ARTH 483A/ARTH 583A (SOC 480B)

Partnerships in Sustainable Community Revitalization:
A “Virtual Incubator” for Micro-Development in Distressed Neighborhoods in Binghamton

“Right to the City” graffiti on billboard advertising the sale of newly built market-value condos in a low-income neighborhood (Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, 2011)

CEL Course (“Community-Engaged Learning”)
Fall 2016

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No prior knowledge required. Open to undergraduates and graduate students from across the disciplines. This course fulfills the Art History Department’s “Architecture and Urban Studies” requirement for a 400-level seminar.
Course Description: This seminar is for students interested in addressing poverty and urban revitalization at the community-level. Our shared project is to develop a cross-sector partnership or "virtual incubator" to assist residents of modest means in transforming distressed neighborhoods near restaurants, breweries, boutiques, luxury housing, and a “High Tech Incubator” currently under construction in downtown Binghamton. We will begin with foundational readings about asymmetries and blind spots in "top-down" city planning and the consequences of leaving neighborhoods on the fringes of commercial development off the revitalization grid. We will also explore the concept of “the right to the city” (the right to individual and collective participation across socio-economic strata in the reshaping of urban space). Students will then research government initiatives intended to stimulate sustainable “bottom-up” revitalization of distressed neighborhoods and successful cross-sector partnerships in this kind of micro-development in cities across North America. To select a local neighborhood with a cluster of viable properties (vacant 2-3 unit structures that could be renovated as owner-occupied and income-generating), students will be supervised in basic field research and data analysis by City of Binghamton officials in charge of planning, community development, and building construction, zoning, and code. With technical support from BU’s GIS Core Facility they will use basic GIS tools to create an updateable digital archive of the foreclosed or abandoned properties, incorporating new data we gather for our purposes. They will interview experts in non-profits, banks, law firms, and contracting companies to create a local directory of professionals willing to volunteer time and services to the project. And they will launch the “virtual incubator” through neighborhood outreach about opportunities for assistance to those who qualify in the financing, purchase, and renovation of the blighted housing stock.

Our working assumption (based on research discussed throughout the semester), is that a) the revitalization of commercial districts is most successful when supported by development in blighted communities immediately surrounding them, and b) revitalization of distressed communities succeeds best when the residents themselves become stakeholders in the process.

The desired community outcomes are additional owner-occupied, income-generating properties (residential and mixed-use) in the target neighborhood and an increase in low-income residents as stakeholders in Binghamton’s current boom.

Learning objectives for students include acquaintance with theories concerning “the right to the city;” on a more practical level, familiarity with issues of poverty as they pertain to housing in Binghamton; knowledge of city zoning and building codes regulating urban development; knowledge about government policy and cross-sector partnerships for sustainable community revitalization; experience in putting together a cross-sector partnership; basic techniques for qualitative data collection and quantitative analysis regarding poverty and urban blight at the level of the neighborhood; basic GIS skills in urban planning; experience in public outreach.
COURSE SYLLABUS - DRAFT

Week 1

Class Meeting: Introduction to the course; organizational and scheduling matters. Virtual tour of possible target neighborhoods.

Week 2

Assignment in preparation for weekly class discussion: Read Chris Butler, Henri Lefebvre: Spatial Politics, Everyday Life, and the Right to the City (Routledge, 2014), in particular Chapters 4 (“State power and the politics of space”), 5 (“Modernity, inhabitance, and the rhythms of everyday life”), and 6 (“The right to the city and the production of differential space”).

Weekly class meeting: Seminar discussion about “the right to the city,” a philosophical debate with real-life implications regarding the right across socio-economic strata to individual and collective participation in the reshaping of modern cities. (Throughout the semester we will continue to reflect on “the right to the city” and other concepts discussed in Butler's book.)

Week 3

Assignment in preparation for weekly class discussion: Internet research on 1) the recent $500 million award from Governor Cuomo’s “Upstate Revitalization Initiative” (January 2016) aimed at economic development in the Southern Tier, and 2) current plans for allocation of these funds in Binghamton. Bring outlines with detailed talking points about the stated purpose of the funds; who is responsible for allocating the funds; the kinds of development projects already underway with the funds or in the planning stages; the location of the projects (we will map them in class); and the stakeholders or beneficiaries of the projects. Bring the urls of the sites you consulted (minimum: 8).

Weekly class meeting: Seminar discussion of the significance and potential impact of the $500 million award from the Upstate Revitalization Initiative (URI), and what relation it might have on neighborhood revitalization.

Additional event to be scheduled during Week 3: Discussion with Tom Costello, head of the City of Binghamton’s Department of Building Construction, Zoning, and Code, who will review different types of public records available for upcoming online research concerning demographics (including income levels and crime) and vacant housing stock in Binghamton.

Week 4
Assignment in preparation for weekly class discussion: A) Half the class will conduct online research on a) federal and state policy intended to promote cross-sector revitalization of urban neighborhoods with residents as stakeholders, and B) half the class will conduct online research on cross-sector models already implemented in cities around North America. Bring outlines with detailed talking points and urls of the sites you consulted (minimum: 6).


Weekly class meeting: Seminar presentations on the two online research topics outlined above in the weekly assignment and discussion of housing in the context of “the right to the city.”

Additional event to be scheduled during Week 4: Group walking tour of the possible target neighborhoods led by Tom Costello, head of the City of Binghamton’s Department of Building Construction, Zoning, and Code.

