Preliminaries

The activity of planning consists in determining who is to do what, when and where, and by how much in order to bring about some intended future outcome. Everybody plans, from strategists of operations spanning continents and decades to homeless persons worrying about where their next meal will come from. In academic programs of city and regional planning we tend to be concerned with planning that affects settlement systems and the welfare of people residing in them.

There are at least two types of theories: causal explanations and justifications. Such theories may explain phenomena that are relatively more observable in terms of causal factors that are relatively less observable or they may provide reasons or justifications for particular conventions, value judgments, or perspectives. These theories answer ‘why’ questions—such as, ‘Why did leap-frog development of building lots occur in Los Angeles in the 1930s?’ or ‘Why should certain aesthetic standards or progressive income tax rates be instituted, observed or respected?’

Other forms of theories might also include coherent frameworks of non-predictive interpretations of behavior (e.g. learning by trial and error). Such interpretations answer not so much ‘why?’ but ‘how’ or ‘what’ questions. Examples are ‘Just what is happening in the informal public spaces of Ithaca?’ or ‘What is the meaning of an historic text or the intent of a piece of legislation?’ or ‘What do certain actors (e.g., members of ‘Occupy Wall Street’ or ‘Black Lives Matter’) understand themselves to be doing when they engage in certain practices?’ In this seminar we will be concerned with explanations, justifications, behavioral descriptions, and interpretations.

What counts as a good or adequate theory varies with the field of inquiry and depends in part on the needs of its intended audience. It is arguable that a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for effective planning is the availability of good theories of both planning behavior (e.g., explanations of conditions under which planning is likely to succeed, justifications of, say, behavioral conventions to be followed by planners, or interpretations of social dynamics) and the workings of interdependent systems (e.g., the economy, social institutions, the political system, ecosystems) in which planning interventions are being considered. Of course, plans may fail for many reasons other than the adequacy of the explanations and justifications to which they appeal. They may fail because planners fail to pay close enough attention to, or ‘read’ or interpret correctly, what is transpiring in a given situation.

Objective and Plan of the Seminar

A major objective of the present seminar is to promote thinking about what work planning theory (really, a corpus of theories) should do, what its (or their) scope should be, and how theorizing should proceed. The qualifier ‘advanced’ in the seminar’s title partly reflects the fact that we are reaching beyond material covered in a typical introductory master’s degree level planning theory course. We will focus largely on planning theory itself and theoretical work it presumes (e.g. on rationality, or performance, or pragmatism), and not on substantive matters that planning theories seek to explain or justify.

We begin by considering recent writings by planning academics on what the distinguishing features of the planning enterprise are, what the intellectual heritage of planning theory has been, what role it plays in planning education, and (lamentably) what tenuous position the discipline of planning holds in the academic community. We will also consider how planning scholarship does or should engage with professional practice.
With this characterization before us, we’ll take a step backwards—or move to a higher level of abstraction—and examine several different ways that philosophers of the natural and social sciences view ‘progress’ in the development of theories. While clearly we cannot settle any of the debates in this contested area, we can at least take stock of positions that are relevant to the planning discipline.

In the balance of the seminar we will examine a series of questions that lend structure to or frame substantive issues. These questions include:

- What models of rationality might help us make sense of planning behavior?
- How might the pragmatist tradition inform planning practice and possibilities?
- How might we analyze argumentation in planning and public policy arenas?
- How might we understand not just the purposes but the craft and discipline of academic writing and the ethos of the peer review process?
- What might the so-called post-modernity crisis imply for planning?
- How might theories of interpretation help us to assess narrative and performative qualities of planning practice?
- How might theories of power, deliberation and democracy inform planning possibilities?
- How are collective action and collective goods related to planning practices?
- How might we identify public interests and validate value judgments?
- What global imperatives do we face as planners (and world citizens) committed to sustainable development and the eradication of poverty? and
- How might we assess the relative merits of different political configurations of societies?

Other advanced theory seminars led by other professors in other doctoral programs would likely be organized around a different set of questions. Let me offer some motivation for the selection I have made.

Part of what we do when we engage in planning is to try to determine how, by intervening in the workings of various systems, we might change the likely course of events to arrive at alternative futures. When we do so we make assumptions about the predictability of systems and individual behavior—i.e., about *systems rationality* and the *rationality of individual actors*. Upon examining some of these assumptions closely, we may find that they appear to be increasingly difficult to hold, and their slippery nature imperils other working assumptions of planners and planning theorists.

Practical rationality involves at least as much problem-framing as problem-solving; reasoning about what to do, in other words, depends on prior reasoning, perception and what Aristotelians call “discernment” regarding what’s going on and what’s problematic in the first place.

Because we might aspire to develop planning theories that help us understand how planners frame and reframe problems, how planners learn in the face of complexity and plurality, and how planners then seek to link knowledge and action, we will explore the legacy of pragmatism and the challenge of articulating a critical rather than an expedient pragmatism.

