

UAPP 606, Special Topic Report

Each member of the seminar will investigate and report on a special topic of her/his choice at an appropriate time during the semester. Consider this an opportunity to investigate areas of interest that are neglected or aren't covered as fully as you would like by the syllabus, and to explain to the rest of us why these topics are important and worthy of greater attention. These brief reports will take the form of a written report to be distributed to the group and an oral presentation supported by visual aids or handouts. Individual reports should not exceed 10 double-spaced pages plus an annotated reference list, and presentations should not exceed 20 minutes. If you feel severely constrained by these maximum limits, think about how to cover different aspects of your material in the presentation versus the written report. Refer to the syllabus for due dates.

Possibilities include more in-depth empirical or library-research investigations of topics covered by the basic course material; in-depth investigations of specific analytic or planning techniques; reports on LED instruments, strategies, and tools not covered by the basic course material; or just about anything else you can convince me makes sense. Possibilities include, but are not limited to: tourism-related strategies; tax-increment finance; HUD's New Markets Initiative; business incubators; research parks; revolving loan funds; SBICs and MESBICs; SBDCs; specific approaches to workforce development and community development; human-capital development; "creative economy" approaches; infrastructure or basic-services improvement strategies; the Workforce Investment Act; financial literacy; welfare-to-work programs; the Community Reinvestment Act; strategies related to the informal sector; and so forth. More possibilities are in the lists of strategies and tools in our texts, on the IEDC website, in articles by Reese and Sternberg, in the questionnaires and summaries of the ICMA surveys, and elsewhere.

As a way to approach both the presentation and written report, place yourself in the role of an outside expert who is explaining the policy, strategy, or instrument to local officials, economic developers, and/or community activists who are not familiar with it, and are interested in learning what it is; how, when, and whether they may want to use it; how they can go about learning whether it will work in a particular local context; and for whom it will produce benefits. Your report should be critical and evaluative as well as descriptive.

Generally, you will want to ask yourself (and attempt to answer for the rest of us), as appropriate, questions such as the following:

- What is the policy, strategy, or instrument in outline? (Or what *potential* strategy is suggested by your analysis of a particular problem/opportunity?) What are the explicit and implicit goals, theories, and definitions of local economic development underlying it?
- What are the key issues surrounding the policy, strategy or instrument? What is the rationale for its use? Is there a market failure or distributional justification for intervention in the private market? Are there any major controversies about it?

- What are the policy objectives? What specific outcomes are sought? Are they measurable? (And if so, is anyone measuring them?)
- What are the specific implementation mechanisms involved (e.g., service provision, infrastructure provision, risk transfer, information provision, financial or other forms of intermediation, tax incentives, direct subsidies, other financial inducements, and so on)?
- Who are the key players in planning and implementation (federal, state, and local governments, NGOs, business firms, etc.), and how is the policy implemented (bottom-up, top-down, with or without citizen participation, etc.)? What are the major challenges to implementation?
- Is there any evidence available about whether and to what extent the policy is effective? If not, can you hypothesize whether and under what circumstances you would expect the policy to be effective or ineffective?
- How likely is the policy to generate benefits that exceed its costs? What are its probable distributional impacts (who bears the costs, and who reaps the benefits)?
- What are the challenges associated with evaluating the policy's efficacy and desirability?
- What else does your audience need to know in order to set about making an informed decision?
- What additional sources of information about the problem, policy, or strategy should they consult, and what kinds of data about local (and global) conditions will they need to gather and analyze in order to make a sound decision?

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