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Study Guide for the Comprehensive Exam in Community Development Theory and Practice

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Disclaimer

Please be advised that the purpose of this guide is to facilitate students’ preparation for the comprehensive examination in Community Development Theory and Practice. The study questions herein are not necessarily actual exam questions.
DESIGN OF THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

The Community Development Theory and Practice (CDTP) exam is given on the first Friday of October. It consists of several essay questions on the current state of knowledge in the field, as indicated by the literature, including the broader body of work on community participation, community organization and community work that have run alongside the notion of community development. The exam integrates and consolidates material from the core curriculum; thus, students are required to demonstrate analytical thinking and mastery of key texts, ideas, theories and concepts, and to apply theoretical insights to community development research and problems. The exam structure – the number of questions and the time allotted to answer them – may vary from year to year; therefore, students should consult appropriate faculty for details about the exam in the semester before it is to be given. The exam is ‘open book’ and ‘open notes’ but not take-home. Students will usually have a choice of questions to answer.

PREPARATION FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS

Preparation for the CDTP exam includes coursework and when possible, group study.

Coursework: As noted above, the CDTP exam tests students’ knowledge of the field as indicated by the literature, and specifically, material from the core curriculum. However, the exam is not a test (or re-test) of individual coursework. Rather, students should select and approach their courses as tools for accessing different aspects of community development theory and practice of most interest to them. Students are urged to write course papers that will help them prepare for the exam.

Group Study: Students report that their independent efforts to study for the exam together have helped them to integrate and articulate their thinking, and enriched their education overall. Therefore, the program recommends that students form their own independent study groups to prepare for the exam.

GRADING OF THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS

Each student’s essays are graded anonymously and independently by at least three members of the Comprehensive Exam Committee. Differences in outcomes are resolved by consensus among the graders. Some of the factors considered in grading the exam include: demonstrated breadth and depth of knowledge, comprehension and critical appraisal of the relevant literature, the capacity to use theories and concepts to assess issues and problems in the field, logical organization and clarity of the answer.

Students are notified of their final grades as soon as possible after taking the exam. Students who do not pass are encouraged to review the Ph.D. Program Advising Guide for the relevant pass/fail policies, and to contact the Chair of the Comprehensive Exam Committee for next steps.
STUDY QUESTIONS

The study questions below are designed to help students organize their thinking about community development theory and practice, and to provide guidance on what to expect regarding the scope and scale of questions asked on the actual exam.

How Communities Develop: History, Policy and Politics

Over the last forty years, community development has been transformed from a small-scale endeavor to a mainstream set of practices and institutions.

1. What intellectual perspectives dominate the theory and practice of community development? Please identify the principal thinkers in understanding the meaning of community as a foundation for the inter-disciplinary field of community development. What kinds of frameworks do these thinkers argue for with respect to community development?

2. What role does community development play in both the larger political economy and in the daily lives of ordinary people? How can development improve or empower communities that lack power and resources to be places of support and opportunity? Is there a right way to displace people? Does wealth building always have to be achieved at the expense of poor people?

3. What constitutes the community development movement today? Describe the different strands of this movement (or movements?) and their ability to effect systemic change. In your view, what is the most important institutional vehicle to emerge from the community development movement in the United States? What are the key challenges and the historical failures of this movement?

4. Discuss the intellectual origins, political frustrations and recurring patterns of federal urban and community development policy. What challenges does federal policy pose to the community development movement?

5. What roles do race, class, and gender play in community development? Give examples.

6. How has structural racism shaped the debate on community development in the post-war period of the United States? Provide a race-conscious framework for addressing urban poverty and community-building. How should the voices of people of color be incorporated into discourses or initiatives involving community development?

7. How can communities effectively organize and assert themselves to affect positive results for their children, families and neighborhoods? What kind of framework is needed (what does the literature say)? How can low-income communities create the social capital needed for movement-building?

8. Identify and describe the forces that limit choice in housing and community location. Explain how and why an “uneven geography of opportunity” by race and class continues to persist. How
does uneven geography impact the social and economic prospects for people in American cities and suburbs?

