Sustainable Master Planning in Urban Politics and Policy: A Service Learning Project

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Biographical Statement: Shannon Jenkins is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. She teaches classes on American government, research methods, state politics, urban politics and public policy. She has published numerous articles in journals such as Legislative Studies Quarterly, Social Science Quarterly, and Urban Affairs Review.
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Abstract: Despite evidence that service learning projects can have positive effects on students’ learning and civic engagement, such projects are not yet widely utilized in political science. This seems to be driven, in part, by the concern that service learning projects may politicize students. In my Urban Politics and Policy class, I implemented a service learning project that sought to avoid the problem of politicization. This project focused on developing a sustainable master plan in a local community. While the experience had some limitations, assessment data demonstrate a positive impact on my students’ understanding of the material covered in class and their civic engagement. Service learning projects focused on master planning can be of use in many general political science classes.
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Since Ernest Boyer’s call for a “New American College” characterized by engaged scholarship and engaged teaching, there has been renewed interest in connecting learning in the classroom to engagement in the community and to a greater sense of civic responsibility. This interest is reflected outside the university in new media rankings of colleges that include information about their engagement with the community (such as the Washington Monthly College Guide, the Princeton Review and U.S. News and World Report), a new Carnegie Foundation classification for colleges based on their level of community engagement, demands from the federal government that work-study students be engaged in community service, and in some states, demands from state government that students be engaged in community service learning. This interest is also reflected in increased scholarship that focuses on the question of community engagement and how it affects student learning.

Two indicators of this interest in engagement are the increasing use of service learning across many universities and increased research on service learning projects and the impact of such projects on student outcomes (Perry and Imperial 2001). Such research has generally demonstrated positive impacts on student learning and student engagement. One of the clearest benefits of service learning projects is that such projects have been found to have positive impacts on students’ attitudes towards service (Walker 2002). But the impact of service learning projects extends beyond just attitudes toward service. As Astin and Sax (1998, 262) argue, “Participating in service activities during the undergraduate years substantially enhances the student’s academic development, life
skill development, and sense of civic responsibility.” Indeed, Astin and Sax (1997, 27), in examining the relationship between service learning and 35 college outcomes in areas such as civic responsibility, academic attainment and life skills, found all outcomes were favorably influenced by participation in service learning projects.

Furthermore, participation in service learning projects has been found to have a positive impact on grade point averages, critical thinking skills, writing skills, commitment to activism, and racial understanding over and above any benefits that stem from engaging in service participation alone (Astin et al. 2000). In political science classes, several studies have shown that service learning projects have a positive impact on students’ learning, leading to a more sophisticated understanding of the political process, more positive beliefs about the importance of politics, and increases in issue identification and political participation skills (Eyler and Giles 1997; Eyler, Giles and Braxton 1997; Eyler and Halteman 1991; Giles and Eyler 1994). Students are also more likely to feel that “they have performed up to their potential” (Markus, Howard and King 1993, 414) in courses with service learning components. Such outcomes should be of critical importance to political science where many departments have either explicit or implicit commitments to increasing civic and political engagement among students. However, as recently as 2000, there was no evidence that the use of service learning was growing in political science departments (Hepburn, Neimi and Chapman 2000). While the use of service learning may have increased since then, it does seem that the use of service learning as a pedagogical tool has been lagging in the discipline.

Given the research on the many positive impacts of service learning projects, one may wonder why this is the case. One reason may be that faculty members are concerned
about the potential for politicizing students, a worry commonly cited by political science faculty (Hepburn, Neimi and Chapman 2000). As Speck (2001, 11) notes, “Perhaps the most potent argument against service-learning is that it appears…to be indoctrination. Students will learn to be democratic citizens, and they will subscribe to particular political views about the evils of capitalism (emphasis in original).” This perspective, which Speck calls the civic approach to service learning, holds that service learning programs should be critical of the status quo. For example, Marullo (n.d., 7) argues that service learning ought to focus on discrediting the political economy and revealing to students that it is the overt operations of market forces, aided by the political-economic system, that is responsible for the inequality and misery they see.

