

**Course:** USP 541 Dynamics of Planning Practice  
**Term:** Winter 2026  
**Days/Times:** Tuesdays  
**Room:** KMC 590

**Instructor:** Matthew Gebhardt  
**Office Hours:** By appointment (via [Google Calendar Appointment](#))  
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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Planning is not neutral work. In every planning decision, there are winners and losers. Planning analysis shines a light on certain factors and not others and values information from one group's perspective and not others. As actors in the planning arena, planners' actions, analysis, and advice have consequences. In this course, we examine the extent to which the individual planner influences and bears responsibility for decisions and choices that are made during planning activities in a rapidly globalizing world. We look at different conceptualizations of the planning process and the planner's role in structuring it, selecting and presenting information, and shaping how issues of diversity, equity, and sustainability are, or are not, addressed. Our aim is to investigate instances of planner's work to understand in practical terms the dilemmas that arise. The objective of the course is to increase the awareness of the ethical consequences of a planner's actions, to begin to develop a framework for systematic analysis, and to encourage personal reflection on values with respect to the world as a whole and the communities with which we work.

### **COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES**

This course is typically taken during the second term of the program. As such, it is meant to introduce concepts and provide a foundation that you will be able/expected to build upon, refine, and master in subsequent courses. The course learning objectives below are associated with [program student learning objectives \(SLOs\)](#) as noted.

This course has two sets of learning objectives. The first set of course learning objectives address conceptual issues related to planning dynamics and ethics. Upon completing the course, students will have an introductory to intermediate ability to:

- Comprehend the philosophies, frameworks, and perspectives for understanding and assessing planning problems, including the AICP Code of Ethics;
- Understand the persistent and emerging conceptual, practical, and ethical dilemmas inherent in planning and development (SLO1 Equity and Social Justice, SLO6 History, Theory, and Institutions);
- Appreciate the roles and (unequal) power of planners, officials, stakeholders, and community members in planning processes and problems (SLO1 Equity and Social Justice, SLO3 Planning as a Political Act);
- Analyze, interpret, and reorient planning practice in light of the above, with particular attention to equity and social justice (SLO1 Equity and Social Justice, SLO3 Planning as a Political Act, and SLO6 History, Theory, and Institutions).

The second set of learning objectives concern important abilities planners need to possess. Again, upon completing the course, students will have an introductory to intermediate ability to:

- Understand concepts related to team building, group dynamics, and project leadership;
- Undertake typical team roles and adapt them to fit individual strengths, team needs, and project specifics (SLO10 Collaborative and Team-Based Environments and SLO9 Effective Communication);
- Engage in critical reflection on, in, and for professional practice, as well as personal growth and wellbeing (SLO4 Reflective Practice).

## **TEACHING METHODS**

This course is taught through a once weekly seminar/discussion scheduled for Wednesdays 3:30-6:10pm. Class sessions will primarily involve planning scenarios and learning circle discussions supplemented by class conversations. Since discussion is such an important component of the course, students are expected to attend every session unless prevented by specific extenuating circumstances. In these situations, arrangements must be made with the instructor and your learning circle *prior to class*. Students are also expected to read all required readings, respond to all scenarios/case studies, and come to class prepared to discuss that week's topics with their group, the class, and the instructor. As described below, attendance and participation will be reflected in your final grade.

## **TEXTS AND READINGS**

There are no required texts for this course. The required readings and supplemental materials are available online either through the University Library's website or other online sources. Copies or links to these readings will be provided on the Canvas site.

The total number of readings for this course has been kept low (and free). This is for several reasons: 1. to encourage students to complete *all* readings, 2. to provide students time to *reflect* on the readings, and 3. to leave space for students to read news articles and other media (independently and as assigned throughout the term).

### **ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING**

Your course grade will be based on the assignments and examinations listed below. Each will be graded on a 100-point basis, weighted for your final grade by the percentages listed next to the item. For a variety of reasons, including a desire to reduce paper, all assignments will be submitted via Canvas or Google Drive, through which you will also receive your grades and feedback.

● Assignment 1: Weekly Scenario Responses and Learning Circles	60
● Assignment 2: Reflection on Role and Ethics of Planner(s)	20
● Assignment 3: Connection to Practice (Format TBD)	20
● Total	<u>100</u>

The basic rubric used to grade graduate-student work is as follows:

- A: Demonstrates original thought and synthesis of ideas, sophisticated, cogent analysis, and is clearly written or presented. Excellent work.
- A- or B+: Presents above average analysis with appropriate evidence to support the ideas and is clearly written or presented. Good work.
- B or B-: Shows a basic level of understanding, with analysis limited to the most obvious arguments. Writing is competent. Adequate work.
- C+ or below: Misunderstands or misrepresents the material, or is so poorly written presented as to obscure the analysis. Inadequate work.

