

PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

COMMERCIAL DISTRICT REVITALIZATION

USP 427-527 – Three Credits

Tuesdays 6:40-9:20 p.m.

Lincoln Hall – Room: 301

Office Hours

By appointment

Ernesto Fonseca, PhD (Instructor)

Dr. Ernesto Fonseca was born in a small community in Central Mexico and later immigrated to the United States, where he has dedicated his career to addressing the needs of local communities. His work focuses on designing and developing healthy, inclusive housing, advancing equitable policies, and supporting leaders who champion these goals.

Dr. Fonseca earned a specialty in soils and construction from the Universidad de Guadalajara, a master's degree in Climate Responsive Architecture from Arizona State University, and a Ph.D. in Environmental Design and Planning, also from Arizona State University.

While in Arizona, he led groundbreaking initiatives to evaluate the health impacts of urban development, focusing on issues like gentrification, public transportation access, affordable housing, and public policy. Currently, Dr. Fonseca serves as the Chief Executive Officer of Hacienda CDC in Portland, Oregon, where he continues to advocate for equitable community development.

Skills and Experience

Sustainable communities and healthy housing; Housing finance & development; Urban and housing planning; Green housing; Community participation and cultural sustainability; Small business development; Grant writing and administration; Fundraising and political advocacy; Communications and public relations; and program management.

ABOUT OUR CLASS, COMMERCIAL DISTRICT REVITALIZATION

What makes a place, portions of a city, or entire districts vibrant, desirable, healthy, safe, and ultimately nurturing inclusive and thriving communities? This course explores some of the elements that make these places work well for most through workforce development, housing, neighborhood amenities, social enterprise, microenterprise development, public policies and more.

Every community is unique and develops differently. The inhabitants and visitors shape those communities based on their needs, values, and economic and natural resources. In this class, students will gain practical skills to identify some of the ingredients that make these places great or not so great. This will include studying some programs that empower individuals and communities economically, taking a quick dive into policies that didn't work, some best practices that support the establishment and development of small business and social enterprises, urban planning strategies that make cities safe and walkable, real estate inventory, in particular housing, and how all of this promotes or impedes progress, whatever that may mean for such communities. Students will also learn the role of government, the non-profit sector, the private sector, educational institutions, and philanthropy in advancing these efforts.

Through case studies, guest lectures, and applied projects, this class equips students to lead initiatives that foster equity, sustainability, and economic resilience.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this class is to understand the systematic process of attempting to achieve positive outcomes in urban planning, community and economic development.

Ideally, students completing this course will be:

- able to understand the history, role, and characteristics of district development and redevelopment, mainly commercial districts, and their assets and liabilities, such as housing, mixed-income housing, parks, centers of gathering, etc.
- ...able to create a robust existing conditions assessment for any community, analyzing the physical, social, market, business, financial, political, community, and programmatic conditions of such communities.
- ...able to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges that face main streets and commercial districts.
- ...able to understand the principles and practices of workforce development and their role in economic mobility.
- ...able to design frameworks for establishing and sustaining social enterprises and cooperatives.
- ...aware of the implications of interventions in and on commercial districts for equity, livability, and sustainability.

TEACHING

This course utilizes diverse instructional methods, including lectures, discussions, small group exercises, projects, in-class critiques of research articles, and thematic presentations. The class is structured into two main sections:

First Half:

- Focus on theory and discussion of assigned literature. (45–60 minutes)
- **Break:** 10 minutes

Second Half:

- Case study presentation by a guest speaker or expert. (30–45 minutes)
- **Q&A:** Faculty and guest speaker-led session

Class Discussion

Class discussions will occasionally be challenging, but we will collectively establish a system to facilitate constructive debate. My goal during lectures is to make the content engaging and relevant. To contribute meaningfully, ensure you have completed the assigned readings before each class.

Literature

There are no required textbooks or exams for this course. Instead, short readings are provided on **CANVAS**. Weekly readings are organized in the syllabus and should be completed before the corresponding class session. **Note:** Week One is an exception. In the first session, we will focus on introductions, sharing professional experiences, and identifying relevant topics for discussion.

GENERAL POLICIES

- **Late Assignments:**
Late assignments disrupt equity, pedagogy, and integrity. You may petition for an extension if unavoidable, but communication is essential. Extensions will only be granted if you contact me before the deadline.
- **Academic Integrity:**
All submitted work must be original and prepared for this course. Plagiarism—including self-plagiarism—is strictly prohibited and will result in a zero on the assignment, with potential university-level consequences.
- **Attendance:**
While productivity and quality are prioritized over attendance, showing up is important. Notify me in advance if you need to miss a session.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Item	Assignment	Due Date	Responsibility	Points
1.0	P1. District Needs Assessment	February 4th	Team	35
2.0	P2. District/Development Plan	March 11th	Team	35
3.0	Discussion	All dates	Individual	20
4.0	Attendance	All dates	Individual	10
5.0	TOTAL			100

Assignment details

District Needs Assessment:

- Teams will analyze a selected district, corridor, or commercial area, conducting a thorough "existing conditions assessment."
- Deliverables: A detailed report outlining key issues, deficiencies, and opportunities, including three critical areas to guide the final project. Reports should focus on aspects such as housing, jobs, workforce development, and small business development and all related activities or elements.

District Plan/Development Proposal:

- Teams will propose solutions to at least three issues identified in the Needs Assessment, considering factors like design, zoning, cost, and policy.
- Deliverables: A visual presentation of the proposal, presented to a panel of experts at **PLACE Studio** in Portland, followed by a networking session with community leaders and professionals.
- PLACE Studio, 735 NW 18th Ave, Portland, OR 97209

FINAL PROJECT FRAMEWORK

The final project should address the most critical issues identified in your Needs Assessment and provide innovative solutions tailored to the selected site.