In an era when David Horowitz authors books such as *The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America* and where organizations work to push students’ bill of rights that argue “the use of academic incentives and disincentives to advance a partisan or sectarian view creates an environment of indoctrination which is unprofessional and contrary to the educational mission” (SAF 2006), it seems that professors exposed to the civic approach to service learning might be reluctant to engage in such activities in their own classes for fear of generating controversy. Even if one does not subscribe to Horowitz’s viewpoint, it is clear that reasonable people disagree with the belief of the civic approach that the status quo must be challenged. If an instructor who disagrees with such a belief was only exposed to the civic approach to service learning, it is easy to see why he or she might draw the conclusion that service learning is not appropriate.

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1 It should be noted that the term politicization here is taken to mean promoting a particular political viewpoint not increasing political engagement and interest.
Furthermore, some projects by their nature tend to expose students to a single set of political views. For example, community members and professionals working in homeless shelters often believe that government ought to do more to alleviate the problem of homelessness. However, many conservatives believe that homelessness is not a problem for government to solve, a viewpoint that students may not be exposed to while completing their service. In addition, having students work in a homeless shelter as part of a class on politics may seem to suggest that there ought to be a political solution to the problem of homelessness, again a position with which some people do not agree. While one can spend time discussing the merits of opposing sides of this debate in class, it may be difficult to devote too much class time to one specific issue when there are a wide variety of topics to cover. Many political science classes focus on the political system as a whole, covering topics as divergent as the rules of the game, political institutions, political participation and public policies. Devoting significant class time to the specific problem of homelessness may result in less time to cover other, equally important topics.

Thus, in order to expand the use of service learning in political science, it is critical to determine how to incorporate service learning in political science classes in a way that allows students to learn about politics generally and to increase their interest in and engagement with the political system without politicizing them. Indeed, several studies have found mixed results when looking at the impact of service learning on political engagement (Kolibra 1998; Miller 1997; Neureurer and Rhoads 1998), but Ball (2005) finds that when such projects are specifically organized around explicitly political activities, they can have a positive impact on political as well as civic engagement.
So the key question is how can one create a service learning project that is broadly focused and explicitly political, but at the same time that does not appear to engage in political indoctrination. Given the value of service learning projects, it seems important to think about how such projects can be designed that have a broad focus, making them appropriate for classes such as urban politics, public policy or state politics or others, but that are balanced in their approach to politics.

One way this is typically done is to offer students their choice of assignments, so as to not force anyone into a project with which they disagree. But such projects still run the risk of only exposing students to one viewpoint. Another way is to involve students in the actions of government directly. While some may argue this is not “service,” local governments often rely on volunteers to staff many positions and run the critical functions of government. Just as community organizations need volunteers to help solve public problems, so too do governments. Thus, working for government can be seen as service. Furthermore, such service is explicitly political as students are engaged in working with the political system without necessarily being partisan. So students can see how government action (whether it be through creating programs or reducing red tape to allow for private solutions to problems to emerge) can help alleviate public problems.

One way to engage students with the operation of government is to have them help government entities with master planning. Typically, master plans describe strategies for the growth and revitalization of a given community, while helping local officials make decisions concerning social, economic, and environmental problems (BLS 2005). In my Urban Politics and Policy class, students worked on just such a project; they worked with local government to develop a sustainable master plan for the city of
New Bedford, Massachusetts, an urban area that has fallen on fairly tough times in recent years. In this paper, I will provide some background information about the city, discuss the organization of the class and service learning project and then reflect on the outcomes of this project.

