Instructional Design for an Online Course
"Citizen Planning Academy: Creating Sustainable Communities"
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Introduction

This paper will present the instructional design of an online planning course for community members. This course is designed to help community members work with planners to develop sustainable, livable communities. Within the planning process, there is a great need for informed citizens. Citizen involvement is critical in the planning process (Cullingworth & Caves, 2014). Planning is not a bunch of professionals and elected officials doing whatever they want and making their own decisions. Rather the planning process utilizes the goals and desires of citizens, and plans should reflect the desires of the citizens of the community.

Critical to effective community involvement is the need for citizens to be well-informed about planning measures (Cullingworth & Caves, 2014). Without the proper education, citizens would easily promote ideas that are unsustainable and unsuitable to their desirable long-range goals. For example, many people love to maintain the status quo, often resulting in the continued development of sprawled communities that can destroy the native ecology and create financially inviable cities. Correct knowledge on how to create sustainable communities would enable better support of good planning decisions, instead of maintaining a status quo that would lead to the breakdown of the goals the community desires.

This paper is divided into three sections. First, a background of the need and goals of instruction and an overview of the instructional design provides a framework for the course. Second, will be a discussion of the curriculum of the course including a critical discussion of texts used, and the content that will be used to support the learning objectives. Finally, learning activities that support the objective and content of the course complete the basic instructional design of the course.

On a personal level, this paper merges my professional interests in landscapes and instructional design. I am highly interested in teaching community members about sustainable landscapes, and this course anchors that interest in exploring the planning process through that lens. Instructional outreach to community members is foundational to making wide-scale changes within the landscapes we reside in.

Section One: Instructional Design Process

Instructional Objectives

Planning efforts are done in conjunction with the citizens that compose the community. As a foundation of any instruction, the first step is to identify what change of action needs to be accomplished in the learner, forming the objectives for the course (Allen, 2016). The goal of this course is to enable learners to meet the following objectives.

- Understand the planning process including concepts of sustainability, community, and be able to define what basic tools are used to implement good planning goals.
- Take an active role in the planning process as community members.
- Critically reflect and evaluate proposed planning decisions and be able to provide informed feedback to decision-makers.
- Work within their sphere of influence to create sustainable communities by engaging with the community and enacting sustainable change.

The education of citizens has a greater impact than simply instructing individuals. When citizens obtain the objectives above, they will be more engaged in the planning process and creating sustainable communities which will have a positive impact on their communities. Communities can become more sustainable, and planning processes will be more effective.

Learning Environment

Citizen planning academies are not uncommon and generally follow a traditional community education course format, with weekly classes taught at night in a centralized location. These courses can lack a broad appeal and focus on only a select number of communities members. Yet, the need for broader community education regarding planning is needed. More than a select number of citizens are needed to facilitate the community planning process.

To enable a broader outreach, this course will be designed as an asynchronous online course that will enable a broader range of participation than a traditional citizen planning academy. The online environment will enable self-guided learning for participants and will also include the ability to engage with other course members in discussion and idea-sharing. The main part of the course will provide a place for a self-guided exploration of the content, with activities that engage learners in discussion with others in the course, their community, and will inspire a continued exploration into the ecological planning process.

Task Analysis

Learners should be expected to engage in two primary tasks after this course. The first is active involvement in the planning process in their community. The second is identifying and engaging in sustainable changes within their sphere of influence.

The first task involves the identification of opportunities for community involvement. These opportunities include public hearings, council meetings, planning commission meetings, and other public outreach that occurs during the planning process. After identification of an opportunity for citizen involvement, citizens need to be enabled to give educated, critical feedback regarding the planning decisions discussed and stay involved in the process as planning decisions continue. As a critical part of this process, citizens also need to engage with fellow citizens and encourage their involvement as well.

