Regional Growth and Equity

URPL-6600 — Spring 2027
Instructor: Andy Taylor, AICP

Course Abstract

Background and Purpose

Regions are a challenge in the United States. They are difficult to define both spatially and institutionally. They lack constitutions or charters that provide governing authority, or codes in which they can enact policy and exercise authority. They challenge the autonomy of cities and towns to operate as independently as the U.S. federalist system allows.

Regions exist because they contain complex, connected systems that span arbitrary political subdivision boundaries. The lack of neat edges in a region is a feature: it means they can be scoped to try and tackle difficult problems that involve urban sprawl, housing affordability, travel options, economic growth, economic inequality, natural resource consumption, and greenhouse gas emissions. Institutions create regional initiatives and organizations in the hopes that coordinated investment or delegation of authority might deliver solutions.

Metropolitan areas in the U.S. literally contain multitudes. Over 86 percent of all U.S. residents live in a metropolitan statistical area, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. These "metro areas" can cross state boundaries and house vital economies that drive economic growth and migration patterns. Even if you never choose to be a regional planner or work for a regional institution, your entire career might find you within one or more of these metro areas, interacting with the institutions and systems operating at a regional scale.

The purpose of this course is for you to build mental models to understand the complex, connected systems that drive regional growth. We will identify regional dynamics and the agents making growth decisions, the forms of regional governance, and how that governance or planning takes place over a variety of topics, including housing, economic development, transportation, the environment, equity and more. You will build skills in simplifying and communicating about these complex systems while applying descriptive and policy analysis techniques.

Course Mechanics

This is a seminar course. Each week will be a mix of discussion, lecture, and practical exercises. We will host guest speakers when possible (currently scheduling) and you will be expected to ask questions and invite their thoughtful and practical contributions to our course. We will have a mix of academic readings and practical review of regional planning

documents. I am currently working to make sure our data analysis assignments are not duplicating lessons from Urban and Regional Development or Planning Methods; expect that the final course syllabus will include a mix of analysis and practical writing assignments.

Instructor Bio

Andy Taylor is a Project Director at ECOnorthwest with over 20 years of professional experience working at the intersection of land use, transportation, and housing planning, leveraging both data and policy analysis to help solve complex local and regional challenges. Prior to joining ECOnorthwest at the beginning 2025, Andy worked in regional planning, analytics, and team leadership roles at the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission and the Denver Regional Council of Governments, where he connected local government decision-makers to actionable insights to make life better throughout each region. Andy has been certified by the American Institute of Certified Planners since 2009. He has a Master of City and Regional Planning degree from The Ohio State University and a B.A. in English and History from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. He currently chairs the Board of Adjustment and Appeals for Englewood, Colorado, and volunteers with ULI Colorado's UrbanPlan experiential learning exercise on land use decision-making. He previously served on the leadership team of the Socioeconomic Forecasting Interest Group for the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations.