

DEAR PRUDENCE: POWER, CAMPUS-COMMUNITY  
COLLABORATIONS, AND THE ELUSIVE SPACE BETWEEN  
CONSTRUCTIVE DISRUPTION AND NEOLIBERAL  
SUBCONTRACT

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Summer 2018

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Urban Studies Program at the University of Washington Tacoma  
Working Paper Number 011

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# DEAR PRUDENCE: POWER, CAMPUS-COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS, AND THE ELUSIVE SPACE BETWEEN CONSTRUCTIVE DISRUPTION AND NEOLIBERAL SUBCONTRACT

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## Abstract

The democratic ideal of inclusive, communicative, practical reason associated with collaborative urban partnerships is increasingly criticized as being poorly empowered in the midst of urban development dynamics favoring established regime elites. Do public universities unwittingly abet such disparities? The tension between critical and/or marginalized voices, and more dominant modes of urban development is demonstrated in three forms of campus-community engagement at a public, urban-serving university. In each case, the university serves as a source of capacity for urban political actors and governance leaders, providing a venue to 1) elevate visibility of their agendas; 2) enlist faculty, student, and campus-based research resources; and 3) match private philanthropic capital with donors' favored initiatives. However, the relative ability of urban scholars to unsettle and broaden presumed purposes of urban development, or to empower different voices in its political processes, can be quite constrained. Can urban theoretical models respond to this challenge, in ways that are useful for campus-community partnerships? Public universities have entered a phase of unprecedented disinvestment by state governments. Graduating students face limited entry-level job prospects, and local agencies can be severely understaffed – the need to 'partner' has arguably never been stronger. Nevertheless, if public universities are to engage in the governance networks of urban and regional development, it must be as more than respondents to private sector imperatives, researchers seeking new data, training grounds for student-interns, sources of an academic imprimatur, below-market consultants, or fundraisers. A conceptual model of the university's potential role in collaborative urban governance is presented, emphasizing the unique and privileged position of urban scholars with a constructively critical perspective.

Presented at the Urban Affairs Association (UAA) meeting, April 8-11 2014; initially prepared for the annual conference of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP), Philadelphia, PA, October 29-Nov 2, 2014.

## Introduction

Planning ethics are formally addressed by the American Planning Association through both a Code of Conduct for certified planners (APA, 2005, 2009), as well as Guiding Principles (APA, 1992) for those associated with the field. More than a list of rules or mandates, a statement of ethics for planners “embodies values, and those values define both the profession and the behavior of those who embrace it” (Farmer, 2006). The values that animate professional planning ethics include a commitment to “serve the public interest,” while recognizing that this is “a question of continuous debate” and that “planning issues commonly involve a conflict of values and, often, there are large private interests at stake” (APA, 1992).

Where do planning academics fit into this statement of values, and what are our responsibilities in upholding them? More specifically, in light of the growing emphasis in our field on collaborative models of planning and governance, as well as the influence of private interests on these arrangements and our own role in introducing students to their prevalence - how should we think about and approach the enactment of collaborative partnerships as institutional investments at our universities, and as experiential teaching tools?

The paper begins by framing the significance of collaborative planning as a central paradigm in our field, as well as the related fields of environmental planning, public management, and urban governance more generally. It then relates collaborative planning to the practice of enacting campus-community partnerships, including a common critique of this practice, which has focused on the status of community partners. A less common criticism is then introduced, focused on partnership as an end unto itself, where

contentious political discourse is viewed as a threat.

This is related to the scholarly critique of collaborative planning, including fundamental concerns with the privileging of “large private interests” noted in our ethical guidelines, and the difficulty of adequately accounting for and correcting power differentials between different parties to a collaborative planning process or institutional arrangement. This critical perspective on collaborative planning is an excellent illustration of our unique role as planning academics: we have the freedom, perspective, and even the mandate to surface phenomena as they actually are in the world, rather than as we want or hope them to be.

What do we do with this knowledge, once surfaced? How does it inform our curricula, our teaching practices, and our institutional engagement with urban and regional partners? Three empirical examples are presented, to illustrate both the communicative potential of collaborative campus-community partnerships, as well as their troubling tendency to reproduce power relations deeply antithetical to the public-spiritedness of the planning professoriate, and our role within the planning profession itself. This tension is then examined as an ethical dilemma – and responsibility – for planning academics. The next section explores the nature of our ethical obligations with regard to campus-community partnerships. There is a strong ethical case to forge such partnerships, and an equally strong ethical case to approach the practice with caution, intention, and continual reflection.

Finally, the paper concludes with a preliminary theorization of the ethical enactment of campus-community partnerships by planning academics. Drawing on planning theorists’ enrollment of a community of practice model, practicing scholars can understand ourselves as occupying

a unique position in the planning profession, responding continually to a range of ethical imperatives, and influencing collaborative partnerships through our perspective as researchers, educators, and constructive critics.

## The Call for Collaboration

The communicative tradition provides an important and powerful conceptual model in the theory and practice of planning. Developed in part to respond to critiques of the technocratic utilitarianism of the “rational planning model” (Friedmann, 1987), communicative planning draws on the theory of communicative action developed by philosopher Jürgen Habermas to call for planning processes that involve multiple stakeholders, and incorporate different contending values, experiences, and ways of knowing into development plans and urban policies (Healey, 1992, 1996; J. E. Innes, 1992, 1995). Communicative planning models are distinguished by their emphasis on the development of shared, inter-subjective reason; the idea that we can learn from each other, for instance through argument and debate (Fischer & Forester, 1993), and thus arrive at better, more democratic outcomes is central to the theoretical rationale for collaboration on planning projects and policy initiatives. In practice, this has led to an increased emphasis on participatory processes and multi-stakeholder institutional arrangements, which are designed to support citizen engagement, enable input and buy-in from a range of project stakeholders, and promote continually reflective practice on the part of planners themselves, as plans are formulated and implemented (Forester, 1999; Healey, 1997; J. E. Innes & Booher, 1996, 2004).

