

**Sociology 4320: Sociology of Urban Life**  
**Fall 2006**

Contact

Dr. James Fraser  
Department of Geography  
North Carolina Central University  
Office: 303-C  
Phone: 698-6402  
[pavement@unc.edu](mailto:pavement@unc.edu)  
Contact for appointment

Class Meetings

Thursdays 6:00pm-8:45pm  
Gardner 209

“City maps are supposed to help people get where they want to go, but because the map-makers ignore so many differences among cities, their maps are often much less useful than they ought to be.”  
- *Harvey Molotch*

Course overview

This course will provide a detailed introduction into the ways that sociologists, as well as more generally urban studies scholars, have thought about, researched, and studied processes of urbanization and urbanism. The first few weeks of class will focus on policy related issues that cities and city-regions face. This will be complemented by a detailed section on urban governance that will provide the “nuts and bolts” of how cities are governed as well as theoretical frameworks that urban scholars have created to make sense of the city. The last part of the class will consist of examining “community” alternatives to capitalist-oriented urban redevelopment that tends to have disadvantaging effects upon economic and socially vulnerable populations. The course will entail an active learning component including an applied research project component.

Course format and expectations

It is expected that students will have all readings and assignments for the class date completed before class sessions begin. Individual class sessions will be primarily structured with at least three activities including discussion of the readings, group activities using current events, and then project updates or assignment discussion. Students are expected to adhere to the University honor code.

Grading

Grading will follow the standard grading system of the university (A, B, C, D, F). You will be writing response papers (short essays) weekly on the readings as well as class assignments. **These need to be posted to me on the Blackboard a day prior to class.** These essays will constitute 50% of your final grade. In addition, 50% of your grade will be based on conducting a study on a relevant topic to the class. For a general indication of how grades are to be assigned, “A” course work demonstrates an excellent understanding of course material and themes, significant contributions in class discussions, completion of well argued papers indicating a high level of critical thinking. “B” course work demonstrates a strong understanding of course material and themes, consistent contributions in class discussions, completion of well written papers that

demonstrate some critical thinking. “C” course work demonstrates a general understanding of course material and themes, minimal contributions in class discussions, and completion of papers that summarize ideas examined in the course. “D” course work demonstrates a vague understanding of course material and themes, occasional or no contributions in class discussions, incompleteness of, or poorly written, assignments. “F” course work demonstrates that a student was a virtual class member, did not demonstrate completion of readings, or turn in satisfactory assignments.

### Response Papers

The response paper should demonstrate a coherent account of the material and your analytical assessment of what has been presented. Therefore, it is not enough to regurgitate what the authors have said, rather students should critically reflect on the issues presented and pose relevant responses that will assist in guiding class discussion. Full credit for these assignments is based upon three criteria: depth, posting them 24 hours prior to class for me to evaluate/read, and being able to use them as a springboard for your contributions during class. Each response paper should focus on a topic from the reading that one could carve into meaningful sections including review, response, and any supporting material to substantiate your perspective. This may require going beyond the reading to other sources (newspaper, academic readings, internet) to make your case. The format of the response papers is two-three typed pages (1.5 spacing and 12 point font).

### Readings & Course Materials

There are four books that may be found at the student bookstore. Additional readings will be provided via Blackboard:

1. *Unmasking Goliath: Community Control in the Face of Global Capital* (2004). James DeFilippis. Routledge.
2. *Place Matters: Metropolitcs for the Twenty-first Century* (Second Edition, 2004). Peter Dreier, John Mollenkopf, and Todd Swanstrom..University Press of Kansas.
3. *City Politics: Private Power and Public Policy* (Fourth Edition, 2003). Dennis Judd and Todd Swanstrom. Longman Publishers.
4. *Urban Theory and the Urban Experience: Encountering the City* (2004). Simon Parker. Routledge.