Key Recommendations:

- **Mission Statement:** Develop a clear mission statement to guide your work.
- **Site Selection:** Justify your selection with specific criteria, such as available amenities, community needs, and potential impact.
- **Gap Identification:** Define the community "gap" your project addresses, such as affordable housing, commercial space, infrastructure enhancements, programming, and adjacent supportive services and policies.

Suggested Structure:

- **Project Description:** Title and overview with a compelling narrative linking site selection to development goals.
- **Program:** Detailed explanation of the purpose, target users, and gap being addressed.
- **Location & District/Neighborhood Plan:** Include a conceptual site plan with spatial allocations.
- **Program Details:** Outline desired outcomes and strategies, such as façade renovations, zoning reforms, or economic development programs.
- **Implementation Plan:** Identify stakeholders, their roles, and a timeline for execution.
- **Conclusion:** Summarize the project's long-term potential and describe its envisioned impact on the community.

PROGRAM

Week 1 – January 7

Introductions, policies, general class overview. First 1/2 of class

Brief History of Downtowns and Commercial Districts in US. Second 1/2 of class

Review in your own time on first week:

- Isenberg, Alison. 2004. *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It*. University of Chicago Press. Introduction

Watch:

- *The Dynamic American City* (1956)

Week 2 – January 14

"Blight", Eminent Domain, and Tax Increment Financing

Review:

- Gordon, Colin. 2003. "Blighting the Way: Urban Renewal, Economic Development, and the Elusive Definition of Blight." *Fordham Urban Law Journal*, 31(2): 305-337.
- Weber, Rachel. 2015. "Tax Increment Financing in Theory and Practice" in *Financing Economic Development in the 21st Century*, Sammis B White and Zenia Kotval eds. Routledge. Chapter 12.

Week 3 – January 21

Main Streets, Small Towns, and Neighborhood Commercial Districts; Historic Preservation

Review:

- Robertson, Kent A. 2004. "The Main Street Approach to Downtown Development: An Examination of the Four-Point Program." *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, 21(1): 55-73.
- The Main Street Approach - <https://mainstreet.org/about/how-we-work/the-main-street-approach>
- OCC. 2015. *Historic Tax Credits: Bringing New Life to Older Communities*. <https://www.occ.gov/topics/community-affairs/publications/insights/insights-historic-tax-credits-may-2015.pdf>

Week 4 – January 28

Planning for Downtowns and Commercial Districts: Regulations, Incentives, and Partnerships

Review:

- Malizia, Emil and David A Stebbins. 2015. "Making Downtowns What They Used to Be." *Urban Land*. <https://urbanland.uli.org/development-business/making->

[downtowns-used](#)

Portland, 2016, Central City 2035

Week 5 – February 4

Workforce Development and the Labor Market

Review:

- Workforce Development: Reimagining and Modernizing How to Connect Workers With Good Jobs: <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/a-progressive-vision-for-education-in-the-21st-century/workforce-development-reimagining-and-modernizing-how-to-connect-workers-with-good-jobs/>
- Can workforce development help us reach full employment? <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/can-workplace-development-help-us-reach-full-employment/>
- ABC: 2024 Construction Workforce Shortage Tops Half a Million <https://www.abc.org/News-Media/News-Releases/abc-2024-construction-workforce-shortage-tops-half-a-million>

Week 6 – February 11

Review of Markets, Niches, and Brands; Urban Design and Public Spaces

Review:

- Leinberger, Christopher. 2005. "Turning Around Downtown: Twelve Steps to Revitalization." The Brookings Institution Research Brief.
- Feeding the Downtown Monster

Week 7 – February 18

Small Business Development, Social Enterprises and Co-ops

Review:

- The Critical Role Small Businesses Play in Inner City Revitalization - ICIC <https://icic.org/blog/critical-role-small-businesses-play-inner-city-revitalization/>
- Nine Advantages of the Coop Model: <https://ncbaclusa.coop/blog/advantages-of-the-cooperative-business-model/>
- When Social Enterprise Meets the Cooperative Tradition
- <https://orbi.uliege.be/bitstream/2268/147172/1/Paper%20Defourny%20&%20Nyssens.pdf>

WEEK 8 – February 25

Brownfields, Greyfields, and Ghostboxes.

Review:

- Howland, Marie. 2003. "Private Initiative and Public Responsibility for the Redevelopment of Industrial Brownfields: Three Baltimore Case Studies."

Economic Development Quarterly, 17(4): 367-381.

- Oregon DEQ Environmental Cleanup
- US EPA Brownfields Program

Week 9 – March 4

The Role of Market and Affordable Housing in Urban Development and Employment

Review:

- The Turner Center: The Links Between Affordable Housing and Economic Mobility. The Experiences of Residents Living in Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Properties
- David Schwartz: the importance of affordable housing to economic competitiveness

Week 10 March 11

Final presentations at PLACE

What to expect

- These final presentations will be treated as professional presentations responding to an urban issue that you want to solve. These presentations, as listed above, will include real estate, urban planning, and economic development components.
- The presentations will be presided by an expert panel from beginning to end. This panel will include industry leaders from some of the largest real estate developers in Oregon, Government Agencies, Department Directors, and others. These stakeholders play a significant role in providing regulatory guidance, funding, resources, capacity, or advocacy for housing, commercial districts, and community development.
- **NOTE:** Depending on the number of teams we form, we will determine each presentation's proper time and refine the final requirements.