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# Teaching Tourism Planning through Community Engagement

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## Teaching Tourism Planning through Community Engagement

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### SUMMARY

One goal of the curriculum in the School of Community Resources and Development at Arizona State University is to provide students with hand-on opportunities for learning. A secondary benefit is that out-of-classroom community-based projects directly address one of ASU's design aspirations, that of social embeddedness. Undergraduate students in class sizes from 30 to 66 have researched and recommend changes in community tourism destinations, both rural (Greenlee County for example) and urban (Scottsdale for example) as taught by Timothy Tyrrell from 2010 to 2013. These projects have been conducted as the case study in Tourism Planning, an upper division course in a Tourism Development and Management Curriculum.

The course is designed to provide students with an overview of tourism planning at the local, regional and national levels. It provides a variety of practical planning theories, procedures and guidelines to meet the diverse needs of destination communities, tourism and hospitality organizations, public, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. The course concentrates on developing students' competencies in the basic techniques of planning and developing a sustainable tourism plan, products, attractions and services. The class also meets a literacy general studies' requirement and so involves significant writing and critical thinking assignments. Some are individual assignments; others are team assignments. The large, final product of the class is the community assessment that is done by teams of students.

The class covers basic tourism planning concepts such as supply and demand assessment, stakeholder involvement, SWOT analysis, logic models, planning concepts, and the tourism planning process. To put theory into practice, students conduct an assessment of a community's tourism resources and provide a report that shares the results of the assessment and ideas for continued tourism planning and development with community leaders. Projects involve considerable engagement with community residents, government officials, and tourism business owners. There is always a site visit (sometimes overnight) and students are required to cover their own costs and make their own travel arrangement. Destination communities are encouraged, but not required, to donate meals and accommodations but the only financial requirement is to pay for printing the final report (\$2000 or so), which is professionally designed by a college media expert. By asking for direct payments to the printer we avoid the University accounting bureaucracy. The report includes photos of all students in teams of 5 or 6, research findings, introductions by local officials, recommendations, complete APA references, pictures, famous tourism researcher quotes and logos of local sponsors on the back cover. In one case a follow up study by a Ph.D. class provided detailed strategic plans. In another case, the class was

taught by a doctoral student and the project was sponsored by the Arizona Office of Tourism (Nogales assessment) so it was somewhat different from the other projects.

The final report is very popular with the students who receive two copies on the last day of class when we deliver a webcast presentation of the final results to the community. Students love to show it to prospective employers when they interview for jobs. The instructor keeps about 50 copies for course and major promotion and the community receives the balance of 200 copies to distribute. It has been easy to sell the idea to communities because these students represent a very important tourism market (college-educated millennials) and because they are very aware of how the tourism industry works and how competitive destinations behave. There is no tourism consulting company with this perspective. Communities are impressed with the reports because they are comprehensive, grounded in the academic literature, and full of new and interesting ideas for tourism development.

Copies of the reports can be accessed via these links:

[Greenlee County \(December, 2012\)](#)

Project proposals to reduce economic leakage and build local capacity in Greenlee County

[Bisbee \(December, 2011\)](#)

Evaluation of different Stakeholder Perspectives on Tourism in Bisbee, Arizona

[Marana and Oro Valley \(May, 2011\)](#)

Assessment of resources and opportunities for tourism development and regional integration in Marana and Oro Valley, Arizona.

[Maricopa II \(August, 2011\)](#)

Recommendations by PhD students for three types of tourism development (downtown cultural district, festivals and events, agritourism) and branding for Maricopa, Arizona

[Maricopa I \(May, 2010\)](#)

Tourism resource assessment for Maricopa, Arizona

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

### Course Objective:

To provide a framework for linking sound multidisciplinary tourism planning activities with contemporary issues and policy concerns. The course will direct students in applying planning approaches to both hypothetical scenarios and practical situations to demonstrate their knowledge of planning principles for sustainable tourism development which minimizes the negative impacts of tourism while maximizing the benefits.

### Course competencies/outcomes:

Upon completion of the course, students should be able to:

1. Understand the general background and basic approaches to tourism planning,
2. Identify principles, processes and techniques for preparing local, regional and national tourism plans,
3. Relate tourism policies and plans of a selected destination to tourism planning concepts and components,
4. Identify the critical social, economic and environmental factors that need to be considered in the tourism planning process,
5. Evaluate the institutional elements to be addressed in tourism planning,

6. Outline the essential components of a tourism plan implementation and the monitoring process,
7. Understand the socio-economic and political context for successful tourism planning and development,
8. Understand the importance of community participation in tourism planning, and
9. Understand the local capacity needs related to tourism planning.

### IMPLEMENTATION CRITERIA

A partnership with a community is usually formed in the semester preceding the class. To date, we have been approached by communities requesting assistance rather than the other way around. The final project is one part of a grade that includes a number of writing assignments. The writing assignments for the final community report accounts for 35% of the students' grades. This project is done in teams and includes an opportunity for students to grade one another. Each student evaluates the contribution of each of the other members of the team. After each team assignment they are asked this question for every person on the team:

**“If the team earns an “A”, this person should get a “\_\_\_\_\_”**

The percentage of the average of these peer grades to an A is used to adjust individual grades on the team assignments from the team grade.

Part of the project includes development of a Gantt chart that lays out a time-line for the project (a spring semester class).

