeking ideas for how to best carry out this assessment. What forms of evidence that the course is meeting its goals as a Perspectives course would be appropriate to collect for this course during the next five years? How would you prefer assessment to be conducted? How might evidence of effective teaching and student learning be collected and evaluated?

Syllabi will be collected and reviewed periodically to assess the extent to which they continue to meet the criteria for Perspectives courses. We will collect this information and periodically submit a short report to the GEAC. Obviously, there should be no punitive measures attached to the collection of this information, or the evaluation protocol might be compromised. The Urban Studies Department has established for itself a comprehensive outcomes assessment protocol designed to collect and evaluate a

wide variety of evidence of effective teaching and student learning. It will not be difficult to assess the extent to which this course is meeting the respective goals as part of our wider evaluation activities.

However, there are important questions about Perspectives courses that might be best answered through a college-wide assessment of the new general education curriculum. One big and important question is whether the goals of this new general education curriculum are more transparent to the students than are the goals of LASAR. Another is whether or not the quality of general education is improving on campus. It would make sense for the college to establish an assessment committee sooner rather than later if it hopes to collect evidence about these questions, since it will be very much beyond the purview of individual departments to collect relevant and comparable data unless asked to do so well in advance and in clear and concise ways.

V. Administration

What process will your department develop to oversee this course, suggest and approve changes, and conduct assessment? Who will be in charge of this process? Also indicate whether the course will be primarily taught by full-time or adjunct faculty, or by a combination of the two types of instructor.

URBST 105 is primarily taught by full-time faculty with the occasional adjunct also teaching the course. The Urban Studies Undergraduate Curriculum Committee will devise a teaching manual for all of its PLAS courses for distribution to all faculty teaching these courses. The manual will include guidelines and sample syllabi. The Curriculum Committee will oversee all administrative matters and evaluation protocols for our Perspective courses. In addition to standard evaluation protocols, which include regular observations of all instructors and reviews of all syllabi, the committee will incorporate an evaluation of our Perspectives courses into our ongoing outcomes assessment protocol. We will devise several means – pre- and post-testing, the analysis of student portfolios, and so forth – to determine the extent to which our new General Education courses are effectively taught and our students are reaching their general education learning objectives. Our curriculum committee is comprised of Jeff Maskovsky, Tarry Hum, Alice Sardell, Len Rodberg, Dana-Ain Davis, Melissa Checker and Madhulika Khandelwal.