9. In developing concepts and a vocabulary for community economic development, scholars have also developed several tools for analyzing how communities can develop their economic resources. Briefly describe and analyze these tools and their strengths and weaknesses. What is the contribution to knowledge about community development?

10. A great deal has been written about the appropriate role that community economic development entrepreneurs and innovators serve in influencing social policy makers, and other public and private actors and entities, such as businesses, nonprofit organizations, churches and the like. Discuss the literature on this subject and analyze how social entrepreneurs and innovators use their social, human and intellectual capital to support community development and sustainability.

**Research and Applications of Community Development Theory and Practice**

1. Demonstrate what you have learned about effectively designing a research project in community development. Identify and describe:

   a) a research question that you consider important to community development theory and practice, and explain why it is;

   b) a theory that would allow you to situate your research within the existing community development field;

   c) the research methods you would use, including any instrumentation such as survey or other data or evidence gathering method.

   d) major research design provisions, such as comparison groups or statistical control variables you would use in regression analysis.

   e) the type of data you would collect and how you would analyze it.

2. Identify the similarities and differences in approaches to quantitative and qualitative research designs appropriate to community development questions. For example, compare and contrast philosophical assumptions, and the meaning of key elements of social research such as: variables, validity, generalizability, hypothesis, and reliability, as used across these different methodological approaches. What are some of the similarities and differences involved in collecting data for studies using qualitative versus quantitative methods of analysis?

3. What is action research, and what are some of the effects of action research on community development practice, and community development project design and implementation? How would you utilize action research to help you understand the process of community learning? Describe the steps taken and why each is important. Will the action research process improve learning? How do you know?
4. Discuss how, why and when you might use 1) content analysis; 2) interviewing; and 3) survey research in community development research.

5. You are conducting a case study of the use of eminent domain and community development in Camden City. Why a case study? What evidence needs to be documented in order to show that a proposed redevelopment area meets statutory blight criteria? Does the neighborhood survey on which a blight designation is based have to be conducted by licensed planners? Does the redevelopment plan have to be signed and sealed by a licensed planner? What combination of legal notices is appropriate or necessary in order to satisfy a court that community members have been adequately notified about the redevelopment process? Under what circumstances, if any is the use of eminent domain to support a private use justified? And under what circumstances if any is the displacement of residents and businesses justified?

6. Describe how you would go about planning and executing an impact study of reinvestment strategies designed to improve Camden City. What should be the role of local civic leaders, foundations, partners, government, and stakeholders in protecting the rights of citizens in a city like Camden? How would you propose to solve the many challenges posed by poverty, segregation, disinvestment and deindustrialization? What issues would you tackle first? What models of best practices would you adopt? Elaborate.
RECOMMENDED READINGS

The literature cited below provides students with a breadth of scholarship on community development, and it will be updated or changed from time to time. Some of it is used in the core curriculum courses and some amplifies or applies key ideas and theories in additional ways. Students should read selectively, guided by subjects and questions taken up in the core courses, the study questions above, and students’ own developing interests in the broad inter-disciplinary field of community development theory and practice.


Jeffrey M. Berry, with David F. Arons, *A Voice for Nonprofits* (Brookings Institution, 2005)


James DeFilippis and Susan Saegert, eds., *The Community Development Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2007)


Susan S. Fainstein, *The Just City* (Cornell University Press, 2010)


Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires, eds., *The Integration Debate: Competing Futures for American Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2009)


Paul Jargowsky, Poverty and Place: Ghettos, Barrios, and the American City (New York: Russell Sage, 1997)


John Kromer, Fixing Broken Cities (New York: Routledge, 2009)

Loretta Lees, Tom Slater, and Elvin Wyly, Gentrification (New York: Routledge, 2008)


Paul C. Light, The Search for Social Entrepreneurship (Brookings Institution, 2008)

John Logan and Harvey Molotch, Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1987)

Peter Medoff and Holly Sklar, Streets of Hope: The Fall and Rise of an Urban Neighborhood (South End Press, 1999)


Marion Orr, ed., Transforming the City: Community Organizing and the Challenge of Political Change (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2007)


Paul E. Peterson, City Limits (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981)


Walter W. Powell and Richard Steinberg, eds., The Nonprofit Sector: A Research Handbook