## Schedule of Classes

### Week 1-2

- Reading Chapters 1-3 in “Place Matters”
- ❖ Activities **Week 1:** 1. Introduction to the class; 2. Student introductions; 3. Lecture on social inequality in the city - **Week 2:** 1. Discussion of response papers with a focus on how neighborhood characteristics affect family and child well being as well as opportunity 2. Class debate – how are race and class important for understanding urban segregation?

### Week 3

- Reading Chapters 4-5 in “Place Matters”
- ❖ Activities 1. Discussion of response papers with a focus on the ways the state (government at all levels) impacts urban growth; 2. Discussion on shifting state-market-civil society relationships: the case of mixed-income housing in Durham, NC.

### Week 4

- Reading Chapters 6-8 in “Place Matters”
- ❖ Activities 1. Discussion of response papers with a focus on why regionalism/regional governance is cast as a good thing for metropolitan areas; 2. Class debate on chapter 7 and the policy suggestions that the authors put forward to solve urban/metropolitan problems; 3. Introduction to research assignment.

### Week 5

- Reading Chapters 1-4 in “City Politics”
- ❖ Activities 1. Discussion of response papers with a focus on early forms of city government and reform; 2. Introduction to research methods and data urban researchers use.

### Week 6

- Reading Chapters 5-8 in “City Politics”
- ❖ Activities 1. Discussion of response papers with a focus on federal urban renewal policies; 2. Lecture/discussion on housing and urban renewal politics of Birmingham, AL. during the twentieth century; 3. Continuation of research project discussion (the set up).

#### Week 7

- Reading Chapters 9-11 in “City Politics”
- ❖ Activities 1. Discussion of response papers with a focus on economic segregation and privately managed communities; 2. Lecture/discussion on sprawl and smart growth; 3. Film: Subdivide and Conquer.

#### Weeks 8

- Reading Chapters 12-15 in “City Politics”
- ❖ Activities 1. Discussion of response papers with a focus on urban finances and economic development and growth strategies; 2. Lecture/discussion on the new economy and discourses of “competitive cities” and the creative class; 3. Update on research projects.

#### Week 9

- Reading Displacement, Exclusion and Gentrification Papers (to be placed on Blackboard)
- ❖ Activities 1. Discussion of response papers with a focus on gentrification; 2. Film: Flag Wars

#### Week 10

- Reading Chapters 1-4 in “Urban Theory”
- ❖ Activities 1. Discussion of response papers with a focus on inequality and space (we will discuss how cities are produced and inhabited according to the theorists covered in the chapters); 2. Group project: we will split into groups and develop our own utopian visions for a city. Questions to consider should stem from the reading; 3. Update on research projects

#### Week 11-12

- Reading Chapters 5-7 (8-9 for last part of Week 12) in “Urban Theory”
- ❖ Activities Week 11: 1. Discussion of response papers with a focus on the ghetto and the capitalist city; 2. Lecture/discussion on ways urban studies has examined have defined types of cities according to capitalist logic, and discussion of alternative approaches.
- ❖ Activities Week 12: 1. Discussion of response papers with a focus on revisiting ways of theorizing urban politics and governance; 2. Lecture/discussion on the re-making of Durham, NC; 3. Update on research projects.

Week 13

- Reading Introduction and Chapters 1-2 in “Unmaking Goliath”
  
- ❖ Activities 1. Discussion of response papers with a focus on globalization and the case for community control; 2. Lecture/discussion on the relationship between community development, control and civil rights.

Week 14

- Reading Chapters 3-6 in “Unmaking Goliath”
  
- ❖ Activities 1. Discussion of response papers with a focus on collective ownership of work, housing and money; 2. Update on research projects

Week 15

- Reading Epilogue in “Unmaking Goliath” and Selected Readings (to be posted on Blackboard)
  
- ❖ Activities 1. Discussion of response papers on the politics of scale; 2. Complete work on research project presentations.

Week 16

- Final Class Presentations