**Background**

The Urban Politics and Policy class is a senior level seminar that examines political science research on the political institutions, processes and policies in urban communities in the United States. This is a small class (with an enrollment cap of 12 students) designed for political science majors. In this class, I specifically focused on the problems and challenges faced by urban political leaders, such as improving public education, redeveloping urban centers, and reducing crime, and the limits on their ability to deal with these issues. The readings and class discussions focused on how communities are able to respond to these problems by examining how public inputs, the structures of government, other governments and other political actors configure the solutions available to them. Much of the “traditional” political science literature dealt with the difficulties cities face in responding to the problems that exist in these areas. For example, Stone (2003, 140) argues that “most elected officials pursue marginal change and choose to align themselves with elements of the community who have substantial resources.”

As a counterpoint, the class was also organized around the concept of sustainability. While there are many definitions of sustainability, almost all focus on meeting the needs of those living in the present without compromising the ability to meet
the needs of those living in the future. Students read Hallsmith’s (2003) book describing how cities can develop master plans centered around sustainable goals. Generally speaking, this viewpoint is much more optimistic about the ability of urban areas to solve the problems with which they are confronted. Thus, students were given two vastly different viewpoints about the ability of cities to deal with problems.

In addition to these materials, students were given a variety of materials about New Bedford, Massachusetts. The city of New Bedford was chosen for this project because it is one of the most economically depressed areas in the state. For example, employment in New Bedford declined 25.2% between 1985 and 2003; the average annual unemployment rate in 2003 (7.9%) was 2.1% higher than the state average (CPA 2006). Population levels are decreasing as well; the number of people in New Bedford dropped 6% between 1970 and 2000. Population declines would have been much steeper were it not for an influx of immigrants to the city, but it is estimated that nearly 1 in 3 immigrants living in the city has limited English-speaking skills (MassINC 2006). Furthermore, poverty rates in the city of New Bedford are well above the state average; this is evidenced by the fact that 17.3% of the families in New Bedford are classified as low-income as opposed to only 6.7% statewide. In addition, per capita income in the city was only 60.1% of the state average. This poverty is reflected in poor educational outcomes in the city; at the middle school level, no students received advanced scores in math or English on the state-wide standardized test in the entire city (MDOE 2006). At all levels and in all subjects, the New Bedford school district had fewer students achieving “advanced” and “proficient” scores than the state average and more students

2 All of the information in this paragraph comes from the Center for Policy Analysis unless otherwise indicated.
scoring “needs improvement” and “failing” than the state average (MDOE 2006). This is also not surprising given that over 65% of New Bedford students were classified as low income in 2006.

Given the state of the city, there was much dissatisfaction with the incumbent mayoral administration in the semester the course was taught. Eight candidates emerged to challenge the mayor in the non-partisan primary; the mayor was eventually defeated by one of the challengers in the general election. This challenger ran on a platform of change, inclusiveness and openness in city administration; thus there was a feeling of hope that emerged in the city during the election campaign. In addition to the readings that focused on the demographics and political institutions of New Bedford, students were required to follow current events in New Bedford by reading the local paper on-line. A number of speakers came to class to give the students background information about New Bedford, including a local reporter and the mayor-elect of the city.

The classroom discussions focused on applying the general materials covered in the readings to the specific situation in New Bedford. For example, when one of our readings covered the ability of mayors to lead city governments and identified numerous factors that affected mayoral leadership, our in-class discussion focused on the extent to which these factors increased or decreased the ability of New Bedford’s mayor to work towards solutions to New Bedford’s problems. Students completed a take-home midterm and final exam that focused on analyzing and interpreting the readings.

My content goals for this course were four-fold. First, I wanted my students to develop an understanding of the actors and institutions of city government and political behavior in urban settings. Second, I wanted them to learn about the process of urban
policy development, the policy problems faced by many contemporary U.S. cities, potential solutions to those problems, and the limits on urban actors’ abilities to solve these problems. Next, I wanted students to become familiar with the concept of sustainability, how it is relevant to local politics and the limits on sustainability in local governments. Finally, I wanted them to learn about the political situation in an urban area in the surrounding community and New Bedford’s current problems.