Collaborative governance can be understood as an extension and complementary set of practices for this philosophical watershed. Practitioners and theorists of planning recognize that organizing project processes and decision-points to incorporate involvement from a variety of participants is part of a larger imperative to understand and undertake urban development, land use planning, and environmental management practices across various

agencies, organizations, and scales of governance. Patsy Healey sums up this ongoing challenge in her 2007 book, *Urban Complexity and Spatial Strategies*: fields such as planning require “recognition that the spheres of the state, the economy and daily life overlap and interact in complex ways in the construction of politics and policy”; to focus on governance is to focus on “the wider relations through which collective action is accomplished” (Healey, 2007) (17-18). As Innes and Booher note in their 2010 book, *Planning for Complexity*, the scope and scale of a planning process intended to develop “collaborative rationality” (J. E. Innes & Booher, 2010) is in fact part of a larger network performance of collaborative governance which “involves distributed control, open boundaries, and interdependent, nested network clusters of participants” (201). Collaborative rationality is thus the means through which effective, adaptive, democratic governance is carried out (J. E. Innes & Booher, 2010).

In environmental planning and management, collaboration has become the paradigm of choice (Margerum, 2008), driven by necessity as well as normative values. In an era of deteriorating environmental conditions, limited public resources, overlapping jurisdictional responsibilities, and increasing reliance on citizen groups for advocacy, outreach, and volunteer labor, collaborative planning provides a model to address these challenges (Margerum, 2002; Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). Moreover, collaboration can extend beyond discrete environmental problems or plans; it has the potential to support ongoing learning networks (Goldstein & Butler, 2010), helping to reform an overreliance on technical managerialism into a resilient capacity to make sense of problems, prioritize goals, and respond to crises (Goldstein, 2012).

Similarly, in public management and policy studies, effective collaboration across sectors has been characterized

as essential to leadership itself, if we are to have any hope of meeting public goals and enacting broadly-shared common purposes (Bryson & Crosby, 1992). This has only become more important in an era of decentralized, networked governance (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003); leading to the call for policy actors to engage citizens directly in democratic governance (Feldman, Khademian, Ingram, & Schneider, 2006; Sirianni, 2009); to be inclusive managers and collaborative capacity builders (Feldman & Khademian, 2007; Weber & Khademian, 2008), and to enable virtuous cycles of collaboration through recourse to more traditional forms of governing authority (Weir, Rongerude, & Ansell, 2009).

The justifications for collaborative approaches to planning and governance are clearly well established, and urban planning and development practice is now widely influenced by the practical and normative justifications for building multi-sector group processes into the governance of urban land use, natural resources, public health, redevelopment, and placemaking. Embracing the language of collaborative governance “seems to help practitioners and theorists alike to unlearn embedded intellectual reflexes and break out of tacit patterns of thinking” to address this new “topography” of political institutions and planning practices (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003)(2). As planning educators, we continue to shape and respond to this topography, teaching students the importance of building partnerships in order to plan, manage and govern effectively and democratically. The collaboration imperative is strongly embraced by our theoretical models as well as our curricula in urban planning; frequently, collaboration is also emphasized and enacted by the campus-community partnerships that form an important part of many students’ education.

### Campus-community partnerships

There is a substantial and growing literature on campus-community partnerships, including emphases on service-learning, institutional resource generation, and the role

of the university in urban development and neighborhood revitalization (Maurrasse, 2001; Percy, Zimpher, & Brukart, 2006; Perry & Weiwel, 2005; Rodin, 2007). In general, much of this work views such partnerships in a positive light, contextualizing their emergence against the historical failure of urban universities in particular to acknowledge or engage with their neighbors. Campus-community partnerships are examples of collaboration that can include professors, students, administrators, local residents, non-profit and neighborhood groups, private businesses, philanthropic foundations, and public agencies or state-run organizations; furthermore, the factor most cited as crucial to their relative success and longevity is a shared focus on students and their learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Sandy & Holland, 2006). That is, not only are campus-community partnerships a growing and important form of collaboration; we are also using them to deliver planning education. This is illustrated by an examination of such partnerships in a special edited volume of the *Journal of Planning Education and Research* (volume 17, issue 4, 1998).

Critical examinations of the service-learning partnership model often problematize the power relations implicit in the ivory tower metaphor, and focus attention on building and sustaining equal status for community partners in ongoing participatory research action projects (Checkoway, 1997; Harkavy, 1997; Reardon, 2000; Reardon, Ionescu-Heroiu, & Rumbach, 2008). This important critique warns academics against deploying their expertise in a kind of self-congratulatory, drive-by field research – sapping goodwill and depleting relationships – while simultaneously instrumentalizing the communities they claim to serve. It is a critique that assumes greater relative political power on the part of the academic researcher than the community partner, which may often be the case. This frame is consistent with longstanding and valid concern in the

social sciences with the nature of field research itself, more specifically the enacted relationship between researcher as expert, knowing subject, and the researched as primitive objects of scrutiny and theory-building (look back to old qual methods syllabus for 1-2 key cites).

However, a different critique is developed here, extending the insights of a less common strain of analysis examining the university's complicity in enacting and maintaining problematic spaces of what Pendras and Dierwechter call uncritical, "oppressive civility" in campus-community interactions (Pendras & Dierwechter, 2012). The work of Howell Baum lays the groundwork for this alternative critique, where he identifies the disconnect between "fantasies and realities" in campus-community partnerships (Baum, 2000). The terms of engagement are often "expediently disingenuous: funders want to persuade their constituents that they are investing in major reforms, grant writers promise to accomplish everything funders want, and all agree to believe one another" (Baum, 2000) (241). The important thing, in this collective embracing and arranging of campus-community partnerships, is the enabling of collaboration; the question of collaboration *for what* is too often neatly elided, a can kicked down the proverbial road and/or packaged in the false advertising of a cure-all nutritional powerhouse. The fact that expectations for campus-community partnerships are rarely met, or that their sustenance requires significant time, knowledge, and money (Baum, 2000) are uncomfortable realities of the collaboration mantra; another, less frequently acknowledged reality is that space for "critical and potentially contrarian role[s] in urban political and policy discussions" (Pendras & Dierwechter, 2012)(319) is actively undermined, in practice, by the tacitly enforced gospel of collaboration as an end unto itself.

