

Sabbatical Leave Proposal
Lee Ballestero
Discipline: Political Science
Hired: August 2007
Request for: Spring 2020
Previous Sabbaticals: 0

Background

In 1999 the city of Los Angeles instituted a system of Neighborhood Councils as part of the city charter. Article IX created the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment and tasked the department with "... promot[ing] more citizen participation in government and mak[ing] government more responsive to local needs, a citywide system of Neighborhood Councils, and a Department of Neighborhood Empowerment is created. Neighborhood councils shall include representatives of the many diverse interests in communities and shall have an advisory role on issues of concern to the neighborhood." Currently, the city of Los Angeles has 99 Neighborhood Councils whose role include representing the interest of about 40,000 people each, managing a \$37,000 annual budget for per neighborhood council, providing community impact statements for proposed developments, providing input on priorities for the annual city budget and creating events that address the interests of the community. Neighborhood Councils require that members of the council be a "community stakeholder" so these organizations function as the most local type of government that one can participate in or be elected to within a city—in essence the most local of local government.

Proposal

My primary teaching responsibility is PS M05: National, State and Local Government. I teach between 3-4 sections of this class each semester. As part of the class I discuss sub-state government structures such as special districts and city governments. Prior to this class, it is unlikely that most students will have been exposed to local government structures. My proposal seeks to expand the local government content of my class by adding richness and depth to that section of the class. In order to accomplish this goal, I will attend neighborhood council meetings and sub-committee meetings in several different neighborhoods in the city of Los Angeles. By documenting the topics covered as well as the process by which politics occurs at this level I will accomplish the following goals:

- Expand my class content to include real world examples of local matters and provide students a clear explanation of how Neighborhood Councils affect their lives.

- Create simulations to support an active learning environment in class. I have reviewed several textbooks looking for simulations applicable to local government—such as zoning simulations. Very few exist and the ones that I have reviewed do not reflect current issues. A simulation requires the creation of situation in which student are required to address a question or problem within certain constraints. The more realistic simulations are ones that identify problems that are current and relevant. In addition, the constraints should reflect constraints that exist in the real world—such as the decision-making process of the planning commission. A useful simulation for my class would be the creation of a zoning simulation that reflects situations that students might face in their neighborhoods that will affect their everyday lives.
- Provide students with paths of how they can get involved at this level of government and demonstrate how their involvement can actually make a difference.
- Make connections with members of the neighborhood council that could lead to students having internship opportunities.

The meeting schedule for Neighborhood Councils vary by neighborhood. Each month there are several meetings that regularly take place including a full Board meeting as well as a regional meeting of Councils in the San Fernando Valley. In addition, each neighborhood has a set of committees that cover topics such as Land Use, Business, Public Safety and Outreach. While the number of committees will vary within a neighborhood, these committees meet each month as well. Finally, there are other committees that meet on a less regular basis such as Education or Parks and Recreation. These committees may meet every 2-3 months. Given the copious number of meetings available to attend, I will have ample opportunity over the course of the spring semester to see local government in action. I have chosen to attend meetings in at least four different neighborhoods (Canoga Park, Lake Balboa, Northridge South and Woodland Hills) to explore what differences, if any, exist in how neighborhoods run their local government. It is possible that the meeting schedule for one neighborhood may conflict with another neighborhood so it may be necessary to exchange a neighborhood in favor of one that allows me to attend more meetings but the minimum number of observations will remain at four (see Appendix A for examples of meeting topics).

Proposed Timeline

January 2020- Read the documents that established Los Angeles' Neighborhood Council system in the Los Angeles city charter, with the goal of becoming familiar with the specific powers and responsibilities of LA's Neighborhood Councils. Read academic research on Neighborhood Council systems, examining how effective they are in influencing City Council decisions. (See Appendix B for proposed reading list.)

January-March 2020- attend meetings for at least 4 different neighborhoods. As part of enriching my class content, I will collect agendas and minutes from meetings as well as document the proceedings, decisions made and interaction of the council with each other and citizens. (See Appendix A for an example of the frequency and number of meetings).

April-May 2020- update course content, create simulations

Upon return to the College, as part of my final report out on sabbatical work, I will prepare a document that includes: a list of updated class materials, an example of a simulation that was created, a list of journal articles read, a list of all meetings attended with their agendas, minutes and notes and a list of internship opportunities (if applicable). This document will be provided to the College and District.

Outcomes

Benefits to the Students

This sabbatical's focus is most obviously on improving the student's experience in my class. Most importantly, I strongly believe that if a student sees how something affects their daily life, they will be empowered to become involved in their community.

Benefits to the College and District

The College and District will benefit since my sabbatical directly affects the quality of my class and therefore the student experience in my class. A more interactive class via simulations and more real world examples will increase student interest thereby improving retention and success. Specifically, this sabbatical is an "On-site research project". It is "designed to expand the faculty member's knowledge so that he or she will be a greater asset and credit to the District, worth to students being the ultimate measure. These projects may also include development of educational programs and curricula."