Service Learning Project

In order to facilitate a deeper understanding of each of these learning objectives, I worked with the newly elected mayor to develop a service learning project in New Bedford. We discussed the idea of a sustainable master plan and agreed it would be a good project for students to undertake as it was a process in which the city was not engaged. Sustainable master plans add to the master planning process a focus on how cities can work to meet the needs of current citizens with less impact on the local area and on the future ability to meet citizen demands and tend to focus more on the process, stressing the importance of widespread participation in the development of the plan (Hallsmith 2003). The goal of this service learning project was to apply the information that we gathered in our course readings and discussion to the particular situation of New Bedford. Specifically, in conjunction with our political science readings, we sought to understand the forces that shape political action and policy outputs in New Bedford. In conjunction with our sustainability readings, we sought to understand the obstacles to sustainability in New Bedford and how to work towards sustainability, if at all possible. The goal was to gather information, mainly from interviews with numerous key actors in
the city, that could be used to begin the process of developing a sustainable master plan. In developing traditional master plans, public input may be limited. The students’ job was to gather information from some non-traditional sources and then generate a report for the city.

Thus, the service in this service learning project was for the city government of New Bedford. As Markus, Howard and King (1993, 416) note, the purpose of service learning is to educate students about the responsibilities and their roles as citizens, so when they engage in service learning with political organizations, they are performing public-oriented service, “an appellation that should not be bestowed solely upon work with ‘needy’ groups.”

For the students, the hope was that their exposure to how city government operates and the complexity of the problems and tasks faced by local officials would lead them to a greater appreciation for what local governments do. Many local boards and committees in this area are staffed by volunteers, and many local governments are continually looking for volunteers to fill vacant positions on these boards. So there is a real need in this area for citizens to become more involved with their local government. Thus, the goal was that engagement with local government would lead students to be more actively involved with the local government in the future. For the community, the hope was that this project would help the city think about future plans from a different perspective. The city of New Bedford has many issues to deal with already; they have little capacity at this point in time to take on new initiatives. By collecting information that city officials would not have otherwise had the time to collect, the students were performing a service to the new administration.
Working in small groups, students conducted a needs assessment in the community of New Bedford to determine what various actors in the community thought about the problems in New Bedford and the role of the university in New Bedford. Given that we used the concept of sustainability to guide this class, the actual work focused on assessing needs in four key areas as outlined in Hallsmith (2003): economic development, education, equity and the environment. Students were divided into teams and were assigned responsibilities that corresponded to these areas. The job of each team was to gather information about their assigned issue area.

Each team was responsible for interviewing three sets of actors: organizations, government officials, and community members. For the first two types of actors, we identified two interviewees for each team. With the organizations, we sought to identify one “established” organization that was well known and had regular sources of funding and one “grassroots” organization that had not been around as long and had a less reliable budget. So for example, the education team was assigned to interview a not-for profit education compact that was sponsored and funded by the university and local businesses along with a group that provides after-school programming by engaging young people in producing hip-hop music and events. Often, smaller grassroots organizations such as the latter are not included in the planning process; the focus was allowing new voices to have access in the process. With the government officials, we identified two officials, either elected or a bureaucrat, with significant knowledge and power in the given policy area. Students assigned to the education team interviewed an assistant superintendent of

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3 Given the small number of students in the class, the campus service learning coordinator, who was auditing the class, took on the responsibility for the environmental area, so students were divided into three teams of four.
the schools as well as an elected member of the school committee. Despite the fact that interview commitments were lined up in advance of the semester, some interviewees failed to honor those commitments, so in a few instances, we varied from these guidelines.

Finally, given the difficulty in locating community members without ties to an organization or a government official (we did not want to hear the “party” line), we conducted community member interviews during one class period at various locations throughout the community, including in front of city hall, near the bus station, and at a discount supermarket with a customer base that had a high ethnic customer base. In the end, students spent approximately ten hours in the community gathering information in addition to the information they gathered from course readings and guest speakers.