Week 5

Assignment in preparation for weekly class discussion: Divide online research on census reports, property surveys, records of real estate sales and property taxes, pending foreclosures, plans for demolition, and crime statistics in the target neighborhood in Binghamton.

Also explore “Binghamton – Stories from North of Main” (http://giscore.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=9cf894d69ae84f728b00ae830a6a5f20).

Weekly class meeting: Seminar presentations of research and discussion of the data about community demographics and the state of real property in the target neighborhood.

Additional event to be scheduled during Week 5: Discussion with George Homsy (Assistant Professor, Public Administration) and Siobhan Hart (Assistant Professor, Anthropology) about the ArcGIS Story Map they put together last year with their BU students, “Binghamton – Stories from North of Main” (http://giscore.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=9cf894d69ae84f728b00ae830a6a5f20).

Week 6

Assignment in preparation for weekly seminar discussion: 1) Watch Geospatial Revolution (http://geospatialrevolution.psu.edu/), a 4-part video series (approx. 1 hour viewing time) on the history, applications, and future of digital mapping and
other location-based technologies. 2) Read What is ArcGIS (http://downloads.esri.com/support/documentation/ao_/698What_is_ArcGIS.pdf), an introduction to software designed for organizing, analyzing, and sharing data with geospatial components drawn from various sources.

**Weekly class meeting:** Seminar in the GIS Campus Core facility (Old Johnson 101). Working with Kevin Heard (Associate Director of BU’s Core GIS Facility), learn how ArcGIS software stores data in nested files with tools making evident and permitting the display of key relationships among various data-components. Begin using basic ArcGIS tools to put together a digital archive of the abandoned structures in the target neighborhood, using information from government databases and other online sources (ongoing project).

**Additional event to be scheduled during Week 6:** Discussion with Mary Webster, a resident in the target neighborhood, unofficial neighborhood historian, longtime advocate of historic preservation of distressed structures of local significance, and founding member of Safe Streets, a community group made of residents and representatives of local business committed to addressing crime. Ms. Webster will share insights about the history and challenges of neighborhood revitalization from the perspective of a grass-roots organizer.

**Week 7**

**Assignments in preparation for weekly class discussions:** All participants will read The NACEDA Communications Toolkit, a 13-page guide put out by the National Alliance of Community Economic Development Associations providing guidelines for speaking in public about community development work (http://community-wealth.org/sites/clone.community-wealth.org/files/downloads/tool-nacada-communications.pdf). While here, check out the rest of the NACEDA’s website (http://www.naceda.org/).

A) Half the class will also read Ch. 3, Section 15, “Qualitative Methods to Assess Community Issues,” in The Community Tool Box, an online resource produced by the University of Kansas for community action and social change (http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/qualitative-methods/main).

B) Half the class will also read A Guide to Conducting Volunteer Interviews, an online resource put together by faculty at The Ohio State University Extension Program (http://www.smartny.org/files/2013/02/VIOSU.pdf).

**Weekly class meeting:** Dividing into two groups, discuss methods for qualitative data collection either in a community setting or professional office setting, each group developing common instrument and set of protocols to be used in the next phase of this project.
Additional event to be scheduled during Week 7: (Speaker TBA)

**Weeks 8 - 9**


Weekly class meetings: Discuss the social and economic effects of gentrification in the revitalization of distressed communities and begin the following:

Conduct

- initial community outreach (collaborative field work in groups)

or

- interviews with professionals in public & private sector offices and agencies (collaborative field work in pairs)

Seminar discussions devoted to presentation of community-engaged work conducted that week.

Additional event to be scheduled during Week 8: Discussion with Lillian Levy, a partner at the law firm of Hinman, Howard and Kattell, where she is Chair of the Residential Real Estate practice groups. Also serving on the boards of numerous philanthropic and charitable organizations in Binghamton, Ms. Levy will share insights about approaching professionals in the world of real estate to serve as volunteers in the “virtual incubator.”

**Weeks 10 - 11**

Assignments in preparation for weekly class discussions: TBA.

Conduct

- on-site visits to inspect the abandoned properties in the digital archive with members of the City of Binghamton’s Department of Planning, Housing, and/or Department of Community Development and Building, Construction, Zoning, and Code, and/or Broome County Land Bank (collaborative field work in groups)

- analysis of data collected in the community outreach and in interviews with professionals (collaborative work both in and outside the classroom)
Weekly class meetings: Students working on the digital archive will present it (work-in-progress) to the group for discussion. Students involved in qualitative data collection will present the data and initial analysis to the group for discussion.

**Weeks 12-14**

**Assignments in preparation for weekly class discussions:** TBA

Divided in groups, put together the directory of professional volunteers for the “virtual incubator” (collaborative work both in and outside the classroom)

- Organize end-of-semester outreach programs (collaborative work both in and outside the classroom)

Weekly class meetings: Presentation of progress with the “virtual incubator.” Presentation of progress in the organization of the outreach programs (including venues secured; specific volunteers lined up for each event – number to be determined; publicity for the events; format for presentation of information at the event – digital and hard copy as take-away for attendees).

**Week 15**

**Assignment in preparation for weekly class discussion:** All students attend the outreach events.

**Weekly class discussion:** De-brief about the outreach events.

**Finals Week**

Submit narrative report of the semester’s work, incorporating journal entries.