

Introduction to Urban Life

URPA 1301-001, Fall 2014 Syllabus (version 1.0)
Thursdays, 7 - 9:50 p.m., University Hall, Room 025

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SUPA's urban affairs mission

To help provide society with the competent, responsible and reliable individuals needed to deal with increasingly complex and urgent urban problems, as well as career opportunities, by educating young men and women with emphasis on issues, problems, and public policy questions related to life in urban communities.

Course description

The course subject matter is relatively limitless. The challenge is to capture the most meaningful and current aspects of urban life and how the practical application of fundamental principles, practices and theories will help achieve community betterment and an increased quality of life. There's no better place to study this subject than in the midst of the fastest growing urban area in the United States.

In *Introduction to Urban Life* we will examine the reasons for the growth and development of cities and the different ways in which people live in cities. A majority of people in the United States, and most of the world, live in urban cities. The purpose of this course is for students to gain an understanding of life in the city. In the course, we will cover the history of the city; the physical, social, political, and economic structure of the city; as well as current issues facing urban dwellers today.

In this class we will engage in the understanding of public policy, economic opportunity, community service, urban culture, and how to develop your role in it all. Economic and political changes beyond the city, changes in government, spending priorities, all affect local conditions and the ability of city governments to address fundamental needs and solve problems. Beyond the operations of the local government, we will discover the role of the private sector in developing the place we call home. Cities do not stand alone, and thus a true understanding of urban life requires a broad perspective.

This course is more about real world experience and less about theories of urban life. Before there is research and speculation about what might be, we first must examine the actuality of life in the city. We will be doing more exploring the realities than speculating.

Importance of this course

Among the characteristics that contribute to the quality of life for American citizens are conditions, services, support systems, educational programs, economic factors, recreational and leisure time opportunities and much more that are all part of the fabric of the urban community. Betterment of the community through active participation in all facets of its life

is a responsibility of all its citizens. From exercising the fundamental practices of democracy to volunteer service to supporting activities and institutions that are vital to individual and collective needs, everyone has a role to play. This course is designed to develop an awareness of all of this and to examine ways to support the most desirable outcomes of urban life in today's society.

This course should be especially useful for those seeking careers in any field that involves or connects with any aspect of urban life. From local government to community service to economic activities based in the community, understanding the dynamics of the city, the special challenges, needs, problems, and opportunities that characterize urban life in today's fast paced information age are all part of what we will study. The results of such study should empower students with knowledge and information that will enhance the potential for success in career and personal endeavors.

Structure of the course

The course is organized into four overlapping and connected categories: (1) history and culture – vital to understanding who we are and how we became who we are, (2) local governments and their role in serving, organizing, regulating, and managing life in the urban community, (3) economic conditions and the community's dependence on the success of the business sector, and (4) the importance of and opportunities for community service, understanding the importance and operations of the community's not-for-profit organizations and the tangible and intangible values that define the community and lead to the development of community pride and how to acquire the quality of life you desire.

Expected learning outcomes

At the conclusion of the course, you should be able to:

- Demonstrate a broad understanding of the impact of local government policies and how those policies are developed in a democratic process.
- Identify and summarize the major historical, political, legal, economic and social trajectories of contemporary life in the urban community.
- Identify some of the major challenges confronting large populations living among a number of jurisdictions and different political units within the same geographic area.
- Explain why and how urban policy debates are rife with conflict among economic and personal objectives and how those controversies are resolved.
- Develop an understanding of how to achieve success through collaboration and the use of collective resources among diverse interests to produce desired outcomes.
- Understand the occasion of special opportunities that enhance the tangible and intangible values of the community.
- Realize your own role in the life of the community based on your needs, opportunities, responsibilities, and interests.
- Define "civic pride" and "quality of life".

Course topics

I intend to address these topics and others that are relevant to the objectives of this course from week to week, in generally the order listed here - subject to revision, modification, overlapping and changes that will occur during the semester:

- History, social & political culture of Texas - how that culture impacts urban life today
- The history and development of a modern urban community
- The relationship of the urban community to federal/state gov't
- The purpose and outcome of engagement in community issues
- How local government is organized – form and structure
- Building things & growing the city – capital improvements
- Dallas at the Tipping Point – case study in urban life
- The role of non-profit organizations in the urban community
- Economic impact in the public sector – cost, benefits, values
- Economic impact in the private sector – economic development
- Collaboration among cities in the larger urban region

As the instructor for this course, I reserve the right to adjust this schedule in any way that serves the educational needs of students enrolled in this class.