For each set of interviews, we worked together as a class to develop a standard questionnaire to be used for interviews. Some questions were specific for an issue area or interviewee, while others were asked by all teams for all interviewees. Questions focused on the general problems in that issue area along with questions specific to each interviewee. For example, the education group providing after-school programming based around hip-hop was asked about the impact of recent cuts to the school music programs and the lack of after-school programs in the city. Students were given considerable latitude in determining how to share the workload and points assigned with each interview and in fact, each team came up with a different plan. After completing the interview, teams were required to post a brief summary of the interview on the class

4 Luckily, one of the students in the class was fluent in Portuguese as many of the customers at this supermarket had limited English speaking skills.
website and give an oral presentation about the interview. These oral presentations allowed student to reflect on their own interviewing experience as well as to expose the other students in the class to a wide variety of perspectives on the state of the city. Students were also required to read all materials posted by their peers and provide feedback on them via the class website.

These presentations and discussion sessions went quite well; students did an excellent job connecting the information gained from their interview with the topics we were covering in class. Their peers were also quite interested in what was being said, and we often spent far more time than I had planned questioning those making the presentation and making connections to course materials and other interviews. These presentation and discussion sessions allowed students to see one of the main points of the sustainability perspective: problems cannot be viewed in isolation; they are all connected and require a comprehensive solution. For instance, almost every interviewee, regardless of their official focus, noted that problems in the education system are a critical component of many of the other problems faced by the city, including lack of economic development, crime, health problems and so forth. As a result, almost every group argued in their final report that the key priority of the city should be the education system.

At the end of the semester, each student wrote a draft final report for their issue area. The final report consisted of several components, based on the sustainable master planning process outlined in our readings from Hallsmith (2003). First, students provided

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5 It is common in many service learning projects to require written reflection on the project. However, we utilized oral reflection techniques as this seminar fulfills a general education oral competency requirement at the university.
an assessment of the key assets and problems in the area they studied. Second, students discussed what New Bedford actors, such as groups and governmental officials, could and should do to work towards fixing these problems as well as how successful they thought these sorts of actions would be. Finally, they were asked to think about how the university might be able to help New Bedford as it works towards creating a better future. They were also asked to draw on the “traditional” political science literature to identify limitations on the ability of local actors to address these problems, thus drawing on the two course perspectives. Each team then produced one team final report based on the best materials from each individual team member’s reports, feedback from their peers and feedback from me.

Outcomes

My desired outcomes for this service learning project were three-fold. I wanted the service learning project to help with the attainment of my learning goals, to increase my students’ civic engagement, and to produce useful information for the community. First, as mentioned above, I identified several learning outcomes (developing an understanding of the actors and institutions of New Bedford government and political behavior in urban settings; learning about the process of urban policy development; understanding the concept of sustainability and learning about the political situation in an urban area in the surrounding community and the problems currently facing the New Bedford). As Table 1 indicates, mid semester evaluations suggest the service learning
project increased students’ understanding of the course materials.6 100% of the students indicated they had learned some or a great deal about urban politics and the city of New Bedford (asked in two separate questions) in the first half of the semester, and 80% of the students either agreed or agreed strongly with the statement, “The service learning project has added to my understanding of the materials we are covering in class.”

Table 1 About Here

End of the semester evaluations were equally positive as Table 2 reveals. While most of the (department standard) indicators evaluate my capabilities in the classroom, the results show that students generally responded positively to the class with average responses to most questions falling near the low (or positive) end of the scale. Responses to open-ended questions confirm this. Over 77% responded they had learned “a lot” or “a great amount” (each respondent included these particular words in their responses) about urban politics and New Bedford during the semester. The rest of the students indicated they had learned a good or medium amount in this class. Almost 90% of the students indicated the service learning project was the most interesting and worthwhile part of the class.

Table 2 About here

Furthermore, the final research reports revealed that students understood the course materials and were able to apply them to the particular situation in New Bedford.