The second task involves making sustainable changes within the realm of the learners' influence. The opportunities for this influence are varied according to the learners' situation, and focus will be given on changes that are common for most citizens. This task involves identifying an area that has the potential for sustainable change, knowing how to enact the change, implementing the change, and then sharing with others. Areas for change include building community, creating sustainable landscapes, and seeking and supporting sustainable efforts.

Learner Analysis

The learner for this class is assumed to be a citizen with some influence in the community. It will be geared to those committed to staying in their community for some time, primarily established homeowners with a desire to make their community better. The persona below seeks to establish an idea of the type of learner who would be interested in this course. Additional development is also possible for underserved community members and youth.

Stewart has lived in Glen City for four years. He is a 40-year-old male with a wife and four children and lives in a mid-sized home a five-minute drive outside of the city center. He works as a scientist with a local company. Recently, due to watching several YouTube videos about city planning, he has become interested in what he can do to make his community better. After contacting the city, they directed him to this online course.

Section Two: Curriculum

The fundamental part of any course is the content presented. This section will explore the content of the course, providing suggested topics, themes, and information that will anchor the curriculum. As effective classes involve ongoing revising and should respond to the learners' interest, this section is not intended to be comprehensive of the material presented in the class but provides a starting point that can be adapted as the course progresses.

The Goal of Planning

The first section of the class focuses on the basic history of planning that leads to the goals behind good city planning. Key points for this section are discussed below.

The history of city planning began around the turn of the century. The 1893 world fair in Chicago presented a model city and was one of the first examples of training for city planning (Krueckerberg, 1987). City planning began with a focus on sanitary reform and quickly expanded to include beautification of cities and social equity (Krueckerberg, 1987). An initial focus of city planning was on creating healthy cities that were also beautiful. Historic city planning issues have included health issues such as reducing diseases like cholera and increasing the availability of public open space. An emphasis has included creating city spaces that are considered beautiful and not eyesores and increasing such features such as art, classical architecture, and playgrounds within a city (Krueckerberg, 1987). Later, planning efforts focused on striving to overcome racial and class inequalities.

Sustainability has become a recent focus for planning. Sustainability is "meeting the needs of today without compromising the needs of future generations" (Keeble, 1988). Campbell (1996), offers a balanced approach to sustainability that includes three primary issues: growth of the economy, distributing this growth fairly and equitably, and not degrading the ecosystem while doing so. Balancing growth, equity, and ecology is the key to sustainable development. This three-issue approach to planning is of critical importance to understanding good planning decisions.

Planning issues include improving the physical environment and providing for the public interests while considering the long-range implications of planning decisions (Kaiser & Godschalk, 1995). Specific issues addressed through planning include quality of life, protection from hazards, reducing energy use, coping with climate change, preserving community character, equitable development including affordable housing, and economic progress (Hack, 2009). These varied issues all fall under the umbrella of police power, which includes the betterment of health, safety, and general welfare. The police power is the basis for land-use authority and planning efforts within a city (Nolan, 2005).

Recently, an awareness of the effects of city planning on the surrounding ecology has shown that conservation efforts are critical to planning (Perlman & Milder, 2005). A lack of preservation of the natural systems also results in decreased quality of life. Safety issues result as risks like fire and flood increase, and connection to the natural environment is lost (Perlman & Milder, 2005). Within the planning process, Landis & Pendall (2009) recommend three main goals that directly relate to sustainability and the local ecology. First, link the timing of development to infrastructure capacity. Second, control the rate and location of development. Third, protect ecological and cultural resources.

Traditional planning often focuses on the segregation of incompatible uses and rebuilding worn-down communities, or what was perceived as slums. However, the desirably of these goals was questioned, and one person at the forefront of this discussion was Jane Jacobs. She showed the desirability of cities with mixed-use development, short blocks, and dense people (Jacobs, 2016). These elements create desirable circumstances in cities that create vibrant communities.

