URBAN FISCAL POLICY

FINANCE 730, BUSINESS AND PUBLIC POLICY 773, REAL ESTATE 730

Fall, 2010

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Office Hours: Monday: 11:00-12:00; Wednesday: 3:30-5:00; or by appointment.

Course Outline and Reading List

"My problem lies in reconciling my gross habits with my net income." Errol Flynn

This course will examine the problems of, and prospects for, financing the provision of public services through state and local governments. The course assumes a solid understanding of micro-economics and an ability to apply that understanding to solve numerically problems in property valuation, public budgeting, and fiscal design.

To give you a sense for how the course materials will be presented, I view cities as economic organizations not unlike a publicly held corporation. There are "shareholders" called owners (or renters) of residential land. Shareholder voting rights are not, however, in proportion to the value of shares owned but rather are simply in terms of one person-one vote. The "Board of Directors" of the "corporation" is elected by the resident-shareholders and is called the City Council. The Chairman of the Board -- appointed by the elected directors or elected directly -- is the Mayor. The Mayor and the City Council appoints a management team -- Managing Director (COO), Finance Director (CFO), Commerce Director (Head of Marketing?), and a group of managers for the city's various "product lines" of the business: street cleaning and maintenance, safety, education, recreation, libraries. Each service has a production relationship requiring labor, capital, and materials. The corporation finances it capital with equity (taxes) or debt (municipal bonds) and pays it labor a negotiated (union) or competitive (non-union) wage. Labor may own "shares" in the corporation (live in the city). The city-corporation "sells" its services to "customers" who buy those services with a "yearly contract" (taxes) or perhaps with a per unit fee (user charges). The customers includes the resident-shareholders -- most of the customers are shareholders -- but it can also include non-shareholders, the most important of which is business.

The primary economic purpose of city-corporations is to protect and enhance a region’s competitive advantage – a.k.a. "agglomeration" economies – through the provision of important services for residents and businesses: for example, infrastructures such as roads, ports, and communication systems and services with significant consumer interdependencies such as safety, environment and (depending on what you consider to be an "appropriate education") school services as well.
Each city-corporation is in direct competition with other city-corporations. If a city does not provide its services efficiently, then customers (residents and businesses) leave the city and go elsewhere. This leads to a fall in land values (share prices) and if revenues are not sufficient to pay for fixed costs (prior debt accumulated), then bankruptcy.

Countries which design their systems of "city (corporate) governance" well will encourage efficient cities. Efficient cities attract businesses and residents. Economic growth follows. However, if the system of city governance is poorly designed, then cities in that country (or state) cannot compete, residents and businesses exit, and growth declines. For example, one inefficient system of "city governance" regulates the city-corporation to provide poverty services for which the city organizational form is not well-suited. Good rules of city governance are equivalent to a good national policy towards cities.

To use the "language" of finance, well run cities require good internal management, favorable (at least neutral) rules for city governance, and informed and diligent shareholders. To use the language of public policy, well run cities require honest and well-trained leaders, appropriate federal and state policies, and informed voters. Good management and good policy are one and the same when it comes to managing and financing cities.

As an investor/shareholder (owner of real estate), lender (banks and bondholders), worker (teacher), or customer (resident or business), you have a vested interest in ensuring your city is well-run. This is a course in how to finance and manage a city-corporation to maximize your consumption benefits and/or investment returns.

Assignments and Grading: There will be two, two hour examinations: One will be scheduled for the end of October in the evening (most likely, October 21) and the second exam will be given on the regularly scheduled date for the class final examination. In addition, there will be two graded homework assignments which you will be expected to complete on your own. Your course grade will be based on the sum of your two examination scores and your scores on the two graded assignments. Assignments will be available on a Monday and due no later than noon on the following Wednesday. Late assignments will not be accepted.

How to Use the Assigned Readings: Obviously I want you to read everything. You will, however, find overlap between the articles and class lectures, so to that degree they are substitutes – but not perfect substitutes. Perhaps the best way to use to the readings is as a supplement to the lectures, and then when a topic strikes your fancy, read the articles more carefully. You will be responsible for readings not covered in class.