6 Students were asked to complete an anonymous survey at www.surveymonkey.com, designed by the instructor. 10 of the 12 students in the class completed the survey. While it would have been useful to compare these students to a control group, the seminar classes offered in the department are fairly specialized according to faculty interests and faculty are given wide latitude in designing these courses, so there were no classes in a subject area even remotely close to Urban Politics and Policy. Additionally, this is the first time in many years that a seminar on Urban Politics has been offered.
For example, many of them noted that the mayor elect was severely constrained in his ability to deal with problems (as our readings discussed) due to many of the institutional features of New Bedford’s government, contrary to what the readings about sustainability asserted. For example, one student noted in her final exam that New Bedford “gets 50% of its funding from the state of Massachusetts; it is therefore enormously dependent on keeping good relations with state politicians.” However, the reports drew on concepts from the sustainability readings to discuss how the mayor might be able to somewhat overcome these limits, particularly through increased political participation, a factor cited by several students.

Generally, I was able to identify two common themes in the service learning final reports. First, each team discussed the connections between the problems they identified and problems identified by other teams. For example, both the economic development and equity teams identified low educational attainment as being the key problem in the city. Meanwhile, the education team discussed how a lack of skilled jobs and drug violence, problems identified by the economic development and equity teams respectively, contributed to the dropout problem in the city. The education final report specifically noted the inter-connected nature of problems with education and crime. When children dropout, they become more likely to engage in crime; the education team cited several interviews by their team and other teams as well as facts from the class readings to support this assertion. Drawing on the readings from Hallsmith and their interviews, they then discussed several projects that are underway in New Bedford, such as the SouthCoast Mentoring Initiative, that seek to tackle these problems simultaneously rather than in isolation.
Traditionally, political science courses deal with specific policy areas as distinct and separate; one policy topic is covered in one class, and then we turn to the next policy area in a subsequent class. Indeed, this class was initially structured in such a manner, but we rarely kept on the topic at hand. Instead, we spent a good deal of time in this class discussing the connections between each of these policy areas (and even spent some time attempting to diagram these connections) and the need to view solutions to these problems in a holistic manner.\footnote{However, this also may have somewhat negatively impacted course evaluations as the average lowest score (1.67) for the end of the semester evaluations (as shown in Table 2) came on the question dealing with addressing ideas in an orderly manner.} As students listened to the oral reports from other teams, they noted how often what they were hearing in the oral reports reinforced what they were hearing in their interviews. In other words, the students themselves identified these common themes. Therefore, their final reports reflected a deeper understanding of the nature of these problems than they brought to this class.

The second theme I identified in the reports had to deal with the use of evidence; each team was able to very effectively use evidence from both the interviews and readings to support their arguments, suggesting they clearly saw how the readings and interviews were connected. For example, in their final report, the economic development team cited both the interviews and the readings in discussing how the diversity of New Bedford’s population can be seen as an asset to the community. The equity team noted the need for more early intervention programs to counter violence in the city, but citing Hallsmith, they countered the assertion of one of their interviewees who suggested that such programs be targeted to “hot spots” in the city. Rather, they argued, drawing on the sustainability readings, such programs need to focus on youth throughout the community.
Thus, the service learning project, including the interviewing and report writing, made the abstract more concrete for these students. It brought to life the themes we were discussing in the readings. All in all, the evidence shows the project was a success in terms of deepening students understanding of urban politics and policy.

Secondly, I hoped to increased my students’ engagement in the surrounding community. This project has made my students more committed to working in the local area although this is somewhat difficult to assess as all students were upper level political science majors who had a high degree of engagement and efficacy already. For instance, one of the students was the student body president. However, responses to the evaluations and to me suggest they had some impact on student’s perceptions of the surrounding community and their desire to be involved in the community. Students noted that they are much more optimistic about the future of New Bedford. One student is planning on completing an internship with New Bedford, while another has become involved with the university taskforce on service learning. Thus, the project was successful in promoting students’ sense of civic engagement generally and their engagement in the local community as well. Importantly, not one student expressed any concern about politicization in the open-ended questions. This is notable as there were a wide variety of viewpoints represented in the class, yet none of the students indicated they felt their views were being neglected in the project.