## The political critique of collaboration

Collaborative planning has long been approached along these lines. Planning theorists studying collaborative processes have always acknowledged that interest-based ne-

gotiation is prone to privilege the voices and perspectives of stakeholders with economic resources, social status, and political wherewithal (Forester, 1989; J. Innes, 2004). However, this problem has been taken up by scholars who view it as a fundamental Achilles heel in the design and implementation of collaborative planning processes and outcomes, and call instead for more agonism, debate, conflict and struggle in planning, as being essential to democracy itself (Hillier, 2003; Huxley & Yiftachel, 2000; Purcell, 2008).

The call for more openly agonistic processes in urban planning and policy is framed against the notion that collaboration has become the field's new Rationality, our effort to rescue ourselves from the "postmodern abyss" (Beauregard, 1991). In this view, this is not just an act of existential self-preservation, for which we might feel empathy, understanding, a pragmatic hopefulness, even a grudging respect. Rather, by enacting a new Modernist planning ideal, but failing to acknowledge it as such – or worse, dressing this old wolf in the sheep's clothing of emancipatory knowledge-in-action – we risk unintentionally embracing and enabling the ravenous, unchecked forces of neoliberalization (Purcell, 2009). That is, despite nodding to the idea that rationality is a contested and context-dependent phenomenon, the relative porosity and procedural emphasis of many collaborative institutional designs provide wide-open avenues for the increasingly hegemonic project of market-driven normative values and urban capital accumulation (Fainstein, 1994, 2001; Flyvbjerg, 1998).

Neoliberalism as a theoretical concept is different from the collaborative planning critique. The argument is that neoliberalism is what we get when collaborative planning is imperfectly executed, as of course it must be, in practice - incompletely understood, weakly designed, underfunded,

inadequately staffed, insufficiently managed, and overlaid with a veneer of cooperation and success. Such realities can be understood as a manifestation of the critique and analysis developed by Raul Lejano in his consideration of the practical disconnect between policy design and its intents as “text,” and the practical process of its becoming embedded (or not), taken up, interpreted, adapted and enacted to produce patterns and outcomes, as “context” (Lejano, 2006). Too often, our capacities as analysts for identifying and understanding the competing ways of knowing and “dimensionality” of planning and policy situations is limited (Lejano, 2006), with the practical outcome that a broadly pleasing metanarrative can serve as a contingent means to move a planning discussion forward, without working out the deeper conflicts and spatial claims (Lejano & Wessells, 2006). Perhaps this is necessary, we tell ourselves pragmatically. But perhaps, this is how “the increased power of capital to shape the future of the city” rolls on unchecked, with collaborative planners smoothing the way (Purcell, 2009)(147).

That collaborative planning is often undertaken by highly intelligent, politically progressive, professionally trained, dedicated and hardworking people, does not change this argument. The charge of neoliberal hegemony indicts the instrumentalization that quietly organizes collective endeavor, especially those based on negotiation - where the capacity of political interests to be made commensurable with dollars gradually elevates and reinforces an underlying calculus where the only rationality that matters is market utility. In campus-community partnerships, this can mean that the university space and function becomes first and foremost a vehicle for this project of enacting and connecting commensurable utilities: for instance advocating for urban land use development, training students for available jobs, furthering donor interests, and so on.

For many of us, this critique may resonate deeply with our experience of campus-community partnerships, and call into question our relationship to a longstanding commit-

ment in our field and on the part of communicative planning theorists to emancipatory knowledge-in-action that challenges, rather than reinforces existing socio-spatial power structures. What, then are our ethical obligations: to our students, to ourselves, to the cities and the profession that we serve? What knowledge-of-action have we developed in our experience of these partnerships, as scholars; that needs to be made accessible for knowledge-in-action, going forward (Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009)? In order to examine these questions, I intentionally move into a first-person narrative account, to highlight my own efforts at reflective practice (Schön, 1984) as a planning educator, striving to make sense of and navigate the dilemmas raised by “this collaboration, this commitment to the common good” (Boyer, 1996)(22).

## Empirical Exposition: three case study examples

In my role as an assistant professor of urban studies, I have led three campus-community initiatives that help to exemplify the goals and tensions described above. In following paragraphs, I describe each of these initiatives briefly, with a focus on the communicative intents and outcomes, as well as the more troubling dynamics that seemed often to dampen debate, stifle critical voices, and/or reproduce existing power relations amongst a relatively narrow cross-section of urban governance actors. The first two partnerships are initiatives that I conceived and designed, while the third is one that I inherited from another faculty member, adjusting the design based on conversations with past instructors.

### Example 1: an annual campus-community forum

In early 2010, after nearly a year of meetings with local leaders and community members, as well as conversations with scholars at my own institution (the University of

Washington, Tacoma) and our cross-town neighbor, the University of Puget Sound, I convened a one-day campus-community event, the Urban Studies Forum. The topical focus of the inaugural forum was Tacoma's waterfront, reflecting my own substantive research interest in urban waterways and shoreline planning.

My theoretical, normative, and pragmatic motivations were varied. As a scholar interested in action research and collaborative governance, and as a new faculty member with a full course load, I wanted to meet professionals active in the policy space that I study, and begin to build relationships. As a planning studies scholar at a relatively new urban campus, where the physical spaces seemed at times to be more ambitious than the ways in which they were used, in practice, to enliven the urban fabric of the city in an intellectual or ideational way, I was interested in the concept of public scholarship, and wanted to host a conversation between different publics with an interest in listening to, and learning from each other.

The first forum was a success on many fronts. We welcomed over 150 attendees, from local, regional, and state government agencies; neighborhood and community groups; and the university itself. Campus administration, which had been lukewarm in its support for planning the event, became enthusiastic champions in subsequent years. Students and campus neighbors seemed to enjoy the chance to interact with each other in novel ways; and the Urban Studies unit enjoyed additional goodwill on the part of its civic advisory board and in the view of campus leadership.

