This seminar course introduces students to the topic of social justice as it relates to planning and the city. We will focus less on higher-order social-theoretical questions related to the origins of the concept of justice and more on applications of justice to and in the city, such as uneven development, gentrification, poverty, food justice, homelessness, environmental justice, vulnerable populations, immigrants and refugees, urban politics, right to the city, public housing, segregation, racial discrimination, affordable housing, social exclusion, and public space.

The course will provide a very strong foundation and grounding in principles of justice that will guide you as you begin your career in planning or a related field. As such, we will grapple with complex questions such as “for whom are we really planning our cities?” and “what are the most powerful contemporary challenges to a just society?” and “what might a just society even look like?” and, finally, “what role does planning have to play in all of this?”

This course is unique in the MURP program in that it will be run as a true seminar with weekly discussion and a substantial and deep “reading” of potentially difficult material, to include not only books and articles but also videos, images, and other popular media. I intend to let the course take on new directions as a result of student input: this is a true graduate seminar in that we will be exploring these significant questions together as peers.

We begin the semester by defining key terms such as justice, equity, and fairness. We will then work to become aware of our own social identities and cultural positioning as we begin to challenge our own views of the world. A key feature of the course is an analysis and dissection of best practices for socially just planning and policy and the development of new frameworks and criteria for action. Finally, we will apply much of our learning in the course to a real-world, hands-on project in the Denver metropolitan area wherein we examine current planning and policy proposals and assess their potential contribution to a more just and equitable society.