

## UAPP 606, Policy Memo Project

This project provides an opportunity to integrate the course content into either (1) the articulation of a recommended economic development policy/strategy for a local community or organization which currently lacks one, or (2) the thoughtful evaluation and critique of an existing policy/strategy accompanied by specific recommendations for improvement. This may be done as an individual project or a group project. Final deliverables are an oral presentation, supported by visual aids and/or handouts, of not more than 20 minutes, and a final report which ideally will not be longer than 20 double-spaced pages or so. Topics and teams will be chosen in consultation with the instructor. Refer to the syllabus for the due dates for interim and final deliverables.

The research for this report will ideally include some field work, such as site visits and in-person or telephone interviews of key relevant officials and other stakeholders/participants in local economic development efforts. I am therefore biased toward having you choose a relatively nearby subject. (That said, I will entertain more distant or even international subjects if you make a good case for them.) In choosing a community, bear in mind that you will want it to be relatively manageable in the scope of its LED activities: large state governments and big cities might not be the best choices.

*An original strategy/plan/policy* will generally include the following basic elements:

- Appropriate economic, social, and spatial analysis from available sources;
- Identification of broad economic-development goals;
- A plan for more detailed primary and secondary data collection and analysis;
- Selection (or recommendation of potential choices) of strategies and measurable objectives;
- Identification (or recommendation) of potentially suitable programs and projects;
- Recommendations for a detailed action-planning process for selecting specific projects and activities, and for evaluating the effectiveness of activities in order to make appropriate policy corrections; and
- A strategy for implementation, including proposed organizational and financing arrangements.

*In the case of a critique*, the analysis will generally include determining whether all of the requisite elements of a plan are in place as well as evaluating the quality and appropriateness of those elements. (Note that strategies may be explicitly formulated by organizations or they may be inferred by examining the organization's selection of policies and practices; in some cases you may find that one set of strategies is espoused, while a different set is actually pursued; and in some cases, there may be a relatively incoherent, non-strategic approach to selecting instruments and activities.) Identify, and focus your analysis on, those activities to which the organization or community devotes the most attention and resources.

*In either case*, your review and reports should include:

- (1) a concise overview of the community's economic circumstances and the specific

challenges (such as un- or underemployment, inadequate tax base, concentrations of poverty, the effects of structural changes, and so forth) it faces;

(2) a descriptive inventory of the policies and practices in effect, if any (you may want to ask yourself a series of questions here, such as: what is the community or organization doing, how, and with whom? what theories or assumptions are espoused by decision makers? do there seem to be other theories in use by relevant stakeholders? what are the financing and implementation arrangements?); and

(3) a well-supported (by appropriate references to the literature and assessments of the community's actual economic conditions and needs) evaluation and recommendation of strategy, policies, and practices.

You may be able to get much of the information you need from the subject organizations or communities themselves. Data sources may include organizational documents; academic studies and technical reports; news accounts; basic local/regional economic data from appropriate sources; published research and other secondary sources; direct observations; and interviews of key local officials and other participants and stakeholders in strategy formation and execution.

If you use interviews or other personal contacts with organization members, your methodological appendix should provide a list of your interviewees and the date and means of communication for each interview, together with any other appropriate ancillary information. You will find it useful to prepare an interview protocol in advance of speaking to local officials and other, to help you structure the conversations and ensure that you come away with the information you need. I have also found that people respond very positively to short thank-you notes after they have given the time to help me with research projects.

(N.B. If you think you may want to re-use interview data for APs, theses, or publications beyond this class, you will need to secure Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. This is relatively easy to do for us here in SUAPP, but it does require some advance preparation and forethought, and the process *must* be completed *before* you conduct interviews or other human-subjects data. If you are quite certain that you will never want to re-use the information beyond this class assignment, it is not necessary to go through IRB review.)

*Format.* Your memo should be accompanied by a list of references and an appendix describing other sources of data (such as interviewees' positions, means of communication, dates). Follow a standard memo form of organization by providing an executive summary or a carefully written introduction and concluding summary ("tell them what you're going to tell them" is the way this was taught to me, "then tell them, then tell them what you told them" – see Eisinger's 1988 *Rise of the Entrepreneurial State* for an extreme example of this style applied to academic writing). Consider also appending tables and figures that may help you present information more powerfully or concisely than prose text alone. Think of your presentation and memo as something that can be useful to community residents, leaders, and members of economic development organizations as they seek to bring the greatest benefits to their communities.

Please be attentive to details of presentation in both oral and written formats. You want your analysis to be persuasive, as well as correct, and listeners and readers are more easily persuaded by clear and attractively presented arguments than by those which are difficult to decipher. Selecting and following the guidance of a style manual – such as APA or Chicago – will help you to accomplish this and will also be good practice for preparing your theses and APs. Two (among many) helpful sources of guidance are the U.D. Writing Center (<http://www.english.udel.edu/wc>) and <http://faculty.maxwell.syr.edu/jyinger/Classes/PPA735/jytips.htm>

**This assignment was adapted from an idea in a syllabus by Dr. Ed Feser at UNC.**