The communicative outcomes of the event were not insignificant. While some attendees may have been lured by the usual trope of downtown waterfronts as salvific urban development, academic contributions were enlisted to focus attention on the ongoing need for first-generation environmental regulatory policy, the potential folly of dismissing urban industry as an economic sector, and the

strong tradition of service learning on campus. Five Urban Studies seniors were selected from my senior capstone class to participate in a lunchtime poster session explaining their work. The planner leading the city's Shoreline Master Program update process – a major plan update mandated across hundreds of state municipalities at the time – was able to launch his public outreach with a presentation, and shoreline planners and parks advocates from across the region made connections with one another, and with students and local residents. Perhaps most important, a newly opened, flexibly designed campus gathering space was inaugurated with a different kind of university event; free, and focused on the value of bringing different urban publics together to hear what others are doing, and ideally to challenge and be challenged by others' thinking and perspectives.

The boosterish language creeps into my account, even as I strive to keep my scholar hat aright. With it, I fear, comes the fuzziness that invites and glosses neoliberal imperatives of interest maximization, utility seeking, and growth that can be monetized. My grassroots partners and entrée to local donors for the waterfront forum had motivations possibly more mixed than my own, including trying to get an industrial shoreline zone out of their residential backyard. The success of the first forum brought increased attention and investment from campus and civic leadership for subsequent gatherings, but with it came the increased difficulty of fully owning the event's content, and the higher stakes around potentially angering or offending a local supporter. Finally, the forum design by definition privileges discourse that is professionalized, relatively formal, and somewhat divorced from less empowered publics and their work; as a campus-community partnership, it is a deliberately variegated gathering, however it potentially enables the needs and discursive tastes of an already well-resourced urban elite.

## Example 2: a course with a community partner as client

Another partnership involved the design of a course in sustainability assessment as a service-learning partnership to investigate the meanings of urban sustainability, and produce a report of compiled data measures for 23 local municipalities (Wessells, Brockamp, Nagorski, & Thomas, 2014). In late 2012 I began to meet with a land use planner at a regional health agency, who was developing a sustainability toolkit for jurisdictions within the county. Together we decided to use my course to introduce students to methods, rationales and existing inventories for measuring urban sustainability – something that I had already been doing in the class – and then to task them with devising and justifying 12 measures for local municipalities, and collecting the relevant data.

Academic terms at UWT are short – ten weeks – and the course design was ambitious. Nevertheless, I wanted to give students the opportunity not just to think about and problematize why and how we attempt to measure sustainability, but also to undertake a project in their own region, and to learn the various difficulties and dilemmas of operationalizing this broad concept, by actually doing it. Students worked in three teams of eight, and approached their assigned issue areas with the language of the regional MPO: People, Planet, and Prosperity. They identified four measures each, and then took part in a “crit” session with our health agency partner, as well as MPO representatives. As a final project, each team presented and justified three measures, and collected and compiled the data. The following term, I worked with three students independently to further refine the measures and data, and produced a formal report for our partner.

The collaboration yielded a number of desirable relational outcomes. Among them, students were initiated into the process of translating their academic learning into the lived experience of a planning directive and work prod-

uct. Rather than merely reporting on existing inventory tools and regurgitating scholars’ concerns with different modes of measurement, they were able to grapple with the difficulty of isolating appropriate metrics, anticipating their use and possible misuse, and engaging directly with the relative depth and paucity of different available data sources. As the instructor, I was moved by the realization of undergraduate students’ profound hunger for useable skills and professional development, and their desire to perform well for non-academic professionals who were viewed as possible future employers. Our partner and MPO contacts remarked on students’ thoughtfulness and creativity, however the difficulty – and for me, desirability – of producing a consultant-style work product became increasingly apparent as the partnership progressed.

The subtext of most of the feedback from our partner was often, “This is how it’s done where I am, and so I need you to do it this way.” However the intent of the course, and indeed the premise of the undergraduate degree program in Sustainable Urban Development of which it is a required part, is to consciously question and unsettle known ways of doing things in urban planning and land use development. Sustainability indicators are only the latest incarnation in a long line of policy measures used to organize knowledge and influence politics (J. E. Innes, 1990); some of “how it’s done” is problematic, and to teach students to do it anyway, without at least an awareness of the tradeoffs involved, is counterproductive to the students’ intellectual education and to the ethos of the program. It also seemed clear at times that our partner was motivated by a need for labor, pure and simple: the agency was understaffed, there was no money to hire out for a study, and a transaction between their small planning unit and eager students was viewed as a way to meet this need.

### Example 3: a course that functions as a civic classroom

A final campus-community partnership example is a course on urban politics and governance that functions as an open classroom. The term began with a traditional textbook and classroom discussion, and then was opened up to host panels of governance leaders, and to welcome community attendance, over its final five weeks. These leadership panels were organized around planning and governance topics, for instance urban education or affordable housing, and students were assigned critical scholarship examining each topic from journals in planning studies, urban affairs, and public policy.

This course was inherited from faculty colleagues, who have written about its “problematic potential to advance a critical urban politics” (Pendras & Dierwechter, 2012). Having had the chance to consider their insights, I made a handful of changes to the course design in an attempt to support more satisfying outcomes: students were trained on how to frame and ask a direct, respectful, and critical question; guests were prepared via e-mail to expect discussion on specific, and not always comfortable issues; and I invested energy in outreach, to increase off-campus attendance – building a public website for the course where readings and guiding questions were made available, posting fliers around campus and making contacts with local media, and sending announcements for each panel session via various on-campus and off-campus lists, as well as social media. Additionally, I partnered with a politics professor at a local private university to combine our students for the panel discussions, and prepared carefully for my role as host and moderator, with introductory comments, challenging questions to pose if students failed to do so, and the commitment to keep guests to their allotted time, in both their initial presentations as well as their responses to audience questions.

Some of the shared dialogue that developed during these sessions was probing and substantive, confirming that

while problematic, the potential for classroom spaces to advance a critical urban politics does indeed exist. Occasionally guest speakers would diverge from their party line in response to a question or a back-and-forth that emerged between panelists, and some students impressed me with their willingness to pose hard questions to even the most imposing and self-assured leaders. It became clear that students were engaged and stimulated by the contact with guest speakers, and it is a unique feature of a mid-size city and small campus that civic leaders were frequently willing to join our classroom sessions. This exposure to different organizations and individuals helped many students to think in more concrete terms about their career aspirations.