*The following represent summaries of the assignments; further guidance and detailed instructions about the four assignments will be provided in class and via Canvas.*

### **Assignment 1: Weekly Scenario Responses and Learning Circles (60%)**

Purpose: To encourage reflection, dialogue, and debate on the concepts and cases shared in this course.

Task: For this assignment, you need to do four things: 1. prior to and during class, actively think about and engage with the material, including readings; 2. complete “homework” assignments (surveys, scenarios, memos) intended to help stimulate your thinking; 3. be prepared and willing to engage in discussion and debate, and (perhaps most importantly); 4. be willing to do the above with an open mind and respectful of alternative ways of thinking.

*Due: Throughout via Google Drive*

### **Assignment 2: Open Reflection on Role(s) and Ethics of Planner(s) (20%)**

Purpose: To encourage reflection on the role you may play as a future professional planner.

Task: For this assignment, you will outline your initial understanding of the role(s) of planner(s) and the ethics you think will/should guide your practice. You will then record brief observations throughout the term and write a short paper synthesizing these, along with discussions and readings from the course, into your understanding of the role(s) and ethics of planner(s).

*Due: Via Canvas by 11pm, Wednesday, March 18<sup>th</sup> (Note: initial response included in Week 2, Scenario 1 Response)*

### **Assignment 3: Connection to Practice (20%)**

Purpose: To encourage you to collect and organize your work into a coherent presentation of your professional goals and identity.

Task: For this assignment, you will discuss the work you complete for this course, along with previous coursework, to connect it to practice. Format TBD.

*Due: Via Canvas by 11pm, Wednesday, March 18<sup>th</sup>*

**Late Assignments and Missed Classes:** Late assignments create a variety of issues related to equity, pedagogy, and integrity. Please try to avoid them if at all possible. If you have legitimate (preferably documented) reasons for a late assignment, you can petition for an extension. Communication is important; extensions will only be granted if you contact me in advance of a deadline.

The same is true for missed classes. Particularly given the format of this course, it is vital that you attend each class session. If you are unable to attend due to a significant, unforeseen reason, please contact me and your group before class. When doing so, you should be prepared to propose alternative arrangements for fulfilling your roles for that week's learning circle.

**Academic Integrity:** All work done for the course must be your own. The work must be original and prepared for this class. Plagiarism is unacceptable. Copying the work of another and not citing it; lifting text from the Internet without attribution; or even presenting ideas that are not your own without proper referencing are all examples of plagiarism. Submitting work for this class that has been done for another class also counts as plagiarism, it is called "plagiarizing oneself." **Plagiarism will result in a zero on the assignment and could result in higher university level sanctions.**

### **ACCESS AND INCLUSION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

PSU values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to fostering mutual respect and full participation for all students. My goal is to create a learning environment that is equitable, useable, inclusive, and welcoming. If any aspects of instruction or course design result in barriers to your inclusion or learning, please notify me. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) provides reasonable accommodations for students who encounter barriers in the learning environment.

If you have, or think you may have, a disability that may affect your work in this class and feel you need accommodations, contact the Disability Resource Center to schedule an appointment and initiate a conversation about reasonable accommodations. The DRC is located in 116 Smith Memorial Student Union (UCB 400 for Winter 2026), 503-725-4150, [drc@pdx.edu](mailto:drc@pdx.edu), <https://www.pdx.edu/drc>.

- If you already have accommodations, please contact me to make sure that I have received a faculty notification letter and discuss your accommodations.
- Students who need accommodations for tests and quizzes are expected to schedule their tests to overlap with the time the class is taking the test.
- Please be aware that the accessible tables or chairs in the room should remain available for students who find that standard classroom seating is not useable.

- For information about emergency preparedness, please go to the [Fire and Life Safety webpage](https://www.pdx.edu/environmental-health-safety/fire-and-life-safety) (<https://www.pdx.edu/environmental-health-safety/fire-and-life-safety>) for information.

## **SEXUAL ASSAULT AND HARRASSMENT**

Portland State is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of prohibited discrimination and sexual harassment (sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, and gender or sex-based harassment and stalking). If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or sexual harassment, know that help and support are available. Information about PSU's support services on campus, including confidential services and reporting options, can be found on PSU's Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response website at: <http://www.pdx.edu/sexual-assault/get-help> or you may call a confidential IPV Advocate at 503-725-5672 or schedule Online at <http://psuca.youcanbook.me/>.

You may report any incident of discrimination or discriminatory harassment, including sexual harassment, to:

- PSU's Title IX Coordinator: Albert Roberson by calling 503-725-4410, via email at [titleixcoordinator@pdx.edu](mailto:titleixcoordinator@pdx.edu) or in person at Richard and Maureen Neuberger Center (RMNC), 1600 SW 4th Ave, Suite 830.
- Taylor Burke, Deputy Title IX Coordinator and Dean of Students: 503.725.4422 | [askdos@pdx.edu](mailto:askdos@pdx.edu), Smith Memorial Student Union (SMSU), 825 SW Broadway, Suite 433

Please be aware that all PSU faculty members and instructors are required to report information of an incident that may constitute prohibited discrimination, including sexual harassment and sexual violence. This means that if you tell me about a situation of sexual harassment or sexual violence that may have violated university policy or student code of conduct, I have to share the information with my supervisor, the University's Title IX Coordinator or the Office of the Dean of Student Life. However, the Title IX Coordinators will keep the information confidential and refer you to a confidential advocate. For more information about Title IX please complete the required student module [Understanding Sexual Misconduct and Learning Resources](#) in Canvas.

