

**USP 313U Urban Environmental Issues
Spring 2024 | T/Th 12-1:50p | UCB 250**

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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Our planet is currently confronted by two interrelated and concurrent developments: rapid urbanization and unprecedented global-scale environmental issues. Ecological degradation and declines in natural resources are, in large part, due to the economic and consumptive appetites of our cities and the people who live in them. Cities also suffer internal environmental problems such as unequal access to (clean) resources. At the same time, cities present an opportunity to live more sustainably through urban density, more efficient use of natural resources, and innovative ideas that address critical environmental issues. Taken together, these developments leave policymakers, scientists, scholars, and other concerned citizens debating the role of cities in exacerbating environmental issues while also being the source of solutions to these issues.

This course will explore this central paradox – the city as source of and solution to environmental problems – and address the following questions: What are the major urban environmental problems in cities around the world? How are environmental issues driving urbanization and how is urban development driving environmental degradation? What does the relationship between (urban) humans and nature look like historically? Currently? In the future? Are sustainable cities possible, and if so, what are they trying to sustain and how do they do so? How do cities fit into nature?

In order to address these questions (and others), we will explore historical context of urban environmental issues, ecological issues related to industrialization and global urbanization, and frameworks for analyzing urban environmental issues. The last few weeks of the course will explore a series of cases (water, transportation, food, waste) related to urban environments. Students will learn about the variety of environmental issues cities face, the way cities have attempted to manage or mitigate these problems, and ways people have evaluated the success of these attempts to solve environmental issues.

Course Considerations

Although the course is called urban environmental issues, the readings will sometimes go beyond environmental problems because they are intricately interlinked with social, economic, and political issues. This course is also not just about the environment in urban areas – it is about the place of nature in a human-dominated world.

This course is part of the Community Development program and University Studies Community Studies, Environmental Sustainability, Design Thinking/Innovation/Entrepreneurship (D-TIE), and Healthy People/Places clusters.

Goals

Broadly, learning objectives are to:

- Broaden the way students think about the environment and cities: students should think critically about how concepts such as “urban” and “nature” are defined and operationalized

- Explore and question various oppositions, such as urban/rural and global/local: where do humans fit into nature? Are cities un-natural? How do unseen global forces affect local processes?
- Understand the interconnections between the social, technological, and ecological dimensions of urban areas
- Understand how humans relate to and treat nature in an urbanizing world
- Enhance critical thinking skills. Students will need to learn to “look behind the curtain” and ask “for whom” questions in order to be successful.
- Participate in a discussion-based classroom setting
- Develop research, communication, and planning strategies
- Convey knowledge and ideas clearly in written and verbal form

READINGS & ASSIGNMENTS

There's no required text for this class, i.e., nothing to buy. All readings are available as links or PDFs on Canvas. I have increasingly been running into issues with paywalls; if you encounter a paywall, please contact me and I'll find a way around it.

As this class is structured around weekly readings, you'll be required to *complete all the reading ahead of each class*. In order to receive full credit, you will be expected to participate in class discussions about the reading. I spend a great deal of time finding readings that are challenging and insightful without being overly dense or absurdly long, so read them carefully and critically. In general, I try to aim for about 2 hours of reading/viewing for each class meeting, but some will require more, and some less.

❖ Participation and Attendance (15 points)

Attendance means showing up for class – show up and get points! Each class is worth .5 points (10 points total), but you are entitled to 2 “freebies” (meaning no point deduction for missing class, no questions asked). Of course, I am reasonable; please contact me if special accommodations need to be made. And if you are sick, please stay home – keep in mind illnesses like covid can have serious impacts on immunocompromised people.

Participation includes: taking part in class discussions, paying attention during lectures and when other students are talking, and being respectful in your comments.

- Students will be responsible for bringing questions and comments about the material to class (more details in class)
- Please bring something to write on/with to every class (your computer is OK): we will be engaging with the material in a variety of ways, including some writing exercises.

