

## FINAL PROJECT ASSIGNMENT

**This assignment has several parts, with distinct due dates, as outlined below.**

**You'll begin by posting some interests to the course website by Session 15—see below.**

### OBJECTIVES

This assignment has several objectives:

- a. To enable you to *apply* your interests and experience, together with critical concepts in the course, to real-world problems that interest you, as distinct from problems and questions posed by the assigned readings or the teaching team;
- b. To further develop your skills at *teamwork*—identifying problems, generating ideas, applying critical analysis, seeking information and other forms of support, and producing workproducts as a group;
- c. To help you develop your skill at *professional presentations*, understood to mean preparing and delivering relevant arguments effectively to a given audience, not just practicing the mechanics of public speaking.
- d. To hone your skill at *professional writing*—clear, concise, and precise writing that is relevant to real-world decision problems and choices.

### PROJECT STRUCTURE AND CONCEPT

This project invites you to work with 2-3 teammates on a critical problem and/or opportunity in the housing and community development field. Teams of 2-4 persons seem to balance capacity with manageability well.

While projects that include historical analysis are welcome, your analysis and message should be relevant in some clear way to what the field faces now and in the future.

What kinds of problems and opportunities suit the assignment? These criteria may be helpful:

- *Significance*: the questions you tackle and answers you ultimately propose should reflect issues of significant concern and give you room to propose bold possibilities. This does not mean that we expect you to come up with ideas that have never before been considered or that magically resolve long-standing dilemmas. It does mean that we

expect you to scope out and complete a project with a clear and compelling “so what?”

- *Complexity*: the stakes and choices should be multi-dimensional enough that straightforward, technical answers will not suffice. This course is a critical introduction to the field. You should tackle something that requires a reflective, multi-faceted analysis, one that considers and integrates political, economic, social, operational, and other considerations, as appropriate.
- *Interest*: at the risk of stating the obvious, the issues and actors involved should truly engage you. All project work has ups and downs, but your continued interest in the substance—in what’s at stake—is important for an assignment that includes (a) multiple submissions of work; and (b) significant investments of time with teammates to develop the best-possible ideas and deliver professional quality workproducts that reflect those ideas.

## **ASSIGNMENT PARTS**

You will submit:

- *A team-produced problem statement*, not to exceed two double-spaced pages, in which you frame your project so that we can give you early feedback. Many roadblocks in thinking can be traced to the failure to set up a problem well. The problem statement should clearly and briefly identify your scope (the key question or decision puzzles at the heart of your project and why you have chosen that focus), the stakes and stakeholders, and what analytic approach you intend to take, using what kinds of data and sources. One member of the team should post the statement, and it should name all team members. After the due date, you’ll be able to view other teams’ submissions online. And before you submit, feel free to email Phil and Justin with a preliminary idea, i.e. if you’d like to get a quick reaction; and
- *A final team presentation* (not to exceed 12 minutes, with an additional 5-10 minutes for questions and answers). It should include a visual component (e.g. slide show) and handout (the hardcopy slides typically suffice if they are well-organized and rich in content). All team members should participate equally in generating ideas, gathering data, conducting analysis, and creating the presentation and handouts. The presentation can be by all team members or by a subset of the team, but everyone should be prepared to answer questions. We’ll want a serious, focused engagement with you during your presentation, in light of all your hard work and to target high standards of delivery. But we also want to celebrate that work and

your ideas. We will serve food and have some down time for conversation. It is meant to be fun and productive.

- A team produced *decision memo*, not to exceed 3,500 words (including footnotes, references, tables, etc.), presenting your analysis and recommendations in written form. The decision memo should not be an opinion piece but should cogently present the question or problem, the analytic approach, relevant evidence, and action options and advice. The document should lead with a concise and integrative summary (the whole in miniature), not just a preview of the contents. It should engage deeply with the strongest counterarguments, presenting them fairly and explaining why your analysis or proposed solution is more accurate. It should also engage with the power dynamics relevant to implementation—who has the power to create this change, who are natural allies and opponents, what are potential points of leverage, what are the intermediate steps toward implementation?

### **ASSIGNMENT CALENDAR: Deadlines**

**By Session 15:** team problem statement due

**By Session 23:** individual decision memo due

**Sessions 24 and 25** (in class): team presentations.

### **GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS**

**Late submissions and extensions.** The course website will indicate on-time versus late submissions for each part of the assignment. There is a standard grace period of 60 minutes, but avoid last-minute submission: you should allow time for technical glitches. We grant extensions in case of true personal emergencies: contact the teaching team as soon as possible, and propose a specific, new submission day and time *if* possible. We will have to penalize unexcused late submissions, in fairness to your classmates.

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11.401 Introduction to Housing, Community, and Economic Development  
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