The goal of planning can be summed up by providing a good quality of life to all the inhabitants within the community. Exactly how this is accomplished can differ based on the circumstances in which the community resides, but the next sections will focus on general methods that are applicable across most communities. Ongoing methods have always focused on the goal of protecting the health, safety, and general welfare of citizens.

Suggested readings for students about this topic are listed below. Full citations are included at the end of the paper.

- *Krueckeberg, 1987. Chapter 1: The Culture of Planning.* This chapter provides a brief overview of the history of planning.
- *Jacobs, 2016. The Death and Life of Great American Cities.* This chapter is an excerpt from her book of the same name, and shows fallacies of some planning methods, and what comprises a good city.
- *Cullingworth & Caves, 2014. Chapter 4: Planning and Sustainability*. The reading focuses on the three aspects of sustainability, and steps that can be taken to make cities more sustainable.
- *Smart Growth Online: About Smart Growth*. This includes the sections, What is Smart Growth?, Why Smart Growth? Smart Growth Principles, and Smart Growth Principle Examples. It provides an excellent introduction to smart growth.

Planning Decisions

Knowledge of the planning process is fundamental to understanding planning. The next section of the curriculum focuses on how planning decisions are made within the local government, including the creation of specific plans. Key points for this section are discussed below.

The standard tools for city planning include two major categories: comprehensive planning through general and specific plans, and local land-use regulations including zoning and codes. Planning decisions are made by the local planning commission and elected officials, with the support of staff, consultants, and community input (Hack, 2009). Most cities are required to have a general or comprehensive plan that outlines the goals of

the city for the future. As a subset to the general plans, specific plans provide guidance on issues such as transportation, recreation, and specific areas and neighborhoods.

City plans are not simply making blueprints for how a city should be, rather they are creating processes that respond to changing situations (Faludi, 1973). The planning process aims to be comprehensive and rational, but due to the complexity involved, much of the planning process often resembles "muddling through," deciding between a short list of alternatives, often regardless of the implications to long-term goals (Faludi 1973).

The basic steps of the planning process and creating a general plan include five basic steps (Collingnon, 2009):

1. Define the goals.
2. Gather information.
3. Identify alternative courses of action.
4. Evaluate alternatives.
5. Implement the chosen course of action.

Ideally, this process heavily involves input from the community. The plan should be a "framework for community consensus on future growth" (Kaiser & Godschalk, 1995). The most important step is to implement the identified plans and issues in the general plan (Cullingworth & Caves, 2014). The general plan should act as a "living document" that changes and adapts over time with amending and updating as needed (Cullingworth & Caves, 2014). Generally, plans are made for a 10–20-year period, but requirements vary by location.

To support the general plan, land-use regulations include the laws that enact the goals of the general plan. Usually, the primary regulation is zoning which is provided as a map designating zone areas within the city and accompanied by permitted uses. The zoning ordinance generally divides communities into residential, commercial, and industrial districts (Mandelker, 2009). Agriculture, open space, multi-family or single-family, and mixed uses are frequently used categorization subsets on zoning maps as well.

These zones assign the density of an area, and specify what can be built, the setbacks, lot size, and may include regulations for things such as landscaping and parking. Additional zoning regulations can include overlay zones, planned unit developments, form-based codes, and design guidelines (Mandelker, 2009). These regulations add more specificity to traditional zoning ordinances.

When zoning is linked to the community's plans, they provide a predictable, comprehensive basis for regulation, creating stable communities (Mandelker, 2009). Yet despite their wide use, "surprisingly little is known about whether local land use

regulations—even zoning—work as intended" (Perlman & Milder, 2005). The way general plans and land-use regulations are applied vary widely across different cities.

Suggested readings include:

- *Cullingworth & Caves, 2014. Chapter 7: The Comprehensive Plan*. The focuses on the basics of comprehensive planning and creating a general plan.
- *Landis & Pendall, 2009. From Zoning to Smart Growth.* This article focuses on what tools beyond traditional zoning can be used to enable smart growth.