Finally, the proposal clearly fulfills Moorpark's Mission of creating 'global citizens' and cooperating with community partners. The District's Vision statement discusses the importance of 'community involvement' and, as discussed above, the changes to my class will support the District's Mission to 'support student learning and student success'.

Benefits to the Faculty Member

Direct observation of politics and political structures far outweighs reading academic articles. As a full-time faculty member I have not had the free time to become involved at the local level even though I have long seen the benefits it could have to my classes and my professional development in the discipline. While I will review research on Neighborhood Councils' powers

and effectiveness, nothing can replace seeing councils in action; this sabbatical will provide me the time. I look forward to revamping my class and creating a more active learning environment for students.

Ultimately, I hope that these changes will encourage students to get involved in local government where their involvement can cause change. Too often the focus of students is on the more popular national and state levels, where their involvement will result in little to no real change. In reality, so few people become involved in local level decision-making that one person really can change the outcome of a decision and impact not only their lives but thousands of their neighbors' lives.

Appendix A: Example of Meeting Topics

Examples of Neighborhood Council Topics/Meetings

- Valley Alliance of Neighborhood Councils
- General Board Meeting
- Joint Executive Board & Agenda Preparation Meeting
- Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Committee
- Land Use Committee
- Community Activities and Projects Committee
- Transportation and Public Works Committee
- Planning, Land Use and Mobility Committee
- Homeless and Poverty Committee
- Education Committee
- Outreach Committee

Neighborhoods	January meetings	February meetings	March meetings
Canoga Park	Attend Full Board Meeting for each Council and the Valley Alliance meeting (5 meetings)	8	8
Lake Balboa		6	6
Northridge		4	4
Woodland Hills		8	8
TOTAL		26	26*

*This is an estimate of the number of meetings each month that I will attend. The actual number will depend upon 1) how regularly a committee meets and 2) if it conflicts with another committee meeting in another neighborhood. A serious conflict in a schedule will necessitate swapping out a neighborhood with one that has a more amenable schedule. However, research in to the current meeting schedule of each of these neighborhoods indicates this number of meetings is consistent each month.

Appendix B: Proposed Reading List

1. Toward "Strong Democracy" in Global Cities? Social Capital Building, Theory-Driven Reform, and the Los Angeles Neighborhood Council Experience Author(s): Juliet Musso, Christopher Weare, Thomas Bryer and Terry L. Cooper Source: Public Administration Review, Vol. 71, No. 1 (January | February 2011), pp. 102-111
2. Chen, Bin, et al. "Spontaneous or Constructed? Neighborhood Governance Reforms in Los Angeles and Shanghai." Public Administration Review, vol. 69, 2009, pp. S108–S115.
3. Bryer, Thomas A., and Terry L. Cooper. "Challenges in Enhancing Responsiveness in Neighborhood Governance." Public Performance & Management Review, vol. 31, no. 2, 2007, pp. 191–214.
4. Kathi, Pradeep Chandra, and Terry L. Cooper. "Democratizing the Administrative State: Connecting Neighborhood Councils and City Agencies." Public Administration Review, vol. 65, no. 5, 2005, pp. 559–567.
5. Bryer, Thomas A., and Terry L. Cooper. "Challenges in Enhancing Responsiveness in Neighborhood Governance." Public Performance & Management Review, vol. 31, no. 2, 2007, pp. 191–214.
6. Rinfret, Sara R. "Simulating City Councils: Increasing Student Awareness and Involvement." PS: Political Science and Politics, vol. 45, no. 3, 2012, pp. 513–515.
7. Freyss, Siegrun Fox. "Learning Political Engagement from the Experts: Advocacy Groups, Neighborhood Councils, and Constituency Service." PS: Political Science and Politics, vol. 39, no. 1, 2006, pp. 137–145.
8. Cuff, Dana. "The Figure of the Neighbor: Los Angeles Past and Future." American Quarterly, vol. 56, no. 3, 2004, pp. 559–582.
9. MACDONALD, JOHN M., et al. "THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY CONTEXT IN BUSINESS DISTRICT REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES: Business Improvement Districts in Los Angeles." Public Performance & Management Review, vol. 33, no. 3, 2010, pp. 436–458.
10. Martin, Deborah G. "'Place-Framing' as Place-Making: Constituting a Neighborhood for Organizing and Activism." Annals of the Association of American Geographers, vol. 93, no. 3, 2003, pp. 730–750.
11. Assessing the effects of Neighborhood Councils on urban policy and development: The example of Tacoma, Washington. By: Dierwechter, Yonn; Coffey, Brian. Social Science Journal, September 2010, Vol. 47 Issue 3, p471-491, 21p; DOI: 10.1016/j.soscij.2010.01.007
12. The Neighborhood Council System: Past, Present, & Future (2007) City of LA 75 pages
13. PLAN FOR A CITYWIDE SYSTEM OF NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS (2001) City of LA 32 pages
14. Planning Neighborhood Councils in Los Angeles: Self-Determination on a Shoestring Juliet Ann Musso, Ph.D.