PURPOSE AND GOALS

A possible starting definition suggests that planning and public policy entail attempts “to transform reality according to the ideas and images of what we think reality ought to be” (Sack, 2003, p. 4).* Much of your education in planning and policy takes something like this definition as given and offers instruction in how to carry out such transformation. Typical questions involve how to prepare better plans, design better or more affordable housing, engineer more efficient transportation systems, or create healthier or more aesthetically pleasing environments; how to select among alternative strategies and options; how to implement the chosen transformations; and how to evaluate the results.

Hidden behind (and supporting and directing) these practices are powerful, complex, and often contentious theories and assumptions that both enable and challenge the conduct of planning and public policy. This seminar has two goals in opening up this black box of theory:

1. to identify and deconstruct some of the theoretical building-blocks underlying the idea and practice of planning and public policy; and
2. to consider the power of theory in affecting, even determining, how we do our work in planning and public policy.

How does theory affect how we engage with the world, how we comprehend the reality we seek to transform, and how we form our vision of what reality ought to be? Is there a universally recognizable reality waiting for us to discover it or does reality depend on our theoretical frameworks and/or our individually unique vantage points? If the latter, which reality do we seek to transform, and whose “ideas and images” define the goals of such transformation? Who is the “we” that decides “what we think reality ought to be?” How do technology, ideology, and expertise alter our perceptions, understandings, methods, and goals? How do power relations channel and deflect the transformative process? Through what institutional structure(s), including those of the state, is the transformation of reality accomplished, and with what consequences? How are class, race, ethnicity, gender and other vectors of difference and identity accommodated in decision-making, and is this process compatible with the democratic ideal? How do ethics, morality, and values enter the decision-making process? And finally, what are the implications of these questions (and their answers) for theory-building, for social science research, and for the practice of planning and public policy?

Our readings throughout the semester attempt to answer these questions by drawing from an extensive literature vaguely characterized as “social theory.” Broadly speaking, this literature is “social” because it situates the transformative act as a collective, social project. And it is “theoretical” because it offers a framework or approach to guide understanding. This seminar will read intensively yet selectively within the “social theory” literature to help us define issues, develop an approach, and assemble tools that help address fundamental questions regarding the work of theory in the production of knowledge in planning, public policy, and the social sciences more generally.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **Reading and active participation in seminar discussions (40%).** This is an advanced doctoral-level seminar in which all participants share responsibility for reading and discussing the materials assigned for each class meeting. At the beginning of each weekly meeting, every seminar participant will identify questions or issues pertaining to the week’s readings. These will serve as our discussion agenda for the week.

2. **Completion of four written critical essays (6-10 pages each) discussing and evaluating the weekly readings (40%).** You may select readings for any four weeks during the semester as the subject of your review essays but you must submit four essays prior to the last class meeting. Guidelines for preparing these essays will be distributed at the first class meeting. Your essays should not merely summarize the readings; rather, they should offer a critical assessment of, and engagement with, ideas or issues in the readings. Papers are due at the beginning of the class session when the reading is discussed. Essays should be typed, double-spaced, in 12-point type, and must conform to professional standards of grammar, punctuation, and citation format.

3. **Take-home final exam (20%)** reflecting on the readings and discussion over the semester; 6-10 pages due within one week after the last seminar meeting

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and will result in a grade of ‘F’ or zero (0) for the assignment in question. The University’s policy on academic integrity is available at https://slwordpress.rutgers.edu/academicintegrity/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2014/11/Al_Policy_2013.pdf More information is at http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/

REQUIRED READINGS

The following books are available at the Rutgers Bookstore and used copies are widely available. I may distribute additional readings from time to time to augment (or disrupt) our discussions. Items listed as “additional readings” below are suggested should you be interested in reading more deeply into a topic.

SEMINAR SCHEDULE

Sept. 11  INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW
Aims – definitions – ground rules – essay guidelines – readings – knowledge and power – theory and method – theory or Theory?

Additional reading:

Sept. 18  KNOWLEDGE, TECHNOLOGY, POWER, AND POLICY
Read: Timothy Mitchell, Rule of Experts, pages 1 – 119.

Additional reading:

Sept. 25  CONSTRUCTING THE SUBJECT

Additional reading:
Oct. 2  
**POWER, POLITICS, POLICY, AND PLANNING**


*Additional reading:*


Oct. 9  
**STATES AND MARKETS**


*Self-regulating markets – market and society – embeddedness – fictitious commodities – wealth and poverty – welfare – class*

*Additional reading:*


Oct. 16  
**STATE REGULATION**


*Laissez-faire – (neo)liberalism – regulation – planning – nationhood – freedom*

*Additional reading:*


Oct. 23  
**THE STATE–1**  
What is the state? – the capitalist state – state crisis – governance and metagovernance – welfare state to competition state – neoliberalism – globalization  

**Additional reading:**  

Oct. 30  
**THE STATE–2**  
Social welfare policy – state and territory – spatial scale, globalization, and the national state – governance systems – future form(s) of the state – state and capital  

**Additional reading:**  

Nov. 6  
**DEMOCRACY, THE STATE, AND THE PUBLIC**  

**Additional reading:**  
Nov. 13

**IDENTITY, DIFFERENCE, AND DEMOCRACY**

*Read: Iris Young, Inclusion and Democracy.*


**Additional reading:**


Nov. 20

**POLITICS, POLICY-MAKING, AND THE POLICY PROCESS**

*Read: Alice O’Connor, Poverty Knowledge.*

Social science – politics of knowledge – politics of policy-making – problem definition – traditions and paradigms – poverty knowledge and social policy – the knowledge industry

**Additional reading:**


Nov. 27

**GOVERNANCE, POWER, AND POWERLESSNESS**

*Read: Barbara Cruikshank, The Will to Empower.*


**Additional reading:**


Dec. 4  
THEORY AND PRACTICE; THINKING AND KNOWING  
Read: Bent Flybvjerg, Making Social Science Matter.  
Forms of inquiry – the possibility of theory – expertise, again – science, ethics, and common sense – voice – theory and method – research – “social” science

Additional reading:  


Dec. 11  
SUMMARY  
Theory and metatheory – theory/method – knowledge and understanding – politics of calculability – categorical thinking – processual thinking – reflexive thinking – the authoritarianism of expertise – theory as thoughtlessness – theory as liberation – on not knowing the answer

Additional reading:  