The sense of instrumental exchanges and relatively thin urban political discourse identified by former instructors did not disappear, however. It may not be a large city, but Tacoma leaders are busy and agenda-driven. Many who came to the class were either motivated to convey a rosy image of their work and organization, or uneasy with ceding traditional behaviors of authority (talking over listening; certainty over nuance) – or both. Too often, students were cowed by the job titles and confidence of our guests, producing a dynamic where they were happy to be talked at, consumers of leaders’ experiences, without wanting or needing to question the content of what was said. That certain things were simply “how it works” in the mythic real world beyond academe, seemed a providential truth some students were all too happy to hear (Pendras & Dierwechter, 2012). This near reverence for the sound bites of some guests cast our dense readings and homework questions – the very construct and practice of going to college, even – as an irritating impediment to getting on with the so-called real life situations in which real stuff gets done. Finally, any consistent impulse students may have had to provoke richer debate through their preparation and questions was tempered by their palpable desire to make a favor-

able impression and to appear street-smart, sympathetic and work-ready. Many of my students take on debt to get to college, many of them are older and returning students with children and households to support, and almost all of them need jobs.

## The ethics of partnership

Where are the ethical obligations of the planning educator in these situations? This section provides a discussion of the partnership initiatives presented above, in order to formulate a response to this question.

On the one hand, we can argue that planning educators must provide experience of the world as it is; that students should be prepared for the reality of power as it is exercised, enacted, produced and reproduced. That this is a

largely market-driven landscape, is [Table 1. Partnerships as neo-liberal subcontract – or constructive disruption?](#)

simply the current nature of real-

ity; thus, our responsibility is to enlist external partners into shared initiatives, meeting their interests and without overly challenging their rationales and ways of being, in order to provide this valuable experience to our students. Taken to its extreme, this potentially casts planning education as a form of neoliberal subcontract.

On the other hand, we can argue that planning educators must teach strategies of political influence and critical thinking; that students should be prepared to unsettle and reframe existing debates and ways of doing things. In this view, the need to understand power dynamics and structural forces at play in governance settings is only the beginning of an ethical planning education; the next step might include the cultivation of a commitment to democratic inclusion and equitable development, and a disposition of

patience, pragmatism, tolerance, and shrewd calculation in their pursuit and facilitation. Such a perspective on the ethics of planning education views the role of the professoriate as one of constructive disruption.

I illustrate elements of both interpretations in the analysis of three campus-community partnerships, below (Table 1).

	<i>Neo-liberal subcontract</i>	<i>Constructive Disruption</i>
'civic classroom' course	<i>Guests as mouthpieces:</i> want to do PR, not engage in dialogue <i>Students as consumers:</i> want to receive, emulate – not think or criticize <i>Authority:</i> academy undermined by populist teach vs. do frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• prepare, coach students to formulate and ask respectful, but hard questions</li> <li>• moderate the classroom space intentionally</li> </ul>
'partner client' course	<i>Project Brief:</i> intent, constraints, use of report shaped by partner <i>Labor:</i> understaffed local agencies get 40 free interns <i>Hunger for JOBS:</i> student knowledge shaped by existing market norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be clear up front about mixed rationales; learn from partner if/how alternative frames might find traction</li> <li>• explain, problematize process of meeting different imperatives, with students</li> </ul>
Annual forum	<i>Boosterism:</i> expectation of a feel-good, Go Our City! event <i>Funding:</i> donors have agendas <i>Scholarship Lite:</i> academics as dumbed-down commentators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• frame a conversation that aligns with community interests, while deliberately complicating them</li> <li>• train faculty to distill and titrate, not dumb down</li> </ul>

In each case, dynamics produced by the partnership presented opportunities for dialogue, debate, adaptive learning, and the emergence of shared, inter-subjective reason – all emancipatory aims of collaborative planning as communicative knowledge-in-action. However, as is illustrated by Table 1, each case also threatened to produce a myopic simplification of complicated issues in urban development and planning. Moreover, these simplifications tended to serve a utilitarian interpretation of shared, common interests endemic to the project of neoliberalization. For instance, the university must court private donors (because state support for higher education has become so paltry); planners must hew to existing indices of eco-

conomic prosperity, social welfare, and environmental health (because such proxy measures have been chosen for expediency and ease of maintenance, as opposed to accuracy or a commitment to equitable development); students are inordinately focused on the pre-eminent and time-sensitive need to get a job (because they are increasingly burdened with the costs of maintaining the university system, while the job market remains weak and therefore extremely uncertain and competitive); and professors are expected to be camera-ready, deferential conversational partners (because the knowledge worth having is that which can be monetized, enlisted in flattering those with political power, or preferably both).

This is, of course, an exaggeration and somewhat cynical overstatement of longstanding undercurrents of academic life, which some planning scholars will view with fatigued familiarity, irritated dismissal, or hard-won resignation. The analysis here is not intended to tell us what we already know, but rather to contextualize these dynamics within a set of structural conditions that *has* changed, dramatically, in the last several decades; and to consider with some specificity what the compelling empirical evidence of these conditions should tell us about the potentially evolving ethics of our role as planning educators.

By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the richest 1% of Americans held more wealth than the bottom 90% (Saez, 2013; Stiglitz, 2012). While capitalism has always tended to produce sharp divisions between economic classes, income inequality has intensified dramatically over the last half century, particularly in the US (Oxfam, 2014; WEF, 2013). Median earnings for “prime age” (25-64) American men actually declined 4% between 1970 and 2010, by conventional estimates; when adjusted for un- and under-employment, the decline is estimated at 19% (Greenstone & Looney, 2012). Moreover, analysts tell us this is not the result of unfettered market behavior; rather, as a manifestation of capital’s self-interest (Piketty, 2014), political systems are systematically engaged and enlisted

to organize markets as well as public investments to serve those with existing forms of wealth and power (Oxfam, 2014; Stiglitz, 2012).

This matters to the field of urban planning for two important reasons: first, the majority of people worldwide and over three-fourths of all Americans now live in cities and urban regions (Peirce & Johnson, 2009); second, planners are ethically bound to “serve the public interest” (APA, 1992), opaque and contested though it may be. Thus, the location and purpose of public infrastructure investments, the scope of in-kind and tax subsidization for private development, the proportional investment in urban social, housing, and workforce programs, and the relative reliance on high-cost, free-agent consultants versus trained public planners with secure jobs in the civil service are all essential areas of planning research.