In so far as progress in theory in any academic discipline takes place through the advancement, careful consideration, and revision of arguments, we need to pay particular attention to the ways in which arguments are made and how they can succeed or fail in discussions of planning issues. We also need to consider how arguments can succeed or fail in practical settings and in the context of academic writing. And, from the other side of the page, so to speak, we need to understand our obligations as readers and reviewers of academic writing.
According to Aristotle, the ability to plan is what distinguishes human beings from other animals. On his view, we have engaged in planning as long as our species has existed. Yet, professional planning, particularly in the west, is viewed as a modernist enterprise that is locked into a dated set of inappropriate philosophical assumptions. To better situate contemporary professional planning within the spectrum of available intellectual traditions, we will examine the co-evolution of the sciences with political and cultural institutions in the development of modernism.

In planning we evaluate states of affairs that can result from plan implementation. When we do so, we proceed as if we have acceptable answers to a number of difficult questions that haunt applied ethics and welfare economics. To make headway, we must first determine where we stand on the question of whether or not value judgments can be inter-subjectively validated and truly public interests can be identified. If we hold to the affirmative position, it is incumbent upon us to spell out how such judgments and interests are possible in theory and recognizable in practice. This question, which lies at the heart of the so-called ‘post-modernity crisis,’ leads us to confront such further issues as if and how we can ever overcome our cultural and temporal situatedness to make valid assumptions about the preferences and values of others, and under what conditions meaningful agreement is at all possible.

To the extent that we make collective choices about collective goods when we engage in planning, planning theorists must come to terms with the range of behaviors and values involved in collective decision making and the natures of the institutions and goods that result. Hence, we will look at some recent influential applied research on these matters.

Globalization has raised challenging issues for planners as practitioners, academics, and citizens that span continents and generations, requiring us to come to terms with human rights violations, environmental degradation, and persistent poverty within analytical frameworks that are less parochial and short-term and more global and long-term. We may find helpful recent works by development economists who introduce distinctions and arguments that enable us to see better our responsibilities as planning professionals and citizens and to act upon them appropriately.

Finally, planning theory has always embodied certain utopian strains of thought. Surely, engaging in planning embodies an act of faith in the potential of societies to make progress of some sort. (Otherwise, we would only engage in it because of some deep anthropological compulsion.) Which dimensions we should be progressing along, how we should measure and weight progress along these dimensions, and what political configurations are most favorable to social progress are questions that lack obvious answers. So we conclude the course by considering a modern utopian tale that probes these matters in some depth but with a light touch.

**Seminar Organization**

We shall meet twice a week and, as much as possible, in true seminar fashion. (The relative inaccessibility of some of the readings will probably entail that some background lecture material be introduced in places.) Because we are relatively few in number, conscientious preparation and active participation each week will be important for the seminar to succeed. At the close of each meeting, I will suggest a path to follow through the readings assigned for the next meeting, and at the beginning of each meeting I’ll attempt to motivate the discussion of a number of salient points. But what gets transacted between the beginning and close of each meeting will be determined largely by the seminar participants.

There will be two short papers assigned that will fall due in late October and at the end of term. Grades will be determined on the basis of preparation, participation, and the quality of written work submitted.
Prerequisites
There are no explicit prerequisites for this seminar, but students who have not taken at least an introductory course in planning theory may find themselves further out at sea than they find comfortable.

Academic Integrity
Each student in this course is expected to abide by the Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity. (See http://www.cornell.edu/UniversityFaculty/docs/main.html.) Any work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit must be the student’s own.

Texts

The following texts have been ordered from the campus bookstore.


Copies of these books and all assigned texts not included in them will be placed on reserve at the City Fine Arts Library in Rand Hall. Most assigned texts will also be available from the seminar Blackboard site.

Meetings and Readings

8/25 Organizational Meeting

8/27 Views of Planning, Planning theory and Planning Education from within the Profession


9/1 Engagement of Planning Scholarship with Practice


9/3 Models of Theory


9/10 The Work of Theory: Explanation and Understanding


9/15 Models of Rationality


9/17  Practical Rationality
& 9/22


9/24  Pragmatism and Critical Pragmatism: From Framing to Political Acknowledgement
& 9/29


10/1  Rationality and Argumentation


On the Craft, Discipline, and Ethical Obligations of Academic Writing

Aaron Wildavsky: selections from *Craftways* (“Things I Never Knew…”, Rationality in Writing: Linear and Curvilinear”)
Irene Hames, “COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers,” Committee on Publication Ethics, 2013, pp. 1-5. www.publicationethics.org

Modernity and Postmodernity


Modernity and Postmodernity


Modern and Postmodern Planning Perspectives


First Paper Presentations
& 10/27

[Note that the seminar will not meet on 10/22 as the instructor will be attending a conference.]

On Interpretation, Hermeneutics, Listening, and Narrative Analysis


(Suggested supplementary reading:


11/3 On Performance and Ordinary Language Analysis


11/5 On Justice, Power, and Participation

& 11/10


[Note that the seminar will not meet on 11/12 as the instructor will be attending a conference.]

11/17 Collective Action and Collective Goods


11/19 Validating Value Judgments and Identifying Public Interests


11/24 Development, Human Rights, and Global Imperatives


[Note that the seminar will not meet on 11/26 due to the thanksgiving break.]

12/1 A Utopian Literary Postlude
& 12/3


Finals week Second Paper Presentations