Methods for Ecological Friendly Development

Planning goals and decisions do not always consider the effects of development on the surrounding natural ecosystems. Yet the effect of human development on surrounding ecosystems is huge, leading to the need to consider these effects and how they can be mitigated through conservation. This section will provide some ideas on how conservation can happen within the planning process.

As previously discusses, sustainable development balances growth, equity, and ecology. Ecology is important because "nature performs work for man" (McHarg, 1969, pg. 57). Nature provides us with clean water, clean air, healthy soils that lead to agriculture production, and scenic beauty. The exploitation of nature results in economic damage and the loss of irreplaceable resources.

When human development encroaches on native landscapes, habitat for plants and animals are threatened as the spaces they live in become increasingly fragmented (Perlman & Milder, 2005). Fragmentation can result in the decline and extinction of many native species. Without careful consideration, many new developments result in the "almost complete conversion of native habitat to houses, roads, and lawn" (Perlman & Milder, 2005 pg. 225).

Because of the negative interactions that occur between continual development and native ecosystems, a "map-based land use plan should be supplemented by additional policies to guide future development and conservation" (Perlman & Milder, 2005 pg. 237). These methods can include things like planned unit developments, conservation easements, public lands, and communal green space. Unfortunately, the toolbox that is used for conservation methods is limited and often not used, resulting in the continual loss of habitat and other lands that provides essential natural resources.

One common method that can result in greater conservation of the natural landscape is density and urbanization. When more people live in a dense area, it allows for more preservation of open space. These urbanized lands should ideally not occur in landscapes that are incompatible with development, or in areas that are valuable for

conservation such as important habitat or prime agricultural land (McHarg, 1969). These dense developments can also feature mixed-use centers, walkable residential neighborhoods, and easy access to transit. This development is often termed smart-growth. Smart growth not only preserves open spaces, but also creates communities with a strong sense of place and limits the reliance on a car providing even more ecological benefits (Barnett, 2009).

Another method that can have a positive effect is utilizing an environmental review process before development. This process looks at how development will impact the environment, assesses a variety of issues, and considers alternatives to minimize the impact (Cullingworth & Caves, 2014). An environmental review process is required in some states and for many federal projects but can still be utilized even when it is not required to take place.

Preserving natural spaces provides an abundance of benefits to a community. This includes the cultural benefits of having green spaces to enjoy for our well-being and provides the resources humans need to live and thrive. Careful consideration should be given to the way land is used by striving to conserve natural landscapes.

Suggested readings:

- *Perlman & Milder, 2005, Chapter 6: The Ecology of Landscapes*. This chapter provides a basic overview of landscape ecology and shows the effects of development patterns on natural ecosystems.
- *Perlman & Milder, 2005, Chapter 11: Principles in Practice*. This chapter shows the process of sustainable development, and how planning decisions can be made that have less impact on the surrounding landscapes.

Small-Scale Changes & How to Get Involved as a Citizen

The previous sections discuss the planning process and what can be done at a larger scale. But most citizens are not involved in these types of decisions regularly. Their impact does not need to be limited to sporadic involvement. This section reviews what citizens can do on a regular basis to improve their communities.

When considering issues like the effects of developments on the natural landscape, many of the changes that can be made to lessen these effects can happen at a small scale. Implementation does not need to only happen on a large scale, but on a small scale as well (Perlman & Milder, 2005). Existing development patterns are not easily changed, but there is still a lot that citizens can do to help increase the sustainability of these developments.

The landscapes surrounding homes and within the community can easily be improved to provide many ecological benefits. This can include creating habitat, growing

food, and reducing the amount of irrigation used in the landscape. These small landscapes also provide a place to foster biodiversity and plant native plants that have been lost during development (Perlman & Milder, 2005).

Many community efforts are also beneficial. These include things like historic societies, community gardens, and the maintenance and preservation of green space (Cullingworth & Caves, 2014). These efforts are often identified and supported by community members. Involvement in these efforts by community members supports the planning process and the greater goal of making better, more sustainable communities.

