GU POLITICS FELLOW ALVIN BROWN

DISCUSSION GROUP OUTLINE

SUCCESSES AND STRUGGLES OF A 21ST CENTURY MAYOR

Discussion Group Synopsis

Political gridlock and dysfunction permeate Washington and state legislatures. But America’s cities – where things actually get done – have shown that government and the political process can still work. Cities are tackling critical issues facing our nation at the local level, demonstrating how government can be innovative, efficient, and responsive. As economic and cultural hubs, cities are where the action is and mayors are the driving force. During this discussion group, we will explore how cities are able to do things that federal and state governments can’t, and discuss best practices in leadership, policy, and politics that will challenge students to apply their talents in supporting vibrant cities.

Week 1 – What it takes to lead a city

America’s cities are dynamic places with unique structural, political, and financial realities. From potholes to special interests, mayors must navigate challenges in the level of government closest to the people. The decisions they make impact people’s daily lives – and they’re held to account for their failures and successes in real time. This discussion group will explore what makes an effective leader and discuss what it takes to govern America’s diverse and dynamic cities.

Week 2 – Faith in the public square

Faith has a constructive role in promoting positive individual and community values. It often sustains people (including elected officials) under the most difficult life circumstances. America’s ever-evolving social landscape brings forth new challenges as leaders reconcile the callings of their faith with the demands of a changing society. We will discuss the role of faith in the 21st century American public square.

Week 3 – The value of public-private partnerships

For 21st century public leadership, building relationships between government, businesses, and the not-for-profit sector is key to getting things done. When used effectively, public-private partnerships transcend political divides and cut through red tape to accomplish goals such as boosting education, creating affordable housing, reviving hard-hit neighborhoods, and putting talented people back to work. We will discuss best practices for bringing together diverse stakeholders for innovative public-private partnerships.

Week 4 – Governing beyond partisan politics

Elections matter, but potholes, electricity bills, and test scores are neither Democrat nor Republican. Citizens demand their city government be responsive and effective to pressing problems. Effective municipal leadership brings together good people to make great things happen, and carefully navigates the highly politicized environments of state and federal government. We will discuss the opportunities and challenges of governing beyond partisan politics.

Week 5 – Making the tough decisions: Living within our means

By law, a city must seek to live within its means. In recent times, nearly every American mayor has confronted the tough question: How do you allocate scarce resources in financially challenging times?
Successful mayors have moved beyond the quick fix of raising taxes, and lead by example in making government more effective and efficient. They also ensure that cities remain responsive to shifting political priorities in state and federal government. We will discuss the considerations involved in making tough decisions as a city leader to ensure a sustainable fiscal future while improving quality of life for residents.

**Week 6 – Twenty-first century jobs in America’s cities**
The job market of the 21st century places new demands on workers and city leaders. In addition to ensuring competitive tax rates and reasonable regulations, mayors work to encourage the growth of new industries, and seek to close worker skill gaps to create a diverse, talented workforce. In short, a 21st century Mayor zealously leverages all of the assets of the city, including all of its people.

Mayors often confront unique challenges and opportunities in attracting jobs to their cities. For instance, Jacksonville counts large numbers of active-duty service members and veterans among its residents. Veterans face numerous challenges in the transition to civilian life, and often suffer from high rates of unemployment and homelessness. The city has been able to meet these challenges by using innovative approaches to address Jacksonville’s veteran homelessness crisis, and connecting veterans to job opportunities that embraced their courage and unique skills. We will discuss best practices for creating 21st century jobs in America’s cities.

**Week 7 – Keeping America’s cities safe**
In the United States, public safety remains a primary responsibility of local government. Residents insist upon safe communities in which to live, work, and raise a family -- and rightfully demand fair and just treatment from the law enforcement officers sworn to protect and serve them. Mayors are at the forefront of community policing and justice reform efforts, but face complex challenges including law enforcement leaders who are themselves subject to elections in many communities. During this session, we will discuss the policy and political considerations of maintaining public safety.

**Week 8 – The future of cities**
The greatest investment any city can make involves cultivating the livelihood of its younger residents. By nurturing the well-being of its youth, a city promotes a vibrant, stable future with good leadership in the present, and for decades to come. We will discuss effective strategies for empowering young people as future city leaders.