## **CULTURAL RESOURCE CENTERS**

The Cultural Resource Centers (CRCs) create a student-centered inclusive environment that enriches the university experience. We honor diversity, explore social justice issues, celebrate cultural traditions, and foster student identities, success, and leadership. Our centers include the Multicultural Student Center, La Casa Latina Student Center, Native American Student & Community Center, Pan African Commons, and Pacific Islander, Asian, Asian American Student Center and the Middle Eastern, North African, South

Asian Initiative. We provide students with employment, volunteer, and leadership opportunities. Along with extensive programming, our spaces offer resources such as computer labs, lounge areas, and study spaces. All are welcome! More information about the CRCs can be found at [www.pdx.edu/cultural-resource-centers](http://www.pdx.edu/cultural-resource-centers) and <https://www.facebook.com/psuculturalcenters/>, CRCs can be contacted at [cultures@pdx.edu](mailto:cultures@pdx.edu) and 503-725-5351.

### **OTHER CAMPUS RESOURCES**

The CARE (Coordination Assessment Response Education) Team is available to help students experiencing distress and to assist with concerns about a fellow student. More information about the CARE Team can be found at: <https://www.pdx.edu/dos/care-team>.

The CARE Team also maintains a comprehensive list of resources, both campus and community, which can be found here:

<https://www.pdx.edu/dos/sites/www.pdx.edu.dos/files/C.A.R.E.%20Resource%20Guide.pdf>.

The Center for Student Health and Counseling (SHAC) provides community-based health care for students, including physical health, dental services, mental health, and testing services. You can find information about what SHAC provides and how to access them at: <https://www.pdx.edu/shac/center-for-student-health-and-counseling>.

If you are having trouble meeting basic needs: shelter, sleep, nutrition, there are resources available to help. The PSU Food Pantry offers supplemental food items to currently enrolled PSU students. The pantry is located in SMSU 325. For more information, you can email [foodhelp@pdx.edu](mailto:foodhelp@pdx.edu). For more information on food and wellness assistance for students visit: <https://www.pdx.edu/student-access-center/>. For help meeting other basic needs, contact the Basic Needs Hub at [basicneedshub@pdx.edu](mailto:basicneedshub@pdx.edu).

Student Legal Services provides legal advice and assistance on a range of areas of law including family, landlord-tenant, and immigration. More information can be found at: <https://www.pdx.edu/sls>.

Services are available for students with children, including childcare subsidies and family events, a lending library and clothing closet, lactation spaces, and a Family Resource Room. More information can be found at: <https://www.pdx.edu/students-with-children/our-services>.

The Office of Diversity & Multicultural Student Services (Smith Memorial Union 425) provides structured, academic support service, advising, referrals, and advocacy for first-generation college students, low-income and others facing special challenges. Visit <http://www.pdx.edu/dmss/> for info.

International Student Services provides a range of assistance to international students, including help with visas and immigration status, internships and employment, and life on campus and in Portland. They also have a Student Aid Fund for international students experiencing financial difficulties. More information is available at: <https://www.pdx.edu/international-students/>.

The Learning Center (Millar Library 245) mission is to foster the learning process by empowering PSU students to accomplish their academic and personal goals. In addition to helping with current coursework, academic support services can assist in developing effective learning strategies. See <http://www.pdx.edu/tutoring/> for more info.

The Portland State University Millar Library offers a wide range of helpful resources, databases, and tutorials to assist with coursework and research. In particular, you might find the resources that have been collated specifically for urban studies useful (<http://guides.library.pdx.edu/urbanstudies>).

The Writing Center (Cramer 188) will help you with all varieties of projects, including class assignments, resumes, application essays, presentations, and creative writing. It aims to help writers at any stage of the writing process, from brainstorming to the final draft. You can schedule an appointment online: <http://www.writingcenter.pdx.edu/>. Their website also contains resource pages that suggest ideas and strategies for completing writing projects.

Week	Topic	Scenario
Week 1	Introductions and Course Overview	Who is the Biggest Pop Star?
Week 2	Morals and Ethics	Poor Door
Week 3	Wicked Problems	Zoning Interpretation
Week 4	Lying and Loyalty	Guerilla Employees
Week 5	Identity and Emotion	Power and Comfort
Week 6	Representation and Participation	TBD
Week 7	Culture and Difference	TBD
Week 8	Equity and Justice	TBD
Week 9	Environment and Health	TBD
Week 10	Reflective Practice	Small Groups