Another dilemma raised by the current era of profound and uneven marketization of the public realm relates to institutions of higher education, and to the academic programs where planners are trained. In the decade between 2001 and 2011, the combined cost of tuition, room and board at American universities rose dramatically – by an average of 28% (private) and 40% (public) (NCES, 2013). As illustrated by Figure 1, this trend was exacerbated by the recession of 2008-2009, especially at public universities.

Costs for a professional degree in planning can be especially prohibitive, and narrow the range of feasible employment options upon completion. Graduate school tuition in planning requires most students to borrow heavily; average annual tuition and fees in 2013-2014 at the ten top-ranked professional planning degree programs in the US (Planetizen, 2014) was \$35,205, before accounting for basics like housing, food, and transportation. Thus the standard two-year course of study, including living

School	Degree	2013-2014 tuition and fees	Total annual cost (est)	2-year total (est)
MIT	MCP	43,210	67,078	134,156
UC Berkeley	MCP	36,966	61,466	122,932
UIUC	MUP	25,118	49,618	99,236
UCLA	MURP	33,923	58,423	116,846
Georgia Tech	MCRP	48,852	73,352	146,704
Rutgers	MCRP	27,858	52,358	104,716
Cornell	MRP	29,581	54,081	108,162
UNC	MCP	27,459	52,459	104,918
USC	MPL	37,028	61,528	123,056
Harvard	MUP	42,056	66,556	133,112

Table 2. Top 10 Graduate Planning Programs and their costs. Tuition and required institutional fees reflect out-of-state costs at public schools; cost of living, except where provided by the school, was estimated at \$24,500 annually (a rough mid point between MIT and UNC estimates). Data was obtained from school websites, and have not been verified with individual programs.

costs, requires that almost all full-time students spend or borrow over \$100,000. With many municipal planning agencies limiting staff due to budgetary restrictions, and large private consulting firms offering attractive entry-level positions, it is little wonder that planning has become one of many once-public fields now deeply implicated in the “government by proxy” (Kettl) of the neoliberal age. Planning students are spending more to obtain their education, and graduating into an environment where employment opportunities and their organizational values are increasingly circumscribed.

These conditions raise ethical questions that seem to be in direct opposition to each other. They also highlight other ethical obligations, not just to students and to the cities and regions where planning is desperately needed, but also to the agencies and organizations where our graduates will hopefully find work, as well as – importantly – to ourselves.

These ethical obligations, as well as the relational dyads in which they are embedded, are presented in Table 3.

It is perhaps a truism to say that we cannot ignore the nature of power relations structuring urban governance and planning education, including the instrumental role of universities vis à vis their various publics. The neoliberal age has long since arrived; we do indeed have a responsibility to equip our students, respond to our partners, and protect ourselves in navigating it. It is neither feasible nor desirable to produce only criticism of the conditions that organize the urban socio-spatial reality that we profess to train students to shape.

However, we also have a responsibility to nurture and assert the ideals of higher learning, especially amongst ourselves. In this sense intellectual honesty requires that we

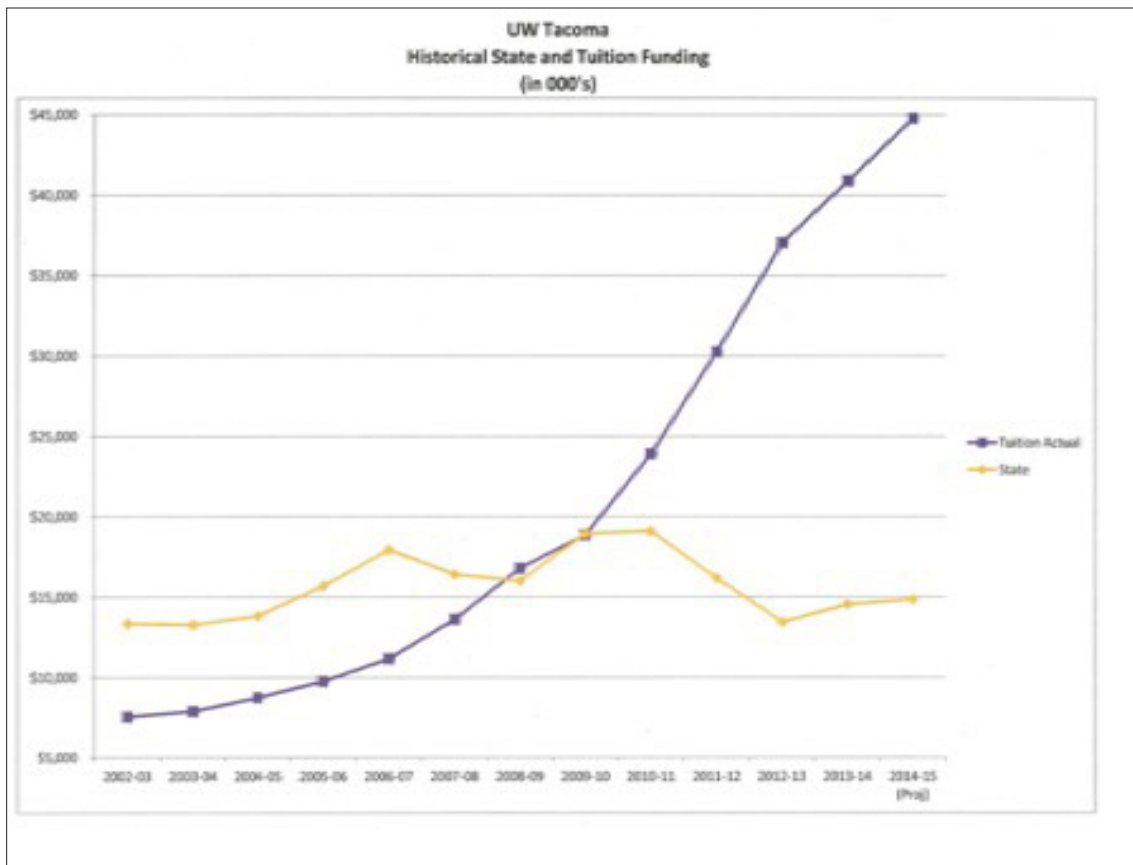


Figure 1. UW Tacoma State and Tuition Funding, 2002-2015. Tuition funding overtakes state funding for the first time in 2008, and diverges sharply in 2010, consistent with nationwide US trend in public higher education funding.

