



College of
Professional and
Global Education



Curriculum: Los Angeles City Government and the Neighborhood Councils

A Project of the Civic University

Pat Brown Institute at Cal State L.A.
Office of Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti
The Board of Neighborhood Commissioners
The Department of Neighborhood Empowerment

With financial support from:

The Department of Neighborhood Empowerment
AT&T

Course Director: Raphael J. Sonenshein, Ph.D.
Raphael.sonenshein@calstatela.edu

Dates and Times:

Thursday April 2
Wednesday, April 8
Wednesday, April 15

All sessions will begin at 630 pm, informal reception at 6 pm.

Location: Ronald F. Deaton Civic Auditorium
100 West First Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

For questions, contact: Raquel Beltran, rbeltr15@calstatela.edu

What is the Civic University?

The Civic University (CU) is a partnership between the Pat Brown Institute for Public Affairs at Cal State L.A. and the Office of Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti. The Civic University arose from our shared belief that there are immense gaps in public knowledge and understanding of how Los Angeles city government works, and that as a result, people in many communities feel that they cannot effectively influence their own government.

The Civic University designs programs tailored to particular audiences in order to maximize the usefulness of the education we offer. The Board of Neighborhood Commissioners asked for a Civic University program specifically designed for leaders of neighborhood councils.

This Civic University for neighborhood councils will be the first to offer a non-credit certificate in local government from Cal State L.A.

What is the focus of the program?

The Civic University operates on the premise that when it comes to local government, a well-informed community will be more active. We want to help people have a greater impact on government by increasing their understanding of how the system is designed and how it works in reality. We are not only interested in explaining the formal processes of local government (“how does a council motion becomes an ordinance?”) but why things happen as they do. What are the important access points within local government?

You will find this program to be different from a traditional training curriculum. We will not be teaching about how to lead a citizen board; or how to comply with the Brown Act; or how to organize the budget of a neighborhood council. Rather, we will be examining how neighborhood councils can best achieve their mission and attain productive influence at city hall. We will also consider how the 1999 Los Angeles City charter reform changed both government and participation.

The course will be under the supervision of lead instructor Dr. Raphael Sonenshein, Executive Director of the Pat Brown Institute at Cal State L.A., and author of three books on Los Angeles politics and government. Dr. Sonenshein participated in the creation of the neighborhood council system during the 1999 charter reform as executive director of the appointed charter reform commission, and served as executive director of the Neighborhood Council Review Commission. Additional teachers and facilitators will be drawn from the Mayor's Office and other sources.

Course Plan

Session 1: The Power Structure at Los Angeles City Hall April 2, 2015

Part One: Who Governs Los Angeles City?

Readings:

Raphael J. Sonenshein. Your Guide to Power in L.A. *Los Angeles Magazine*, <http://www.lamag.com/citythinkblog/your-guide-to-power-in-la/>, February 2013.

The Los Angeles City Charter (Article IX):

[http://www.amlegal.com/nxt/gateway.dll/California/laac/administrativecode?f=templates\\$fn=default.htm\\$3.0\\$vid=amlegal:losangeles_ca_mc](http://www.amlegal.com/nxt/gateway.dll/California/laac/administrativecode?f=templates$fn=default.htm$3.0$vid=amlegal:losangeles_ca_mc)

- LA's political geography
- Power institutions
- The role of the mayor
- The city council
- Other citywide offices
- CAO and other key staff positions

Part Two: Where do Neighborhood Councils fit in?

- Origins and early decisions
- Expectations and annoyances
- Why no dotted or solid line to the government?
- Powers and roles: outsiders, insiders, or both?
- Future directions to maximize the influence of neighborhood councils

Session 2: The Guts of City Government

April 8, 2015

Readings:

Budget data for the city (selected sections):

<http://cao.lacity.org/budget/>

Part One: City services and budgets: Where the rubber meets the road

- What is a city service?
- The hierarchy of service delivery
- What the city does and does not do
- Financing city services
- Short term vs. long term services

Part Two: How Can Neighborhood Councils influence the budget process?

- Where are the budget access points, and when do they come into play?
- Using data to move the budget process: Guest speaker, Abhi Nemani
Chief Data Officer, City of Los Angeles
- The neighborhood council budget groups; how are they working?

Session 3: Moving the System

April 15, 2015

Readings:

Pat Brown Institute. *Who Votes in LA City Elections?*

<http://mwmultimedia.com/pbi/images/PBISOTC2014FINAL.pdf>

Part One: Elections

- Who votes in LA city elections?
- Race, class, and generations in voting
- Who has a strong sense of political efficacy? Who does not?
- What's the impact of campaign money and grass roots organizing
- Direct democracy
- Changes in candidate recruitment and success; do neighborhood councils have a chance?

Part Two: Informal power: getting it and using it

- To whom does city hall respond and why?
- Secrets of gaining and exercising influence
- Credibility and influence

Closing comments: What is the future of neighborhood councils in the LA power system?

- Finding a voice
- A unique role: both outsiders and insiders

How to learn more about Los Angeles City Government:

League of Women Voters of LA, *Los Angeles: Structure of a City Government*

http://www.lwvlosangeles.org/files/Structure_of_a_City.pdf

League of Women Voters of LA website for information on city elections and other issues: <http://www.lwvlosangeles.org>

Raphael J. Sonenshein, *The City at Stake: Secession, Reform, and the Battle for Los Angeles*. Princeton U. Press, 2006.

The Los Angeles City Charter:

[http://www.amlegal.com/nxt/gateway.dll/California/laac/administrativecode?f=templates\\$fn=default.htm\\$3.0\\$vid=amlegal:losangeles_ca_mc](http://www.amlegal.com/nxt/gateway.dll/California/laac/administrativecode?f=templates$fn=default.htm$3.0$vid=amlegal:losangeles_ca_mc)

Raphael J. Sonenshein. Your Guide to Power in L.A. *Los Angeles Magazine*, <http://www.lamag.com/citythinkblog/your-guide-to-power-in-la/>, February 2013.

City elections information:

<http://clerk.lacity.org/Elections/ElectionArchives/index.htm>

And on neighborhood council elections:

<http://clerk.lacity.org/Elections/NeighborhoodCouncilElections/index.htm>

Pat Brown Institute. *Who Votes in LA City Elections?*

<http://mwmultimedia.com/pbi/images/PBISOTC2014FINAL.pdf>

Budget data for the city:

<http://cao.lacity.org/budget/>

Final report of the Neighborhood Council Review Commission:

www.lacityneighborhoods.com/documents/finalReport.pdf