

PSC 3192w: Infrastructure, Inaction, & Inequality

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Lecture: T, 12:45-3:15 pm, MPA 208
Office Hours: Th, 1:30-3:30 pm, Monroe Hall 472

Semester Fall 2025

Course Description

How should we decide where to put things society needs, but few people want nearby?

In this seminar, we will focus on the political challenge of infrastructure in the United States. Infrastructure is broadly defined, but we will focus primarily on the supply of housing (market-rate and affordable) and clean energy infrastructure. The political challenge at hand is how to provide infrastructure but also ensuring equity in its distribution of costs and benefits. Having considered normative goals, we will review the political hurdles to its provision, from the behavior of political actors to the institutional designs which create challenges.

As a writing in the discipline (WID) course, you will develop your own research paper on the supply-equity trade-off behind a specific piece of infrastructure. You will develop this paper throughout the course, incorporating peer feedback through presentations.

Finally, I would like to thank the following scholars for inspiration behind this course design: Janet Lewis, Robert Betz, David Szakonyi, Danny Hayes, Julian Wamble, and Henry Watson.

Learning Goals

The goal of this course is to improve your ability to:

1. Identify and evaluate competing theories about the role of government in constructing infrastructure;
2. Engage in thoughtful discussions about the various ways to ensure equitable outcomes;
3. Select interesting research questions and put forward designs to answer them;
4. Develop skills of presenting and defending their research;
5. Craft original arguments and write polished papers in political science.

Course Prerequisites

PSC 1002. Introduction to American Politics and Government.

Expected Time Commitment

You will spend 2.5 hours per week in direct instruction or guided interaction. The average minimum amount of out-class learning expected per week is 8 hours (<https://cte.rice.edu/workload>) for a total of 120

hours per semester.

Readings

The only book we will be reading is *Abundance* (Klein and Thompson 2025). This book is available for free online via the GW Library. All other readings will be posted on Blackboard (<http://blackboard/gwu/edu>).

“Supplemental Readings” are things I find useful but are not necessary for the week’s class. Readings are subject to change up to one week before their assigned class. Please check the syllabus posted on Blackboard for updates.

Office Hours

I will be holding office hours from 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm every Thursday in my office, Monroe Hall 472. You are welcome to come by at any time during that window. However, I recommend that you email me in advance so I can reserve a time slot for you. If you arrive without emailing me in advance, you may have to wait for an available time slot to open.

Course Assignments and Grading

Grades will be composed of the following:

20%	Participation
5%	Peer review comments
5%	Research ideas
5%	Paper proposal
10%	First draft
25%	Final draft
30%	Verbal defense

At the end of the semester, your grade will be assigned based on the following scale: A (93-100), A- (90-92), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D+ (67-69), D (63-66), D- (60-62), and F (0-59). Scores within one-half point of the next letter grade will be rounded up. While a curve may be used in determining the final distribution of grades, the curve will only be used to improve your grade. I do not allow students to submit extra work in an attempt to raise their grade.

Participation

Students are expected to come to class prepared, having read and independently analyzed the readings for the week. There will be cold-calling during the class. Absences, tardiness, and low effort participation will negatively affect your grade.

Note: Laptops and other electronic devices are not permitted in class. Please speak to me if you require a device for DSS accommodations.

Research Paper

In this assignment, you will write a research paper on the politics of infrastructure and the tension between inaction and inequality. You can choose which political factors you will research, and you can research a infrastructure domain of your choosing. The paper should develop an explanation for your topic of interest (“why” or “how” questions). These papers should be roughly ~8,000 words, excluding bibliography.

1. Memo of three ideas for research questions to class (due September 22nd, 11:59 pm)

2. Paper proposal with research design, ~750 words (due October 6th, 11:59 pm)
 - Outline your research question, research design, importance of the question, and evidence to be collected. The proposal should include an annotated bibliography with one or two sentences explaining the argument and utility of at least 6 sources.
3. First draft (November 3rd, 11:59 pm)
4. Peer review (November 11th through December 2nd)
 - Each student will lead peer review comments for one of the papers
 - Remainder of students will comment during ~20 minutes per paper
5. Final paper is due December 8th, 11:59 pm
 - Late papers will be docked 1/3 grade for each day.
6. An ~10 minute verbal defense will be scheduled during the final exam window assigned to our class. Date TBD.

Absence Policy

Absences will result in “zero” grades for participation and any activity that day. To account for mild illness, I drop the 2 lowest participation grades. For religious holidays or GW-required events, as per university policy, students must notify the professor during the first week of the semester about any class session that will be missed.