edge workers, preparing students for employment, enabling monetized return on their educational investment, and providing employers with the capacity for hard data analysis and project management that they require. On the other hand, we try to hold fast to the animating values of the planning academy: expanded student knowledge, agency through ideas, the power of inquiry on practice and understanding. These poles, the traditional camps of real and ideal, are not the ethical spaces most crucial to disruption, however - except inasmuch as our academic ideals need

continual reinvestment and affirmation.

face the neoliberal critique developed with increasing sophistication by political theorists, labor economists, cultural geographers and others, and supported by overwhelming empirical evidence. It is that much more remarkable that many planning academics are able to occupy a place of inquiry, reflection, analysis and creative endeavor in the midst of such unrelenting commodification. It is a privilege for which acknowledgement and gratitude are appropriate, but perhaps insufficient responses. Rather, how do we use our academic freedom, and the perspective earned through research and analysis, to constructively disrupt the field of which we are a part?

The practice of enacting collaborative campus-community partnerships suggests the spaces of ethical obligation most amenable to engagement and influence by planning scholars. On the one hand, the neoliberal imperatives must be acknowledged and met: we are training knowl-

The ethical spaces where constructive disruption takes place are arrayed between these poles. Our ability to translate our research to non-expert audiences, including students and practicing professionals; our commitment to curricular standards and accurate, non-hyperbolic public discourse; our capacity to conceptualize and teach a sense of relational governance context – these are the practices that challenge and inform existing ways of knowing. Experiential learning, the educational justification for so many campus-community collaborations, is in this sense a profound double-edged sword, begging the question: what is this experience teaching students? If the experience teaches them only that they should hew to the structure

Ethical obligation to whom?	Students	Employers	City, Region	Ourselves
What is the nature of the ethical obligation?	<p>To broaden, challenge, deepen, unsettle their existing knowledge</p> <p>To animate concepts in planning theory and practice with experiential learning</p> <p>To provide training and skills that will help them to get jobs and to be competent employees</p> <p>To be aware of the student debt and foregone income that accompany a planning education</p>	<p>To respond to the need for employees who can handle policy research and data analysis</p> <p>To respond to the need for employees who grasp governance context: statutory, inter- and intra-organizational; political/ historical</p> <p>To train employees who bring new ways of thinking/ doing to planning and development practice</p>	<p>To train competent workers who can populate local agencies, non-profits, private companies</p> <p>To set and maintain high academic standards, to ensure reputation and impact as an anchor institution</p> <p>To graduate students with an awareness of actually-existing phenomena, problems, potentials</p> <p>To develop a sense of possibility and agency</p>	<p>To protect academic freedom and the open pursuit of unpopular questions</p> <p>To maintain integrity in the midst of conflicting paradigms, rationales</p> <p>To adequately train students to be impactful, thoughtful, employable</p> <p>To resist total colonization by external demands, imperatives</p> <p>To translate our findings, concerns, perspectives into our teaching and partnerships</p>

Table 3. A provisional assessment: the educational ethics of collaborative planning

of existing power relations, in order to get things done in planning, it is in my view a waste of the time, energy, and goodwill of all involved.

Having identified potential collaborative spaces of constructive disruption, a practice-based perspective insists that we decenter our own role in producing the experiential learning that enables new forms of shared, adaptive knowledge to emerge. As scholars, we are not likely to reform urban development and planning practices by lodging well-rehearsed critiques from a podium. The practices we study and engage in are comprised of actors; those actors have ways of organizing priorities and collective en-

deavor. Perhaps the most important ethical move planning educators can make in the era of collaboration, neoliberal and otherwise, is to enact and institutionalize ‘communities of practice’ (COPs) around campus-community partnerships, a concept enlisted in the planning literature to develop collaborative planning goals of inclusion, the sharing of skills and expertise, and the promotion of social learning (Goldstein & Butler, 2010; Quick & Feldman, 2011; Schweitzer, Howard, & Doran, 2008).

