

Community Dynamics and Engagement (CP 6036)

School of City and Regional Planning

Georgia Institute of Technology

Fall 2026

Instructor: Gregory Randolph

Course Description

The physical, social and economic fabric of human settlements is profoundly shaped by planning decisions. To ensure that interventions in the built environment happen through democratic decision-making, the planning field has adopted public participation as a cornerstone of practice. However, the imperative of community engagement raises complex, thorny questions: How do we balance our roles as technical experts and facilitators of participatory local governance? How do we grapple with communities as complex, contradictory, and power-laden? How do we design engagement processes that are purposeful rather than ritualistic?

This course introduces MCRP students, first, to the origins of community engagement in planning, studying it as a response to the great planning disasters that occurred when community voice was ignored or silenced. Second, we interrogate the forms of public participation introduced to democratize planning beginning in the late 20th century. And third, we examine principles for designing effective engagement processes and building community action around positive transformations in the built environment.

The course is structured around lab sessions, designed for seminar-style discussions, experiential learning, workshops, and field visits in Atlanta. Most but not all weeks, these sessions are supplemented with pre-lab lectures, intended for delivering related course material in a more traditional instructional format.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Situate community engagement within planning's history and ethical foundations
- Analyze the ways in which identity, history, place, and power shape community dynamics
- Critically assess traditional forms of public participation
- Identify and apply best practices in designing community engagement processes

Assignments and Evaluation

Neighborhood Case Study (60%): During the semester, the cornerstone of your work outside of class will be the development of a neighborhood case study. You will trace the history, identity, institutions, stakeholder groups, and contemporary issues of a specific, clearly delineated neighborhood in any part of the world. Please read carefully the assignment description available on Canvas.

Community Engagement Plan (20%): Based on research in your neighborhood case study, you will design a community engagement process around one of the neighborhood's contemporary issues. Your deliverables will include a professional engagement plan and a communication tool (digital asset) that launches, promotes, and outlines the process for the community. Please read carefully the assignment description available on Canvas.

Participation and in-class exercises (20%): Throughout the semester, participation will be assessed through both in-class exercises and your contributions to class discussion (see Attendance and Participation below). In-class exercises are typically conducted in pairs or small groups and are not announced in advance. They will be assessed based on the student's engagement with the course materials and/or demonstrated preparation for the day's discussion.

Grading Scale

Grade	Minimum Points Required
A	900
B	800
C	700
D	600

Attendance and Participation

Students are expected to attend every class, barring unforeseen circumstances. In-class exercises are not designed to be made up at a later date.

Participation grades (20% of course grade) will be assigned according to the following guidelines:

<i>Excellent</i> (180-200 points)	The student actively and meaningfully contributes to all in-class exercises. In most class meetings, the student verbally participates by responding to questions, asking questions, and offering comments. These contributions demonstrate an excellent level of preparedness for class. They reflect full, enthusiastic, and insightful engagement with course concepts.
<i>Superb</i> (160-180 points)	The student actively and meaningfully contributes to all in-class exercises. In more than half of class meetings, the student verbally participates by responding to questions, asking questions, and offering comments. These contributions generally demonstrate a high level of preparedness for class. They reflect deep engagement with course concepts.
<i>Satisfactory</i> (140-160 points)	The student actively and meaningfully contributes to at least 75% of in-class exercises. In about half of class meetings, the student verbally participates by responding to questions, asking questions, and offering comments. These contributions generally demonstrate a preparedness for class and engagement with course concepts.
<i>Subpar</i> (120-140 points)	The student actively and meaningfully contributes to at least 50% of in-class exercises. On rare occasions, the student participates verbally by responding to questions, asking questions, and offering comments. These contributions sometimes demonstrate preparedness for class and intellectual engagement with course concepts.
<i>Unsatisfactory</i> (< 120 points)	The student fails to regularly participate meaningfully in class or contribute to in-class exercises.

Required Materials

There are no textbooks that you must purchase. All required materials will be made available on our Canvas site or via hyperlinks included in the course schedule.

Academic Integrity

Assignments submitted by individual students for evaluation by the instructor must adhere to the academic integrity guidelines established by the Institute. Academic integrity violations of the Georgia Tech Honor Code include: unauthorized access, unauthorized collaboration, plagiarism, false claims of performance, grade alteration, deliberate falsification, forgery, and distortion. For details on the specific meaning of any of these terms, please refer to the Institute [honor code](#).

Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement

At Georgia Tech, we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. The Student-Faculty Expectations articulate some basic expectations that you can have of me and that I have of you. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and cordial interactions will help build the environment we seek. Therefore, I encourage you to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech while in this class.

Accommodations

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, contact the Office of Disability Services at (404) 894-2563 or <http://disabilityservices.gatech.edu/>, as soon as possible, to make an appointment to discuss your special needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please also email me as soon as possible in order to set up a time to discuss your learning needs.