

**Public Policy 170
Urban Revitalization:
Lessons from The Providence Plan**

Patrick McGuigan
Executive Director, The Providence Plan
455-8880; pmcguigan@provplan.org

Tuesdays, 6:00 to 8:30
Taubman Center

What This Course Is About

This is a seminar/ discussion course about the major challenges and opportunities facing American cities today. The current condition of many American cities is critical and without radical and fundamental changes in the ways we view and manage cities, we are likely to see many cities in this country fail- literally and figuratively. However, in the past few years there has been more discussion about a rediscovery of American cities and a potential reversal in the flow of population and capital back into the city. How real and widespread is this rediscovery and does it indicate some powerful new trends for a renewal of American cities or is it an isolated trend affecting only a few cities across the country?

This course is not going to dwell on a long litany of problems but will focus on opportunities and strategies for change. We will use the experiences of The Providence Plan (TPP) as a base for our analysis but we will also borrow freely from experiences in other cities. We will focus on the public policy, economic, political, institutional and social issues that confront and challenge cities as they attempt to implement comprehensive plans for change.

The Providence Plan is a private, non-profit corporation representing a joint-venture partnership of city and state government and including representatives of the private business and university community along with local community members. TPP's mission is to provide a strategic, long term and comprehensive planning and policy capacity for the broader Providence community by focusing on six major and interrelated goals, namely;

1. Put people to work,
2. Revitalize downtown Providence,
3. Provide decent and affordable housing,
4. Reform the public schools,
5. Make the neighborhoods safe and livable,
6. Keep the city's middle class.

The Providence Plan works to achieve these goals by acting as a catalyst and a convenor, pulling together all the key constituencies around a shared agenda for action on the major issues facing the city. Our website at www.provplan.org provides more information about the organization as well as a wealth of information about Providence's neighborhoods and people. I encourage all students to use the site as a resource for team projects and other research about the city.

This course will also reflect the biases, perspectives and experiences of the teacher. I have been teaching this course for the past ten years and I have learned much from that experience. I have valued and appreciated the feedback I received from students and I

have made changes to improve the course each year. But I want all of you to know that I am not an academic- that I do not have the training or the background of those professionals who are primarily involved in teaching and learning. I am a practitioner and that brings different strengths and weaknesses which are reflected in my approach to this course.

I am also a strong believer in cities. I accepted The Providence Plan job because of my long commitment to cities and my strong conviction that the battle to save and revitalize America's cities is at bottom a battle over the fundamental values and beliefs which guide this country. I am convinced that cities represent the front lines in our attempts as a society to confront and resolve the major issues of race and class that continue to divide us. If we lose the cities, I am afraid that we lose our major opportunity as a country to realize the American Dream for all our people.

The challenges facing American cities are significant and require new, bold and innovative strategies for change if we are to succeed in creating viable urban communities for people to live, work and play. We do not have the time or the luxury for marginal tinkering at the edges- rather we must figure out how to create comprehensive and sustainable strategies that can mobilize broad constituencies for change. This course will explore the following key themes in creating those strategies:

Scale: The issue of going to scale, how to replicate on a broader basis successful interventions, what level of mobilization is necessary, do some issues lend themselves more readily than others to a scale approach, and are there constituencies to support scale?

Comprehensive: What does this mean and how to achieve it? Where are the successful models and how key was the choice of a particular governance and delivery system? The critical difference between coordination and integration and the need to create new structures for implementing change.

Strategic: Are some issues more critical than others are and why? We need to understand roles and relationships among the key parties and be able to identify opportunities for shared victories. The importance of choosing the right time, place and leading points for intervention.

Partnerships: While this term has become trite from its overuse, the fact remains that without real and genuine partnerships that bring together people and institutions from many different sectors and with different perspectives, we simply do not have the capacity to win. The course will examine a range of partnership approaches and try to determine what seem to be the critical lessons for success.

Political Action: Political action, meaning the building of a majority constituency for change, is the key to winning. Political analysis and a political action campaign must be central to any program for change. It offers an ideal opportunity for constituency building and provides for tangible and concrete victories. "Politics" must guide our choice of issues, our timing, our identification of allies and our plans for mobilizing the broader public.

Required Readings:

1. **Comeback Cities**, Paul Grogan & Tony Proscio
2. **When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor**, William Julius Wilson

In addition, there will be selected articles and other reading materials, which will be used to supplement the main readings.

Course Requirements:

Students will be expected to have read the assigned reading prior to class and be prepared to critically discuss the topics. While quality discussion is always preferred to quantity, all students will be expected to be active participants in class. During the course of the semester, students will have the opportunity to assist in planning and leading two classes. Performance in this role will be considered as part of class participation. In addition, there will be two short public policy memos on specific topics, which will be required of all students. Finally, all students will work as a member of a three to four person team on a semester long major report analyzing and making recommendations to specific Providence based clients- local non-profits including neighborhood civic organizations, community development corporations, social service organizations or public agencies on a key policy issue facing the organization. Grades will be based 40% on class participation, 20% on policy memos and 40% on the semester project, where a single grade will be given to each team.

These semester projects and final presentations have typically required a familiarity with technical skills in data gathering and analysis, mapping and PowerPoint presentations. During the semester, we will try to arrange additional opportunities for students to gain a greater understanding of these applications.

I have put together a course website with the course schedule, relevant reading materials and other useful information at <http://local.provplan.org/pp170>.