With over half the world living in cities, the processes and challenges of urbanization touch on every aspect of modern society. Cities in Asia and other parts of the Global South are growing at unprecedented speeds and scales, while others in post-industrialized regions face the challenge of declining populations and investment. Large urban regions offer agglomeration economies, cultural vibrancy and diversity, and the potential for environmental sustainability through compact development, yet many are located in river deltas, valleys, and coastlines that are increasingly impacted by climate change. Throughout history, big challenges such as these have inspired big urban plans that have captured society’s imagination with their technological promise and physical scale of reform. At the same time, there has been a growing pushback from community and environmental activists about the insensitivity of Big Plans, as well as a shifting in urban governance from the state to private and nongovernmental actors. It would seem that Big Plans have never been more necessary, yet are increasingly more complex to develop and implement.

This undergraduate course is designed around four modules that highlight the origins of visionary ideas and the political complexity of developing and implementing Big Plans, their implications for social equity and the environment, and the time and spatial scales by which to evaluate their impact. Lectures by the instructors, faculty, and practitioners present U.S. and international cases, with an emphasis on Boston. Classroom discussions, debates, and design exercises help students develop a nuanced appreciation for the political complexity of large scale planning processes and impacts. Throughout the course, we’ll consider the following questions:

- What makes a plan “Big”, what makes it a “Plan”?
- Who leads Big Planning, and who benefits and loses from Big Plans?
- At what scales of time and space do we evaluate Big Plans?
- Why do Big Plans so often fail or exacerbate existing challenges?
- How can Big Plans be ambitious, but also sensitive?

We will apply the analytical perspectives from the course modules to recent resiliency work around sea level rise adaptation in Boston, including the ongoing Boston Living with Water Competition. Interdisciplinary student teams will propose your own Big Plans informed by the competition’s 100 Acres Fort Point Channel and Morrissey Boulevard sites, as well as the four districts featured in the Urban Land Institute’s Living with
Water report (Alewife Quadrangle, Revere Beach, Back Bay, and Innovation District). At the end of the course, you will be able to articulate your own understanding of the main features of big urban plans and planning processes, and their social and environmental impacts.

We will structure the course around small groups to encourage classroom discussion and team exercises. Students from all departments are welcome.

**Course Deliverables**

In advance of each assignment, specific instructions will be distributed. As an overview:

*Debate on Whether Boston Should Bid for the Olympics*

At the end of Module 2 on “Whose Big Plans?”, we will hold an in-class debate on whether Boston should bid for the 2024 Summer Olympics. Students will take on a role (representing developers, community groups, academic institutions, city government, state government, and so forth) and argue for one or another side, applying the theoretical and case data presented over the course of the module. Each student should prepare a one-page position paper and submit a one paragraph reflection after exercise describing what they learned and potential ideas that would work for their competition proposal.

*Policy Charrette on Boston Housing for the Homeless*

At the end of Module 3 on the “Planning for Whom?”, we will hold an in-class policy charrette on how to provide housing for the homeless in Boston, where last fall Boston’s largest homeless shelter closed suddenly, leaving as many as 600 people without shelter on the coldest nights. Working in groups, students will be assigned the task of proposing a strategy from a particular temporal, scalar, or sectoral perspective. The exercise will explore how ways of knowing and ways of seeing influence planning solutions. Students should prepare a one-page position paper (as a group) and submit a one paragraph reflection (individual) after the exercise describing what they learned and potential ideas for their competition proposal.

*Boston Living with Water Competition - Public Jury and Exhibition Reflection (Saturday, Feb. 28)*

Students are required to attend the public jury and check out the exhibits, then submit a two-page briefing memo on the competition and entries. Reflections can comment on the entries, the competition process, where big ideas come from, how and who judges the worthiness of the proposals, or other criteria that would be important for a decision-maker’s understanding.

*Final Project & Project Presentation*

Student teams will develop a realistic proposal to the City of Boston in the vein of the Living with Water Competition. The plan itself can be in the form of a board (poster) or PowerPoint presentation that will be presented to the class with our own invited jury. Students will also submit an individual 7-10 page reflection paper on why their proposal is a “Big Plan”, the trade offs the team made in pursuit of social, environmental, and economic development goals, and foreseeable challenges to adopting the proposal.

