

## Reading Tips and Study Questions: Before Session 13

### OVERVIEW OF THE FINAL UNIT OF THE COURSE

Thus far, we have reviewed the evolution of modern planning, as well as some of its biggest aspirations and dilemmas. In other words, this has been a critical history, not merely a descriptive one.

We began with Unit A as a brief orientation and then moved quickly into the New Orleans case assignment (Unit B) as a window on key dilemmas and possibilities for planning action. We used three planning traditions—design, policy analysis, and empowerment—to examine what's good (or not) in a plan, situating the analyses in a particular context, with its rich history and complex current circumstance.

Unit C went deeper into planning history and theory, including older and newer planning classics that covered the concept of social reform through “rational” design, the relationship between politics and the planning and policymaking process, hopes for public participation, the nature of advocacy and conflict, the potential and limits of process facilitation, and more.

**Taking stock.** At this point, you should be able to explain in your own words (to a curious someone), or discuss with a planner colleague, a variety of key ideas that inform *reflective* as well as *effective* practice in the field:

- How the **rational or modernist model of planning** evolved, in broad terms, what its core elements and assumptions were, and why it came under attack;
- Why it is typically impossible to define planning as an effort separate and apart from **politics** or, put differently, why technical elements of planning are just a part of the larger enterprise of planning action. Put differently, planning draws on science but is not just applied science, contrary to what some post-Enlightenment thinkers and reformers hoped and expected. This doesn't mean that planners need abandon a “commitment to reason,” as Charles Hoch puts it, but it does warn us against becoming elitist snobs or, by default, naïve technicians;
- Why the question of whether particular **types of knowledge** are legitimate and included in planning—trained professionals' knowledge, so-called local knowledge, etc.—is so central to the planning process, even if it can be tricky to resolve;
- In light of those questions, what the **advocacy planning** argument proposes, broadly, versus the **facilitation and dispute resolution** model—and why clashes of expectations and “styles” are likely in planning action, especially if the process becomes genuinely participatory; and

- What a focus on the “**micro-politics of planning**” adds in the way of perspective on planning and what planners can do, that is, why it behooves professional planners, in particular, to pay attention to persuasion and other “argumentation” dynamics of small-scale settings in which we interact, such as workplaces or public meetings.

**Looking ahead: Unit D.** Building on the foundation of the first three units, this final unit of the course addresses more specific questions about what’s fair, achievable, and wise in contemporary planning contexts.

This unit includes our second and final professional communications workshop (on effective memo writing) and then two brief memo assignments—one a *decision memo* and the other an *informational memo*. The first assignment gives you the opportunity to submit a draft, receive feedback, and then revise and resubmit. The second memo assignment, due in early December, acts as a capstone exercise for the course: You will systematically observe and critically interpret “planning action” in a public meeting of your choice.

From India to China, Vietnam to the U.S., and Brazil to Canada, these final weeks of the course will let us examine the still-evolving shape of planning, how “top-down” and “bottom-up” decisionmaking meet, the implications of the emerging digital city, planning’s major ethical frameworks, the challenges and opportunities linked to cultural diversity (planning for and with diverse publics), and more.

This next week focuses on **planning ethics**, with guest lecturer Prof. Annette Kim. The questions and readings for Session 13 are on the next page.