School of Social Sciences

PPPM 301 Public Policy Task Force – SMU-X: Building Community from the Ground Up

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The Public Policy Task Force at SMU's School of Social Sciences is a semester-long course that offers an opportunity for students to get involved with real world issues under the guidance of an outside party that is professionally engaged in the relevant field. Rather than pose well-defined problems for the students to solve, the task force is structured to introduce students to the complexity of social and policy challenges. By scoping, implementing, and analyzing research in project teams, students further their policy-relevant learning by exploring their topic in depth and shaping it through all stages of the research process. When done well, the findings of these student research teams can shed new light on challenging problems, and also inspire a lifelong commitment to a social and civic engagement.

The topic of this task force is "Building community from the ground up." Our focus will be on ground up initiatives (i.e. small scale self-organized groups) in Singapore and we will examine their experiences through their lifecycle, with attention to the circumstances under which they grow into registered societies, remain informal, or exit the space. Why do they do what they do? What do they learn or gain from the experience? These questions will be addressed through ethnographic fieldwork (direct observation, formal and informal interviews), and students will trained in ethnographic methods through this course.

For this iteration of the Public Policy Task Force we will partner with the Partnerships Office of the Ministry of Culture Community, and Youth. Students will benefit from the guidance of civil servants from the Partnerships Office during the semester, and will present their findings to them at a closed-door event to be held at the end of the term. The external partners may be expanded to include private or people sector organizations. There is a lot of flexibility in shaping the focus of the project teams to match the interests of students and partners. Students with an interest in working on social issues both in and outside of government can gain practical insights from this experience. This is an intensive course, but one which rewards students for the effort they put into it.

The members of the task force will be organized into different subteams which will take responsibility for different aspects of our work. Everyone will take on the role of ethnographer. This

entails going to our field sites, producing field notes, and coding them. Additionally, two students will be the editors of the final report (although everyone contributes to it), two students will be in charge of presenting our key findings, and two to three students will take the lead in ensuring the consistency of coding across the project. We will change the coding team half-way through the term so that different students get a chance to take on this challenge.

Class time will usually be spent on qualitative data analysis. The nature of this research methodology is iterative and requires a constant back and forth between the field work itself and analyzing it. There is very little assigned reading for this class. You are expected to conduct field visits every week and to complete the write-up of your field notes within 24 hours. Field research will take place outside of the class meeting time.

Preliminary Timeline

Timeline	Phase	Activities
Weeks 1-3	Foundation	Introduction to the field site and our client Team formation: roles and responsibilities Introduction to the tools and techniques of qualitative research
Weeks 1-13	Fieldwork	Conducting field visits Writing up field notes
Weeks 3-13	Analysis	Coding of field notes Writing analytic memos (3 in total) Presentation of interim findings for feedback
Weeks 11-14	Deliverables	Compiling the final report to the client Preparing for the presentation of the findings Final Presentation

Draft Report Outline

1. Executive Summary
2. Background and context
3. Articulation of the research question
4. Analysis and discussion
5. Conclusions

Grading

Analytic Memos	30%
Field Notes	20%
Role specific evaluation	10%
Class Participation	10%
Peer evaluation of contribution to task force	10%
Written Report (same grade for entire group)	10%
Final Presentation (same grade for entire group)	10%

Academic Integrity

The SMU Code of Academic Integrity applies to this course. Please read it:
https://intranet.smu.edu.sg/dos/scd/pdf/code%20of%20academic%20integrity.pdf. Guidelines concerning plagiarism – and how to avoid it – are available through the SMU Library research guide on plagiarism (http://researchguides.smu.edu.sg/plagiarism).

Your written assignments will be submitted through a dropbox on the course website which will automatically check the originality of your work using the turnitin software. Turnitin will check the contents of your work against a comprehensive database of published materials, internet sources, and current and past student assignments. An originality report will be made available to you regarding the results of this check. Everything you need is in the assigned readings.

Accessibility and Accommodations

SMU strives to make learning experiences accessible for all. If you anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers due to disability, please let me know immediately. You are also

welcome to contact the university's disability support team if you have questions or concerns about academic accommodations: included@smu.edu.sg

Accessible tables in our seminar room are available for students who require them.

Emergency Preparedness for Teaching and Learning (EPTL)

As part of emergency preparedness, Instructors may conduct lessons online via the WebEx platform during the term, to prepare students for online learning. During an actual emergency, students will be notified to access the WebEx platform for their online lessons. The class schedule will mirror the current face-to-face class timetable unless otherwise stated.

Other Questions or Concerns?

The best way to reach me is generally by email, to which I will try to respond within one working day. The teaching assistant will attend every class and is there to help you have all the information on the course you need. Additionally, you can email me to make an appointment for a consultation in my office, or via zoom.