*Class Participation*

- Participation is particularly important in this class – during discussions of readings, guest lectures, module exercises, and peer presentations. Your participation grade will reflect this.
- You should plan to meet with one or both of the instructors during their office hours by February 17, Presidents Day weekend. It can just be for 10 or 15 minutes, but we want to get to know you!
- Should you have a lingering or unanswered question at the end of a class session, please feel free to contact or email the instructors and we can begin the next class with a brief discussion.
- Attendance is an important part of your participation grade as well. More than three sessions of unexcused absences, or excessive lateness, will be grounds for grade penalties.
Evaluation and Grading

- Competition Jury & Exhibition Reflection 10%
- Module Exercises (2 x 15% Each) 30%
- Final Group Project Presentation 20%
- Final Individual Paper 20%
- Participation 20%

Key Course Dates
by Feb 17  Meet with Linda and/or Mike
Feb 26  Form Teams and Submit Site Selections
Feb 28  [Saturday] Boston Living with Water Competition Public Jury & Exhibition
Mar 2  Competition Jury & Exhibition Reflection Due
Mar 3  Project Workshop #1
Mar 17  Model 2 Exercise - Boston Olympics Debate
Mar 19  Module 2 Exercise Reflection due
Apr 14  Module 3 Exercise - Housing for the Homeless Policy Charrette
Apr 16  Project Workshop #2
April 23  Module 3 Exercise Reflection Due
May 7  Project Workshop #3
May 12/14:  Final Group Project Presentations
TBA:  Final Project Individual Reflection Papers Due

Course Administrative Policies

Laptops and phones
As much as we love these modern conveniences, they can get in the way of discussion. While we would prefer they remain in your bag, if you do use them, please keep them quiet and your activities limited to those that are of benefit to the class and your learning.

Writing guidelines and help
All written assignments should include references and citations, and use Chicago Manual of Style or APA conventions. The MIT Writing and Communication Center (12-132) http://writing.mit.edu/wcc offers professional advice from published writers about oral presentations and about all types of academic, creative, and professional writing. On writing a position paper/memo, see some helpful tips from HKS here.

Disabilities
If you have a documented disability, or any other problem you think may affect your ability to perform in class, please see me early in the semester so that arrangements may be made to accommodate you. For MIT's policy on accommodations for disabilities, see http://mit.edu/uaap/sds/students.

Academic Misconduct
Plagiarism and cheating are both academic crimes. Never 1) turn in an assignment that you did not write yourself, 2) turn in an assignment for this class that you previously turned in for another class. If you do so, it may result in a failing grade for the class, and possibly even suspension. Please see me if you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism. Anyone caught plagiarizing or cheating will be reported to the provost in line with recognized university procedures. For MIT's guidelines for academic integrity, see http://web.mit.edu/academicintegrity.
Course Schedule & Readings

Introduction to Big Plans

Feb 3  Course Introduction
Questions of the Day
  ● What are Big Plans? What makes them Big? What makes them Plans?
  ● What is the role of the planner - facilitator, convener, visionary, advocate?
Required Readings
Recommended Readings

Feb 5  Role for the Planning Profession: Theories and Dilemmas
Questions of the Day
  ● How does planning relate to complex questions of process, implementation, politics, equity, and the environment?
  ● For whom do we plan? What are the impacts of planning?
Required Readings
Recommended Readings
Module 1: What is the city? Where does it end?

Feb 10 Contemporary Urban Mega Challenges: Processes, Spaces, and Places

Questions of the Day
- What are the contemporary challenges facing cities?
- What processes drive urbanization and what is their relationship with mega-plans?

Required Readings

Recommended Readings

Feb 12 Urbanization Scale and Boundaries: Institutions and Governance

Question of the Day
- How does global urbanization challenge existing institutions and modes of governance?

Required Readings

Recommended Readings

Feb 17 NO CLASS - PRESIDENTS DAY [Meet with Linda and/or Mike by Today]

Feb 19 Planning for Resilience in Boston: Past, Present, and Future

Question of the Day
- How does Boston’s history of landmaking inform its future?

Required Readings
- Boston Living with Water Competition website: http://www.bostonlivingwithwater.org
Feb 24 Scalar Politics: Waterfront Toronto and the Lower Don Lands

Questions of the Day

- How do intergovernmental relations affect the planning and implementation of large local projects?

Required Readings


Recommended Readings


Feb 26 Planning at the Ecological Scale

[Due at Beginning of Class: Project Teams & Site Selections]

Guest Lecture

Question of the Day

- At what territorial scale(s) do we need to plan to solve contemporary urban challenges?