There is a text for the class: Making Cities Work: Prospects and Policies for Urban America, Robert P. Inman (ed.), 2009 available at the Penn Bookstore. The book is the result of a Wharton Impact Conference held in May, 2007. Each chapter is written by one of the (if not the) world’s top scholar on each topic and provides perhaps the best summary of what we now
know about each subject. The chapters will provide you with the background knowledge you will need to think carefully about the problems we will address in class.

**Class Lectures:** Class Lectures are available for each class and you should bring those lecture notes to class. *I will not have extra copies in class.*

**GUEST SPEAKERS**

We will have three guest speakers over the term. This is a chance for us to talk with folks who are doing UFP in the trenches. They will join us for class.

**OCTOBER 4:** Mr. David Cohen, Executive Vice President, Comcast. David Cohen served as Mayor Rendell’s Chief of Staff during the fiscal crisis of 1992-1994.

**NOVEMBER 10:** Mr. Richard Ravitch, Lt. Governor of New York. This is the most recent appointment of many important positions of government service. Member, US Commission on Urban Problems (1966); Chairman, NY Urban Development Corp (1975-79); Chair, NYC MTA (1979-1983); Head, Major League Baseball Player Relations Committee; Chair, Millennial Housing Commission (2000-2003). Private Sector: Chair, Bowery Savings Bank of NY; Partner, Ravitch, Rice and Co. Ran for Mayor of NYC in 1989 losing to David Dinkins in the Democratic primary.

**DECEMBER 6:** Mayor Michael Nutter, Philadelphia. Our last class will focus on the necessity of strong leadership for successful cities. No one better to share his insights with us than Mayor Michael Nutter, Wharton, ’80.

**CLASS READINGS**

**O. Overview:** (September 8)


I. **Introduction: Why Cities?** (September 13, 15)

   *A. The Cultural City*


   *B. The Economic City*


   **LECTURE NOTES 1**

II. **Does Public Finance Matter?** (September 20, 22, 27)

   *A. Facts*


   *B. Causes*


   *C. Consequences*


   **LECTURE NOTES 2 & 3**
REFRESHER: NOTES ON REGRESSION ANALYSIS (Optional Extra Class) You should read these notes on your own and if they make sense, then you are fine. If not, I will hold 1 or 2 extra sessions – probably 4:30 to 6:00 – to go over the notes. Since we use the results of empirical studies throughout the course, you will be expected to be familiar with the basic approach to empirical analysis and statistical inference in social sciences.

III. Urban Public Finance: The Ideal (September 29, October 4, 6, 13)

A. The Technology of Local Government Services


B. The Efficient Provision of Local Public Goods Through Fiscal Competition


C. When Fiscal Competition Fails: Service Inequalities and Urban Sprawl


LECTURE NOTES 4, 5, & 6

MIDTERM EXAMINATION I: Previous Midterm Examination with Answers.

(Tentative Date: OCTOBER 25: 6 PM to 8 PM)

IV. The Reality of Urban Public Finance: Public Employee Unions (October 18)

LECTURE NOTES 7

V. The Reality of Urban Public Finance: Urban Poverty (October 20, 25)


J. Vigdor, Chapter 7: The Perplexing Persistence of Race,” in Making Cities Work:
Prospects and Policies.

“Why Poverty Persists,” NBER Digest.


LECTURE NOTES 8

VI. The Reality of Urban Public Finance: Crime (October 27)


LECTURE NOTES 9

VII. The Reality of Urban Public Finance: Keeping the Middle Class (November 1)

LECTURE NOTES 10

VIII. From Reality to the Ideal: Reforming Education (November 3, 8)

A. What Works for Better Services: Education


B. Managing What Works: Education


Mark Sloan, "Initiating the Privatization Process: Identifying What Services can
be Privatized and How to Take Them Private,” ASP Wharton School, Spring, 1999.


LECTURE NOTES 11

IX. **From Reality to the Ideal: Reforming Taxation** (November 15, 17)


LECTURE NOTES 12

X. **From Reality to the Ideal: Economic Development and City Poverty** (November 22)


LECTURE NOTES 13

XI. **Financing Cities in Developing Economies** (November 29, December 1)


XII. **So, You Want to be the CEO? The Mayor’s Job** (December 6, 8)

    “Old Style” Leadership:


    “New Style” Leadership:


SECOND MIDTERM EXAMINATION II: Previous Exams with Answers

(Scheduled for the Official Examination Date for our Class)