Major assignments and examinations

Evaluation and grading will be based onⁱ:

Attendance and in-class participation (includes oral presentation)	25%
Mid-term exam	30%
Written assignments	15%
Final exam	30%

Grades will be determined by rank ordering the weighted scores and identifying breaks between groups of students. There is no set score attributable to a specific letter grade. Grades can be curved down as well as up.

Attendance and Class Participation

This lecture course will revolve around my weekly presentations and in-class participation by students. Each student will be expected to attend all classes, read all assigned materials, remain attentive, and engage in discussion. *Note:* Students who wish to take notes during class time are welcome to do so and you may use your laptop computer or electronic tablet for this purpose but for this purpose only. Surfing web sites or any other activity on the laptop is not permitted during class. No other electronic devices should be active during class time. Such activity is distracting to other students and I need your full attention if we are to accomplish the objectives and learning outcomes described above. I will know it if these guidelines are not followed and deductions will be made to this portion of your grade calculation.

The importance of faithful attendance is directly connected to achieving the outcomes of this course and will significantly impact your final grade in two important ways – first as an element itself of the grading method I use and secondly as significant support for high performance on the two main examinations. Students with good attendance records do better on the exams.

In-class participation consists of responding to my questions during lectures, offering verbal comments and questions of your own, and general discussion. I recognize that some students are not inclined to verbally participate and that's okay as participation also can be achieved by giving me your full attention during the class period.

Week-to-week special assignments: From time to time students will be responsible for presenting a brief summary of an assigned case study or current event and discussing its relevance to issues and concerns in the development of knowledge this course is designed to achieve. These assignments will be made from week to week.

Course materials

There is no textbook required for this course. Every week I will deliver, first by classroom presentation and then by posting on Blackboard, the material for each week's lesson. You will use this material to prepare for the two examinations. At the end of the course you will have a compendium of all the information we have covered and that will constitute a data base that is very specific to this course and designed to achieve the learning outcomes outline above.

We will also make use of case studies and analytical materials. During the class time, I will identify which study(s) that will be assigned for the upcoming week's class. Students should be diligent in reading and comprehending these cases as they represent real world examples of urban life events, activities, and their impact on the community. Students should be prepared to engage in discussion as part of in-class participation.

Course schedule – key dates (subject to revision)

Week 1 – Aug 21	Introduction and overview of the course, the professor, understanding the syllabus, definition and meaning of terms, and answering questions
Week 8 – Oct 9	Mid-term examination
Week 15 – Nov 27	No class – Thanksgiving
Week 16 – Dec 4	Oral presentations
Week 17 – Dec 11	Final exam, written reports due

Team Project/Research Paper

With a partner, you will create a profile of an urban dweller, real or imagined, including his/her relationship with the city. Take into consideration elements of the local economy, political influences, social conditions, spatial elements, and the impact that he/she has on the community, organizations, or neighborhood.

The results of your project will be presented in two formats: first, through an in-class oral presentation at the end of the semester and second, in a written three-page paper due on the day of the final exam. Additional details of this assignment and suggestions of how to develop it will be provided at the beginning of the second half of the semester.

Classroom conduct

Our class meets from 7 to 9:50 p.m. There will be a five-minute break approximately mid way through the class session. Students should be punctual, remain attentive and refrain from doing anything that distracts from the learning environment. Each student will be expected to attend all classes, be attentive (no sleeping, no texting, no emailing, no gaming, no web surfing, etc.), read all assigned materials, and participate. Late arrival will negatively impact the attendance portion of grade determination. Think of class attendance and focus on the class presentation as experience in participating in a meeting of your fellow citizens in the urban community where important needs, opportunities, solutions to problems, and the betterment of the quality of life is being pursued.

Communication with students

Our primary means of communication shall be via your official UT Arlington email account and the use of the university's *Blackboard* resources – see details in items F and G below.