Important Dates

- 9/9 - PSC 3192w canceled
- 9/22 - Ideas memo due
- 10/6 - Paper proposal due
- 11/3 - First draft due
- 11/25 - No class, Thanksgiving Break
- 12/8 - Final paper due
- TBD - Verbal defense

Course Calendar

Readings

Module 1. Theory

1. 8/26 Introduction
 - (a) What makes the crises of climate change and housing affordability political challenges?
 - (b) How do the structures of government magnify these challenges?
 - (c) What are some ways the public thinks about infrastructure’s concentrated costs?
 - Gelles, David. 2025. “A Power Line for Clean Energy Was in the Works. Now, an Investigation Looms.” *New York Times*.

- Gross, Samantha. 2020. “Renewables, Land Use, and Local Opposition in the United States.” *Foreign Policy - The Brookings Institution*.
- Been, Vicki, Ingrid Goule Ellen, and Katherine O’Regan. 2025. “Supply skepticism revisited.” *Housing Policy Debate* 35(1): 96-113.

Supplemental reading

- Been, Vicki, Ingrid Gould Ellen, and O’Regan, Katherine., 2019. “Supply Skepticism: Housing Supply and Affordability.” *Housing Policy Debate* 29(1): 25-40.
- Nall, Clayton, Christopher S. Elmendorf, and Stan Oklobdzija S. 2022. “Folk Economics and the Persistence of Political Opposition to New Housing.” Working paper.
- Susskind, Lawrence, Jungwoo Chun, Alexander Grant, Chelsea Hodgkins, Jessica Cohen, and Sara Lohmar., 2022. “Sources of Opposition to Renewable Energy Projects in the United States.” *Energy Policy* 165: 112922.
- Sud, Ryan, and Sanjay Patnaik. 2022. “How does permitting for clean energy infrastructure work?” *The Brookings Institution*.

2. 9/2 The Supply–Equity Trade-off

- (a) What is equity? How should we operationalize the term?
 - (b) What are descriptive statistics behind the distribution of these goods for housing, energy, and transportation?
- Bullard, Robert D. 1990. *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*. Chapters 1 and 2.
 - Lake, Robert W., 1996. “Volunteers, NIMBYs, and environmental justice: Dilemmas of democratic practice.” *Antipode*, 28(2), pp. 160-174.
 - Been, Vicki. 1994. “Locally Undesirable Land Uses in Minority Neighborhoods: Disproportionate Siting or Market Dynamics?” *Yale Law Journal*.

Supplemental reading

- Thomas, Jacqueline. “Separated by Design: Why Affordable Housing Is Built in Areas With High Crime, Few Jobs and Struggling Schools.” *ProPublica*. Nov 25.
- Levine, Jeremy. 2021. *Constructing Community*. Princeton University Press. pp. 163-191.
- Schlosberg, David. 2004. “Reconceiving Environmental Justice: Global Movements and Political Theories.” *Environmental Politics*.
- Goetz, Edward G., Rashad A. Williams, and Anthony Damiano. 2020. “Whiteness and Urban Planning.” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 86(2): 142-156.

9/9 PSC 3192w canceled.

3. 9/16 In the Defense of Localism

- (a) What do local governments get right? What are their incentives?
 - (b) How do we define competing values, from environmental protection, to historic preservation, to home value growth and sense of place?
- Been, Vicki, 1993. “What’s fairness got to do with it? Environmental justice and the siting of locally undesirable land uses.” *Cornell Law Review* 78, p.1001.
 - Fischel, William. 2015 *Zoning Rules!* Chapter 5.

Supplemental reading

- Tiebout, Charles M. 1956. "A Pure Theory of Local Expenditures." *Journal of Political Economy* 64(5), pp.416-424.
- Schragger, R.C., 2021. "The Perils of Land Use Deregulation." *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, pp.125-205.

Module 2. Politics

4. 9/23 Voters

- (a) What do voters want?
 - (b) Can voters be persuaded to support more supply?
 - (c) Do voters care about equity or just themselves?
- Marble, William, and Clayton Nall. 2021. "Where Self-Interest Trumps Ideology: Liberal Homeowners and Local Opposition to Housing Development." *The Journal of Politics* 83(4): 1747-1763.
 - Broockman, D., Elmendorf, C.S. and Kalla, J., 2024. The Symbolic Politics of Housing. Unpublished Manuscript. URL: <https://osf.io/preprints/osf/surv9>.
 - Carley, Sanya. David M. Konisky, Zoya Atiq, and Nick Land. 2020. "Energy Infrastructure, NIMBYism, and Public Opinion: A Systematic Literature Review of Three Decades of Empirical Survey Literature." *Environmental Research Letters* 15(9): 093007.
 - Gelles, David. 2022. "A Fight Over America's Energy Future Erupts on the Canadian Border." *The New York Times*. May 6.