Required Reading

- TBD by Lecturer

Recommended Readings


** Feb 28 [SATURDAY] ** Boston Living with Water Competition Public Jury & Exhibition

[Mar 2 Competition Public Jury & Exhibition Reflection Due by Noon]

Mar 3 Workshop #1: Boston Living with Water
Module 2: Whose Big Plan?

Mar 5  Worlding Cities, Ordinary Cities

Question of the Day
- How are cities using Big Plans to positioning themselves in order to compete on the global network of cities?

Required Readings

Mar 10 Exploding Cities: Master Planning in Abu Dhabi, China and Vietnam

Guest Lecture: Mitch Glass, Senior Urban Designer, Goody Clancy

Question of the Day
- TBD

Required Movie Viewing and Readings

Recommended Readings

Mar 12 Shrinking Cities: Post-Industrial America

Guest Lecture

Question of the Day
- TBD

Required Readings:
  http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/planting-seeds-of-hope

Recommended Readings
Mar 17  Debate: Promoting Cities - Should Boston Host the Olympics?

[Due at Beginning of Class: Debate Position Paper]

Required Readings

  http://lsecities.net/media/objects/articles/rethinking-olympic-infrastructure/en-gb/
  https://placesjournal.org/article/the-displacement-decathlon

Recommended Readings (TBD)


Mar 19  Workshop #2: Navigating the Politics and Stakeholders of the Project Site

[Due at Beginning of Class: Debate Reflection]

Required Readings

- Bent Flyvbjerg, Rationality and power, RIPT, pp. 318-29.

Recommended Readings


Mar 24, 26  NO CLASS, SPRING BREAK

Module 3: Planning for Whom?

Mar 31  Fiscal Fallouts: Co-op City in the Bronx

Guest Lecture by Bob Fogelson, MIT Professor of History and Urban Studies

Question of the Day

- TBD

Required Readings

- TBD

Apr 2  Resilience and Climate Change Responses in New York City and Jakarta

Guest Lecture by Kian Goh, Doctoral Candidate, DUSP

Question of the Day

- TBD

Required Readings


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DRAFT SYLLABUS
● Rebuild by Design website, http://www.rebuildbydesign.org and Design Brief

Apr 7 Cumulative Impacts & Post-Disaster Politics: The Case of Northern Haiti

Questions of the Day
● What do we evaluate impacts - at what geographic and temporal scales?
● What windows do disasters open and for whom?

Required Readings

Recommended Readings

Apr 9 Planning for the Just City

Questions of the Day
● How do the plans we’ve examined to date seek to advance a more just city?
● Is this or should this be an explicit goal?

Required Readings:

Recommended Readings:
● Governor Patrick signs Executive Order on Environmental Justice: http://www.ace-ej.org

Apr 14 Exercise: Policy Charrette on Housing for the Homeless in Boston
[Due at Beginning of Class: Charrette Position Paper]

Recommended Readings
● City of Boston. Bringing Boston Home. 
https://dnd.cityofboston.gov/portal/v1/contentRepository/Public/dnd%20pdfs/EndingHomelessness/Bringing_Boston_Home_web.pdf

Apr 16 Workshop #3: Evaluating a Project’s Social and Environmental Impacts
Recommended Readings

Apr 21 NO CLASS, PATRIOTS DAY

Module 4: Do the little things make a Big Plan work?
Apr 23 Building Social Capital at the Community Scale: The Case of Parcel 19 and Villa Victoria
[Due at Noon: Charrette Reflection]
Guest Lecture
Question of the Day
● TBD
Required Readings
● TBD
http://www.hks.harvard.edu/content/download/68626/1247314/version/1/file/villa_victoria.pdf
Recommended Readings

Apr 28 Technology & Smart Cities
Guest Lecture
Question of the Day
● TBD
Required Readings
● TBD

Apr 30 Uneven Growth: Tactical Urbanisms for Expanding Megacities
Question of the Day
● TBD
Required Readings
● TBD
● Browse the exhibit website and read in depth proposals that speak to you 
http://uneven-growth.moma.org

May 5 Revisiting the Role of Planning
Questions of the Day
What is the place for mega-plans and small-scale and grassroots solutions?
How do we develop solutions that bridge these two poles of planning?
Does rational planning exist? What is the role of the planner?

Required Readings

May 7  Desk Crits and Discussion of Final Project Process

Course Conclusion

May 12 Final Project Presentations
[Due at Beginning of Class: All Presentations/Posters]

May 14 Final Project Presentations

TBA  Final Individual Project Papers
[Due at Midnight via Stellar]