Important Notes

- A. *Academic Integrity* – Students enrolled all UT Arlington courses are expected to adhere to the UT Arlington Honor Code:
- a. *I pledge, on my honor, to uphold UT Arlington's tradition of academic integrity, a tradition that values hard work and honest effort in the pursuit of academic excellence.*
 - b. *I promise that I will submit only work that I personally create or contribute to group collaborations, and I will appropriately reference any work from other sources. I will follow the highest standards of integrity and uphold the spirit of the Honor Code.*

UT Arlington faculty members may employ the Honor Code as they see fit in their courses, including (but not limited to) having students acknowledge the honor code as part of an examination or requiring students to incorporate the honor code into any work submitted. Per UT System *Regents' Rule* 50101, §2.2, suspected violations of university's standards for academic integrity (including the Honor Code) will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Violators will be disciplined in accordance with University policy, which may result in the student's suspension or expulsion from the University.

- B. *Writing quality* – You are expected to produce any written reports in a style and manner consistent with college-level work. The Writing Center, 411 Central Library, offers individual 40-minute sessions to review assignments, *Quick Hits* (5-10 minute quick answers to questions), and workshops on grammar and specific writing projects. Visit <https://uta.mywconline.com/> to register and make appointments. For hours, information about the writing workshops we offer, scheduling a classroom visit, and descriptions of the services we offer undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty members, please visit our website at www.uta.edu/owl/.
- C. *Formatting papers* – Required formatting: *Page numbers*: top or bottom. *Margins*: top and bottom 1"; side 1.25". *Font*: Verdana 10 point or an equivalent 10 point font, you may also use Times New Roman 12 point – use caps and lower case, always avoid the use of all caps except in titles or headings. *Line spacing*: 1.0 or 1.5

lines (i.e., not double-spaced). *Paragraph spacing*: one line spaced, no extra spacing before or after. *Alignment*: left only. *Hint*: the format you are looking at is correct.

I do not want a binder, folder, or other holder for the paper – just the pages, stapled together in the upper left corner.

- D. *Americans with Disabilities Act* – The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*. All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Any student requiring an accommodation for this course must provide the instructor with official documentation in the form of a letter certified by the staff in the Office for Students with Disabilities, University Hall 102. Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at www.uta.edu/disability or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364
- E. *Student Support Services* – UT Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. Resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals, students may visit the reception desk at University College (Ransom Hall), call the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107, send a message to resources@uta.edu, or view the information at www.uta.edu/resources.
- F. *Electronic communication* – UT Arlington has adopted MavMail as its official means to communicate with students about important deadlines and events, as well as to transact university-related business regarding financial aid, tuition, grades, graduation, etc. All students are assigned a MavMail account and are responsible for checking the inbox regularly. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, which remains active even after graduation. Information about activating and using MavMail is available at <http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/email/mavmail.php>. *This course will rely extensively on e-mail communication via your official UT-Arlington email address. Students are responsible for checking their email regularly.*
- G. *Blackboard* – In addition to the distribution via email of notices and materials, we will use this facility to access information I will post for you including weekly presentations and other course materials. <http://www.uta.edu/blackboard/students>
- H. *Drop policy* - Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student's responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. **Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance.** Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships (<http://www.uta.edu/aao/fao/>).

- I. Title IX - The University of Texas at Arlington is committed to upholding U.S. Federal Law "Title IX" such that no member of the UT Arlington community shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity. For more information, visit www.uta.edu/titleIX.
- J. Student Feedback Survey - At the end of each term, students enrolled in classes categorized as "lecture," "seminar," or "laboratory" shall be directed to complete an online Student Feedback Survey (SFS). Instructions on how to access the SFS for this course will be sent directly to each student through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. Each student's feedback enters the SFS database anonymously and is aggregated with that of other students enrolled in the course. UT Arlington's effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback is required by state law; students are strongly urged to participate. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/sfs>.
- K. Final Review Week - A period of five class days prior to the first day of final examinations in the long sessions shall be designated as Final Review Week. The purpose of this week is to allow students sufficient time to prepare for final examinations. During this week, there shall be no scheduled activities such as required field trips or performances; and no instructor shall assign any themes, research problems or exercises of similar scope that have a completion date during or following this week *unless specified in the class syllabus*. During Final Review Week, an instructor shall not give any examinations constituting 10% or more of the final grade, except makeup tests and laboratory examinations. In addition, no instructor shall give any portion of the final examination during Final Review Week. During this week, classes are held as scheduled. In addition, instructors are not required to limit content to topics that have been previously covered; they may introduce new concepts as appropriate.
- L. Emergency Exit Procedures - Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit, which is located adjacent to this classroom. When exiting the building during an emergency, one should never take an elevator but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist individuals with disabilities.

ⁱ You will be notified in the unlikely event these percentages are modified.