Finally, opportunities exist within the community to be involved with the local planning process. The first step involves identifying when input is needed. This can be accomplished by things such as checking the city or county's website, following social media pages, signing up for emails lists, and subscribing to the local paper. Next, it's important to give input during the public hearing process, and support measures that are sustainable, while asking for great responsibility for those that are not. Citizens can be involved by attending public hearings and public forums, responding to surveys, and serving on public committees (*Extension Waushara County, n.d.)*.

Suggested readings:

- *Perlman & Milder, 2005, Chapter 8: Nature in the Neighborhood*. This chapter provides an overview of the importance of local natural areas and open space.

Section Three: Learning Activities

The learning activities discussed below can be used throughout the class and adapted as needed. A suggested class outline will also be presented. Additional opportunities can be presented for guest lecture

Reading and Discussion

Suggested readings are provided in the curriculum list and can be supplemented by related works, including location-specific articles. Assigning readings is only partially valuable: learners also greatly benefit from discussing these readings with each other. To facilitate discussion several methods can be used. As one idea, reading groups can be formed which arrange a time to get together and discuss the readings. Discussion boards can also be used to facilitate the exchange of ideas and to ask questions about the readings.

Participation in the Planning Process

As an assignment, learners can identify an opportunity for citizen involvement and participate in it. This can include attending a planning meeting, city council meeting, or another public forum. Another valuable activity is for learners to look up the current plans

and zoning ordinances for the city and review them. To gain a greater depth of knowledge, they can also lookup additional plans from other cities and compare them.

Critical Review of Development Proposal

This task involves the review of development proposals, and critically analyzing them to determine their ecological impact. One such review is done in Chapter 11 of Perlman & Milder (2005). To expand the relevance of this activity, the ideal review would be done on proposed developments within the learner's local community.

Designing Communities

In this activity, learners would design an ideal community. Learners could simply utilize their community and identify places for improvements and draw out the design using paper and satellite imagery. Hypothetical communities can also be developed utilizing computer games such as *Sim City 4,* and *Cities: Skylines*. The use of these computer games is an especially appropriate tool for a younger audience.

What Can I Do?

This activity involves self-reflection on what learners can do to get involved in their community. Rather than focusing on the planning process, this involves identifying measures that they can undertake to support local efforts for community improvement. This can include things like joining a volunteer group, improving the sustainability of a landscape, or starting a school garden.

Course Outline

	Topic	Suggested Reading	Activity
Week 1	The Goal of Planning	*Krueckeberg, 1987. Chapter 1: The Culture of Planning.* *Jacobs, 2016. The Death and Life of Great American Cities.* *Cullingworth & Caves, 2014. Chapter 4: Planning and Sustainability*. *Smart Growth Online: About Smart Growth*.	Reading and Discussion

Week 2	Planning Decisions	*Cullingworth & Caves, 2014. Chapter 7: The Comprehensive Plan*. *Landis & Pendall, 2009. From Zoning to Smart Growth.*	Participation in the Planning Process
Week 3	Methods for Ecological Friendly Development, Part 1	*Perlman & Milder, 2005, Chapter 6: The Ecology of Landscapes*	Critical Review of Development Proposal
Week 4	Methods for Ecological Friendly Development, Part 2	*Perlman & Milder, 2005, Chapter 11: Principles in Practice*.	Designing Communities
Week 5	Small-Scale Changes & How to Get Involved as a Citizen	*Perlman & Milder, 2005, Chapter 8: Nature in the Neighborhood*.	What Can I Do?

Conclusions

This course is designed to instruct citizens on the planning process specifically focused on sustainable processes such as ecological design. The goal of this course is not to be comprehensive, but to provide learners a foundation of knowledge that then leads directly to active participation in their communities. As community participation is critical to good planning, the effects of this education will be far-reaching. Personally, I hope to be involved in such educational efforts as I continue my career.

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