Supplemental reading

- Hankinson, Michael. 2018. "When Do Renters Behave Like Homeowners? High Rent, Price Anxiety, and NIMBYism." *American Political Science Review* 112(3): 473-493.
- Berko, Carly. 2023. "Voters Support Building Electric Power Transmission Infrastructure." *Data For Progress*. March 1.
- Stokes, Leah C. 2016. "Electoral Backlash Against Climate Policy: A Natural Experiment on Retrospective Voting and Local Resistance to Public Policy." *American Journal of Political Science* 60(4): 958-974.
- Wolsink, Maarten. 2007. "Wind Power Implementation: The Nature of Public Attitudes: Equity and Fairness Instead of 'Backyard Motives'." *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews* 11(6): 1188-1207.

5. 9/30 Elected Officials and Institutions

- (a) How do elected officials react to local opposition?
 - (b) Does partisanship matter for housing and energy infrastructure?
- Dynes, A.M., Karpowitz, C.F. and Monson, J.Q., How Local Officials Respond to Expressions of Public.
 - Sahn, Alexander. Forthcoming. "Public Comment and Public Policy." *American Journal of Political Science*.
 - Hankinson, Michael and Magazinnik, Asya. 2023. "The supply-equity trade-off: The effect of spatial representation on the local housing supply." *The Journal of Politics*. 85(3), pp.1033-1047.
 - Sud, Rayan and Patnaik, Sanjay. 2022. "How does permitting for clean energy infrastructure work?" Brookings Institution.

Supplemental reading

- Chou, Winston, and Rafaela Dancygier. 2021. “Why Parties Displace Their Voters: Gentrification, Coalitional Change, and the Demise of Public Housing.” *American Political Science Review* 115(2): 429-449.
- de Benedictis-Kessner, Justin, Daniel Jones, and Christopher Warshaw. Forthcoming. “How Partisanship in Cities Influences Housing Policy.” *American Journal of Political Science*.
- Stokes, L.C., Franzblau, E., Lovering, J.R. and Miljanich, C., 2023. Prevalence and predictors of wind energy opposition in North America. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 120(40), p.e2302313120.

6. 10/7 State Preemption

- (a) What reforms may be acceptable to at the state level?
- (b) How do state coalitions work?
- (c) SB 79 deep dive
 - Gill, Julia and Jenny Schuetz. 2023. “In California, statewide housing reforms brush against local resistance.” The Brookings Institution. June 28.
 - Christopher, Ben. 2023. “The Godzilla Next Door.” *Cal Matters*.
 - Anderson, S.R. and Johnson, M.F., 2024. “The spatial and scalar politics of a just energy transition in Illinois.” *Political Geography* 112, p.103128.
 - Hankinson, Michael. “Process, Policy, and Perceived Fairness: Evidence from Wind Energy Siting.” Working paper.

Supplemental reading

- (a) Briffault, Richard. 2018. “The Challenge of the New Preemption.” *Stanford Law Review*. 70: 1995.
- (b) Gerken, Heather. 2012. “A New Progressive Federalism.” *Democracy Journal*.
- (c) Honig, Jesse. 2023. “Local Restrictions on Renewable Energy Siting in the United States.” *Hastings Law Journal*.
- (d) Elkin, Jacob. 2024. “Federal Court Limits State Authority to Deny Interstate Transmission Projects .” <https://blogs.law.columbia.edu/climatechange/2024/01/22/federal-court-limits-state-authority-to-deny-interstate-transmission-projects/>.

7. 10/14 Federal Policy

- (a) What power does the federal government have?
- (b) Under what conditions has the federal government taken action?
 - Liscow, Zachary. 2025. “Getting infrastructure built: the law and economics of permitting.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 39(1), pp.151-180.
 - Armlovich, Alex, Rohan Aras, and Andrew Justus. 2025. “The ROAD to housing: Tim Scott’s housing bill marks a bipartisan breakthrough.” *Niskanen Center*.
 - McCarthy, Rebecca Egan. 2025. “Trump’s Interior Department is turning environmentalists’ legal playbook against them.” *Grist*.
 - Adelman, David E., Sommer Engels, Andrew Mergen, and Jamie Pleune. 2025. “Dispelling the Myths of Permitting Reform and Identifying Effective Pathways Forward.” *Env’t L. Rep.* 55: 10038.

Supplemental reading

- Benedetti, Tara. 2010. “Running Roughshod-Extending Federal Siting Authority over Interstate Electric Transmission Lines.” *Harvard Journal on Legislation* 47: 253.

- Rossi, Jim. 2009. “The Trojan Horse of Electric Power Transmission Line Siting Authority.” *Environmental Law* 39: 1015.
- Kincaid, John. 1992. “From Cooperation to Coercion in American Federalism: Housing, Fragmentation and Preemption, 1780-1992.” *JL & Pol.*, 9, p.333.