Finally, I wanted this project to be useful to the community. The literature on service learning stresses it is important that the service learning project should be of use not only to the university but also to the community as well (Hepburn, Neimi and Chapman 2000). However, I am fairly certain that the final reports produced by students
in this class would not generate much new insight for people who are involved in New Bedford government as a profession. Part of this was due to the fact that we were constrained to only one semester. Given these time constraints, students had to begin interviewing before they had done much of their readings about local politics and policy. It would have been far preferable to have them do all of the readings first and then begin the interviewing process. As a result, while the reports they produced (which drew greatly from these interviews) showed a mastery of the course material, they would not have much information in terms of new policy solutions for New Bedford planners or elected officials. The solution to this might be to pair each student with a community actor (an organization or government official) and have that student interview and shadow that person for a longer period of time. Potentially, students could be required to initially spend approximately five hours working with a community actor in a specific area before beginning their interviewing. It is clear to me that in order for this to be more useful for the community, students must gather more specialized knowledge and then come together to discuss how all of this information fits together.

However, this project was of some use to the community in that it was successful in fostering connections between the university and community generally, particularly for the grassroots organizations. A number of interviewees have indicated they are interested in partnering with myself and other faculty in future service learning projects and in working to secure outside funding for furthering the university-community partnership. For institutions with less developed service learning programs, such initial connections may be critical to developing a continued, strong relationship with the community. Additionally, such projects may be of more use to smaller communities that do not have
the capacity to engage in large scale master planning. New Bedford is a fairly large city with a professional bureaucracy and many organizations actively working to ameliorate local problems. In communities without such capacities, the reports produced by students may be extremely useful to appointed and elected officials.

Conclusions

Despite fears about politicizing students in service learning projects, it is possible to design a service learning project that engages students with government and politics without indoctrinating them. A service learning project organized around master planning or sustainable master planning are options. Of course, this project needs to be carefully constructed with information that is balanced. In this situation, the information about sustainability, which tended to be fairly positive about the future of urban areas, was balanced by more traditional political science readings that tended to highlight the obstacles faced by local communities. When organized this way, such projects can help meet course learning objectives and provide positive affective outcomes for students, clearly desirable outcomes. While a controlled comparison between this course and a similar course was not possible in this situation, the course evaluations indicate this project had positive impacts on students’ understanding of the course material, understanding of the community surrounding campus, and political and civic engagement. Although this project, as structured, was less useful to the community than it was to the students, with modification, it could be of great use in many communities.

Thus, organizing a service learning project around the process of sustainable master planning or master planning generally is a useful way to engage students in the
community surrounding campus and in the course materials. It certainly served to deepen my students’ understanding of the nature of politics in urban areas generally. Such a focus on planning could also be useful in a state politics or public policy class as well as others. While there are certainly lessons to be learned as to how to improve this project, I think the idea generally could be of use in many political science classes and for many local communities, both urban and not.
References


TABLE 1. Mid-Semester Evaluations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service Learning Adds to Understanding of Materials</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Learning Preferred to Research Paper</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Learning Should be Included in Future Offerings</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Deal/Some</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not Much/None at All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount Learned About Urban Politics</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount Learned About New Bedford Politics</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
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Note: N = 10.

TABLE 2. End of Semester Evaluations

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The professor makes him/herself available outside of class.</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The professor demonstrates knowledge of the subject.</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The professor encourages classroom participation.</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The professor encourages consideration of different points of view.</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The professor promotes an environment that is conducive to learning.</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The professor is well prepared for class.</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The professor is effective in communicating ideas in an orderly manner.</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The syllabus clearly specifies assignments, grading policy, and other course procedures.</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The professor adheres to the policies set forth in his/her course syllabus.</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall average</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Response options were as follows: Almost Always (1), Usually (2), Sometimes (3), Infrequently (4), Almost Never (5). N = 9.