Fall 2014  
WED 3:30pm -6:15pm  
Murphey 118   
Department of City and Regional Planning  
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

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PLAN 823 Economic Development Workshop  
*The State of Low-Wage Work in North Carolina*

Client: UNC Center for Poverty, Work and Opportunity

***Précis***

As the economy slowly recovers from the depths of the Great Recession, the labor market continues to show weakness even as the unemployment rate has fallen to a two year low. Despite optimistic accounts of the ‘re-shoring’ of manufacturing and a recovering housing market, a large share of jobs created since the official end of the recession in 2009 are relatively low-wage (NELP 2012). While the U.S. labor market has seen modest growth in high-wage jobs which require advanced degrees (e.g. professional and technical services), this growth has been modest and new evidence suggests that these industries expand in a highly uneven pattern that favors a select few “innovative” regions (Moretti, 2012). The pattern of job growth seen elsewhere has been dominated by comparatively place-bound service industries such as restaurants, retail and entertainment. In addition, while higher education is still a critical step to gaining access to the middle class, the current labor market seems to have a “missing middle” of medium skilled positions that pay a family sustaining wage. As a result, the share of workers earning the minimum wage with at least some college experience has reached a peak. A key outcome of this pattern of growth is rising income inequality; an issue that has received renewed attention at the national and local scales and which is by all accounts as severe as the 1920s (Piketty 2014).

Thus, as North Carolina leaders seek to craft effective economic development policy on a range of issues, they operate against a labor market backdrop that is fundamentally different from past recoveries. In this workshop we will provide a detailed compendium of the nature of low-wage work in the State of North Carolina. We will document the extent and prevalence of jobs that pay a wage that is below a level that is socially optimal.

In particular we may investigate the following indicators:

* + Demographics of low-wage workers
  + Job characteristics and working conditions in low-wage occupations
  + Opportunities for mobility within and across low-wage industries
  + Growth trends and competitive dynamics of low-wage industries
  + The impacts of extensive low-wage work on the wider community and the fiscal health of state and local governments

The exact set of indicators and the format of the final presentation will be determined by the class in discussion with the client. We tentatively intend to create an interactive website to present the findings our research and to effectively communicate complex data analyses to a non-technical audience using high-quality data visualization.

***Key Learning Goals***

* + How to scope a project agreement with your client in a manner that is clear to both parties and can *realistically* be completed in the specified time frame.
  + How to breakdown large deliverables into clearly defined tasks and manage your time professionally.
  + How to assign sub-tasks to other team members and effectively manage their work.
  + How to find critical data sets and use planning methods for local economic development planning and labor market analysis.
  + How to effectively organize and communicate highly technical analysis to your client and key stakeholders.
  + How to understand and effectively navigate the political context within which your economic development services are offered.
  + Develop web-based publication and data visualization skills.

***Student Responsibilities***

Given the small class size and diverse set of client needs, I envision the organization of this class as something akin to working at a newly formed consulting company with a unique “start-up” culture of its own. While we will be working cooperatively on all aspects of this workshop—with ample opportunities for brainstorming, presentation, feedback, and constructive criticism—each student will act as the “lead” on a given economic development question or task. By the third week of class, each project lead will produce a detailed scope of work that lists individual sub-tasks, data requirements, costs (if-any) and description of project deliverables. While the lead is responsible for the majority of the analysis in her/his primary project, she/he must also recruit other class members to assist on specific sub-tasks. Examples include analyzing information from a large data set for use as an input into another task, or, using GIS to produce thematic maps of employment patterns in a given study region. Each student must serve as the lead for one project and as a team member on another student’s task throughout the semester. Thus, our small team can maximize the available talent by leveraging the networked knowledge and skills across the team (…doesn’t that sound like Silicon Valley speak ☺).

Students should expect to spend approximately 10 hours per week on workshop activities inclusive of class time. Classes will meet regularly for the first several weeks of the semester, with the option of going to meeting as needed once each projected is well scoped and analysis is underway. During class time each lead will report on progress to the team and will be asked to make periodic in-class presentations of work in progress, draft presentations, and/or vexing issues in need of group feedback. A portion of class time will also be devoted to open-ended individual work on specific project tasks. Students should expect to make presentations to the client and make written reports.

***Faculty Responsibilities***

Your instructor will serve as the primary liaison with the client and handle major communications in terms of overall project scope, and deliverable timelines. In addition, he will serve as a senior advisor and go-to person for data questions, questions about specific analysis techniques, and as a mentor to project leads in managing their particular project/question. In addition, the instructor will provide in-class demonstrations of economic development analysis as needed. While students are primarily responsible for all workshop analysis and deliverables, students should feel free to view their instructor as a resource on any aspect of the coursework.

***Evaluation***

Students will be graded on the quality of the final product they produce and on the level of client satisfaction with the deliverables. In addition, students will be evaluated by the instructor and their peers on their level of preparedness and professionalism during in-class presentations and group work sessions. Since one of the goals of this course is to learn how to manage **and** be managed by your colleagues, team leaders will have the opportunity to provide feedback on their team-members and vice-versa.