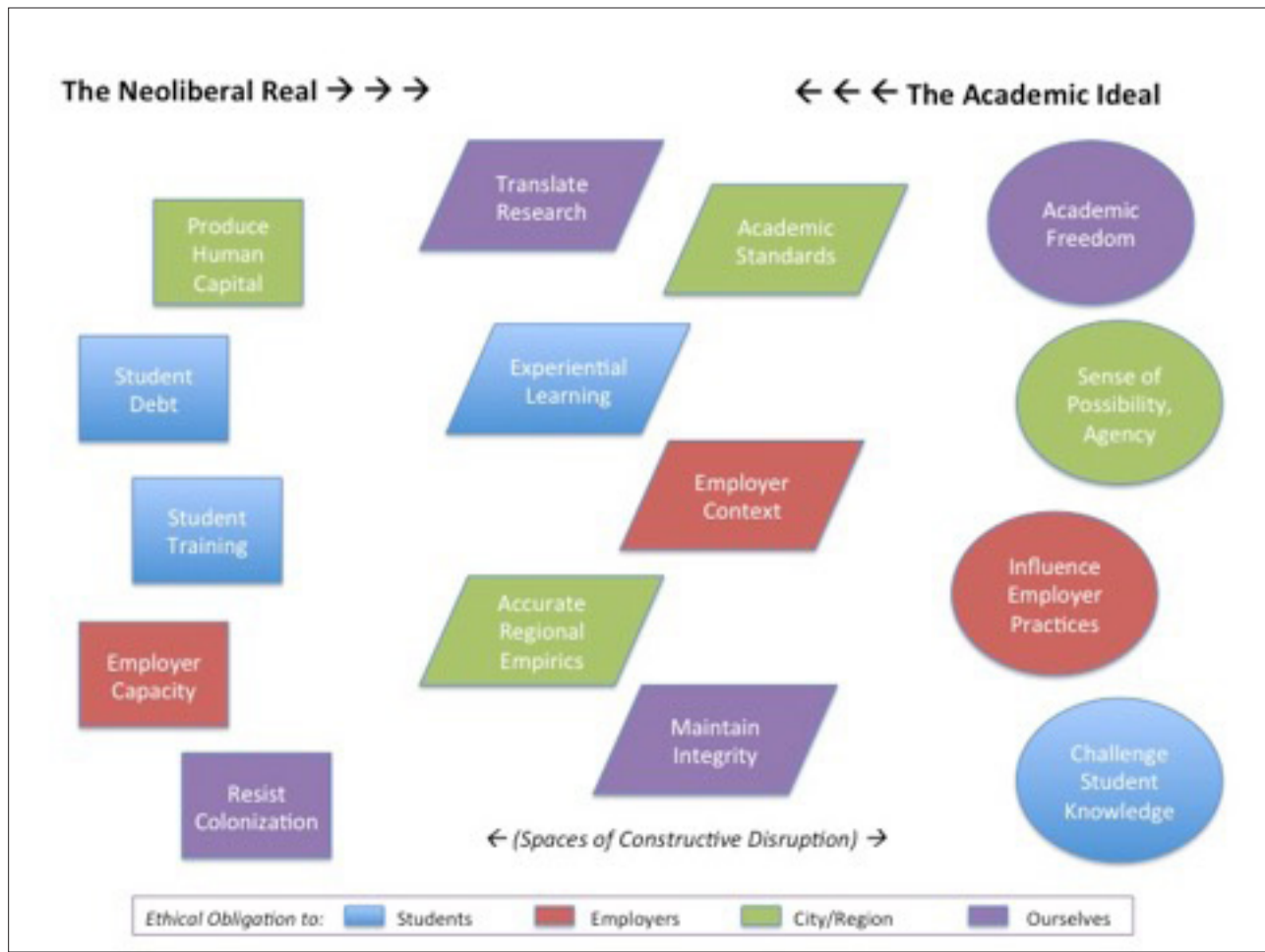


Figure 2. Array of Ethical Obligations: Spaces of Constructive Disruption

As “heterogenous learning networks,” COPs support learning habits beyond those available to individual students or homogenous groups; for instance the ability to critique and revise their positions, and to communicate concepts to members of different groups within a wider COP (Schweitzer et al., 2008)(54). However, while COP networks are frequently used to promote a form of socialization, knowledge sharing and normalization around discrete policy topics or planning issues, I am interested in exploring the potential of COPs as a model for ongoing, agonistic debate and alternative rationalities; or a deliberate enactment of “open, heterogenous spaces [where] people can articulate different forms of representation, [and] experiment with different ways of understanding their own motivations and views” (Lejano, Ingram, & Ingram, 2013) (18). That is, can we normalize and re-civilize the local, place-based experience of critical inquiry and political conflict? Can campus-community collaboration COPs

be explicitly developed to model the shared enterprise of diversifying and thickening our discursive skin, engaging political heterogeneity, and developing a taste for tolerant yet provocative public discourse?

This approach to COPs as learning networks takes up the need to nurture spaces where uncertainty and conflicting rationalities are not seen as problems to be solved, but rather as the very substance of democracy, where the relational work of surfacing and holding in tension different values and perspectives is an essential habit of social-ecological health. Frequently, environmental network “talk is homogenized by consistent scientific categories and measurements” (Lejano et al., 2013)(18), and urban development partnerships are driven by the belief that “cities must be competitive or die” (Purcell, 2009)(144). However,

perhaps these need not be the foregone, overarching rationales of a COP focused on a collaborative practice of inquiry and encounter. If networks are “communities that narrate themselves into existence” (Lejano et al., 2013), a collaborative COP might just as easily embrace a collective storyline of being willing to conscience and explore fundamental incommensurability, as the seemingly more desirable plot of collaborating toward agreement and shared meanings.

In considering the tendency for power relations to be reproduced in a technology- focused COP, Schweitzer and colleagues note “confrontation...enables students to learn to defend their ideas and cope with conflict and the difficult feelings that come with studying structure and privilege” (58)(drawing on hooks 1994). While collaborative planning and COPs tend to emphasize smoothing conflict for the purposes of collective action, it is essential to consider the ethical implications of this move. Especially in an era of profound urban inequality and disturbing inequity in spatial development, Rather than ignoring the tension between the need for authentic, democratic dialogue for knowledge formation and its concomitant elusiveness, that tension should be the point of theory—the prerequisite—on which planning students become introduced to network practice. (Schweitzer et al., 2008)

## Conclusion

As campus-community collaborations have become increasingly important to urban planning educators, they offer an important means of framing our ethical responsibilities to our partners, our students, our cities and regions – and ourselves. While most critiques of such partnership models focus on the historical disconnect between town and gown, the difficulty of enacting and sustaining collaboration, or the presumed power differential between academics (as researchers) and communities (as researched), this analysis highlights a less common concern with the power of partnership rationales themselves.

By potentially reinforcing the commodification of interests amongst a university’s various publics, campus-community collaborations threaten to undermine the fundamental ethical commitment of planning professionals to recognize the contested nature of the public interest, the potentially distorting influence of large private interests in its articulation and pursuit, and the role of the planning professoriate in surfacing these dynamics.

As Seymour Mandelbaum wisely noted, “...we are unable to reshape relations that we do not cogently represent in public” (Mandelbaum, 1996)(433). If Prudence is a preference for practice over mandates, democratizing and respectful of context, difference, and contending moral imperatives, it is also, unfortunately potentially obfuscating; Niraj Verma reminds us that when ethical mandates are inadequate guideposts, “Prudence turns out to be a cognitive demand.” Research, analysis and practical experience tell many of us that communicative justifications have been widely hijacked to paper over profoundly undemocratic interpretations of collaborative planning. The central contention of this paper is that this knowledge carries an ethical imperative, for among planners ascribing to a communitarian ethos, “cognition must mean the democratization of the generation and development of knowledge” (Verma, 1996)(453).

By focusing on the concept of constructive disruption as essential to ethical planning education practice, experiential education and similar spaces of discretion in campus-community collaborations can be designed and enacted to model essential democratic values of conflict, debate, discomfort, and deep disagreement. The ability to do so not only reinforces our scholarly identity as intellectuals up to date with the empirical reality of the world in which we live, but also as ethical planners willing to engage that reality in the shaping of professional practice.

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