Module 3. Application

8. 10/21 *Abundance* and its Critics I
 - pp. 6-101
9. 10/28 *Abundance* and its Critics II
 - pp. 102-173
10. 11/4 *Abundance* and its Critics III
 - <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/the-real-path-to-abundance/>
 - <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/abundance-is-not-the-answer/>
 - <https://prospect.org/infrastructure/housing/2025-04-01-last-abundance-agenda/>
 - <https://jacobin.com/2025/06/abundance-profits-capital-public-sector>
 - <https://thedispatch.com/article/ezra-klein-derek-thompson-book-liberalism-utopia/>
 - <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/abundant-fantasy/>
11. 11/11 Presentations I
12. 11/18 Presentations II

No class, Thanksgiving holiday.

13. 12/2 Presentations III

AI Policy

You are responsible for any mistakes made by AI generation. This includes plagiarism, factual inaccuracies, or fabricated sources.

University Policies

Observance of Religious Holidays

Students must notify faculty during the first week of the semester in which they are enrolled in the course, or as early as possible, but no later than three weeks prior to the absence, of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance. If the holiday falls within the first three weeks of class, the student must inform faculty in the first week of the semester. For details and policy, see: provost.gwu.edu/policies-procedures-and-guidelines.

Academic Integrity Code

Academic integrity is an essential part of the educational process, and all members of the GW community take these matters very seriously. As the instructor of record for this course, my role is to provide clear expectations and uphold them in all assessments. Violations of academic integrity occur when students fail to cite research sources properly, engage in unauthorized collaboration, falsify data, and otherwise violate the Code of Academic Integrity. If you have any questions about whether particular academic practices or resources are permitted, you should ask me for clarification. If you are reported for an academic integrity violation, you should contact Conflict Education and Student Accountability (CESA), formerly known as Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR), to learn more about your rights and options in the process. Consequences can range from failure of assignment to expulsion from the University and may include a transcript notation. For more information, refer to the CESA website at students.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity or contact CESA by email cesa@gwu.edu or phone 202-994-6757.

Use of Electronic Course Materials and Class Recordings

Students are encouraged to use electronic course materials, including recorded class sessions, for private personal use in connection with their academic program of study. Electronic course materials and recorded class sessions should not be shared or used for non-course related purposes unless express permission has been granted by the instructor. Students who impermissibly share any electronic course materials are subject to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct. Contact the instructor if you have questions regarding what constitutes permissible or impermissible use of electronic course materials and/or recorded class sessions. Contact Disability Support Services at disabilitysupport.gwu.edu if you have questions or need assistance in accessing electronic course materials.

Writing Center

GW's Writing Center cultivates confident writers in the University community by facilitating collaborative, critical, and inclusive conversations at all stages of the writing process. Working alongside peer mentors, writers develop strategies to write independently in academic and public settings. Appointments can be booked online. See gwu.mywconline.

Academic Commons

Academic Commons provides tutoring and other academic support resources to students in many courses. Students can schedule virtual one-on-one appointments or attend virtual drop-in sessions. Students may schedule an appointment, review the tutoring schedule, or access other academic support resources at academiccommons.gwu.edu. For assistance contact academiccommons@gwu.edu.

Disability Support Services (DSS)

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact Disability Support Services to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations: disabilitysupport.gwu.edu or call 202-994-8250.

Student Health Center

The Student Health Center (SHC) offers medical, counseling/psychological, and psychiatric services to GW students. More information about the SHC is available at healthcenter.gwu.edu. Students experiencing a medical or mental health emergency on campus should contact GW Emergency Services at 202-994-6111, or off campus at 911.

Safety and Security

- In an emergency: call GYPD 202-994-6111 or 911

- For situation-specific actions: review the Emergency Response Handbook at safety.gwu.edu/emergency-response-handbook
- GW Alert is an emergency notification system that sends alerts to the GW community. GW requests students, faculty, and staff maintain current contact information by logging on to alert.gwu.edu. Alerts are sent via email, text, social media, and other means, including the Guardian app. The Guardian app is a safety app that allows you to communicate quickly with GW Emergency Services, 911, and other resources. Learn more at safety.gwu.edu.
- Protective Actions - GW prescribes four protective actions that can be issued by university officials depending on the type of emergency. All GW community members are expected to follow directions according to the specified protective action. The protective actions are Shelter, Evacuate, Secure, and Lockdown (details below). Learn more at safety.gwu.edu/gw-standard-emergency-statuses.
- Classroom emergency lockdown buttons - Some classrooms have been equipped with classroom emergency lockdown buttons. If the button is pushed, GWorld Card access to the room will be disabled, and GW Dispatch will be alerted. The door must be manually closed if it is not closed when the button is pushed. Anyone in the classroom will be able to exit, but no one will be able to get in.