❖ Weekly Discussion Posts (2 points apiece; 20 total points):

Each week students will submit a discussion post to Canvas

- Students should plan to write about 3-5 sentences that serve as a general reaction to the material for the entire week (both class periods)
 - Think of it as answering these prompts: “what are your thoughts about this week’s material? What stuck out to you?”
- You are encouraged, but not required, to respond to your classmates’ posts
- Each week these posts will be **due every Sunday at 11:59PM**; after that time, the discussion folder closes and you miss the potential 20 points for the week

❖ Short Week 3 Reflection (5 points):

For this short assignment, you will summarize the in-class debate we have during week 3 (4/18), then reflect on these questions:

- What did you find compelling? Which arguments resonated with you and which positions did you find most convincing?
- Did anything you heard, watched, or read change your mind in any way?
- Do you think “green” capitalism is necessary (or desirable) to stave off the worst impacts of climate change?
- Do you feel there were any omissions in the debate?

There’s no length requirement, but well-developed and thoughtful reflections will score highest. Turn in reflections before midnight on Wednesday, 4/24.

❖ **Short “Praxis” Paper (20 points):**

For the praxis assignment, you will pick a current events news article and apply a framework to the issue it describes. Be sure to use a trustworthy source for your article (most major newspapers are OK). Also be sure your article is *not* an opinion or position piece – you need to be able to formulate your own opinion and analysis. Lastly, be sure that your article describes an issue that is urban and environmental. Your article does *not* need to be long, dense, and/or academic, just objective and informative.

- You must use one – not both – framework reading: either The Conundrum of Urban Sustainability or Reconciling the Green and Brown Agendas (both reading in **bold** on the class schedule below)
- The paper should be 4 paragraphs, no more or less; instructions are below:
 - The first paragraph should be a descriptive and concise summary of the issue from the article you selected; what are the critical points of the issue?
 - The second paragraph should describe the framework you have chosen: What are the important elements and keyword of the framework?
 - The third paragraph should apply the framework to the issue you have chosen; how do the elements of the framework fit your issue?
 - The fourth paragraph should be an analytical paragraph that draws a lesson or suggests a solution; what new insights can be drawn from using the framework to think through your issue? Do any solutions become clear?
 - Papers are due to Canvas end of week 6

❖ **Group Project/Presentation (20 points)**

The idea of this project is to think critically and creatively about the future of cities in a climate-changed world. Instead of expecting the worst, we will work on imagining the better. As such, we will form “advisory councils” with the goal of tackling a specific problem (e.g., “climate migration”) from a specific role (e.g., “engineer”). Each group will prepare a presentation for the class at the end of the term; slide decks will be submitted to Canvas. Ample class time will be devoted to group work. More specific info will be announced in class and posted on Canvas.

❖ **Final Assignment (20 points)**

Your final submission for the course will be a product of your group work. In the paper, you will outline the role and problem your group was tasked with, summarize and describe the values that motivated your approach (why were those values important, and what values did they challenge?), discuss your collaboration, and outline the solution(s) your group came up with. You can work collaboratively with your group and submit the same paper, or you can submit your paper individually. More information will be provided in class and posted on Canvas.

- Sources should be cited in-text and in a bibliography
- Papers should be roughly 1200-1500 words; citation style is up to you
- Papers will be due Wednesday of finals week by 11:59pm

Grading Policy

Unless otherwise noted, my general grading policy will follow Prof. Bates's philosophy on evaluating student work:

- An A assignment demonstrates original thought and synthesis of ideas, sophisticated, cogent analysis, and is clearly written or presented. Outstanding work.
- A B assignment presents above average analysis with appropriate evidence to support the ideas and is clearly written or presented. Very good work.
- A C assignment shows a basic level of understanding, with analysis limited to the most obvious arguments. Writing is competent. Adequate work.
- A D assignment misunderstands or misrepresents the material, or is so poorly written or presented as to obscure the analysis. Inadequate work.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Date	Weekly Themes & Readings	Assignments
4/2	<i>Course Introduction</i>	
4/4	<i>Situating and (Re)framing: Urbanization and the Climate</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: Davis, The Urban Climacteric [Excerpt] • Read: IPCC Report Headlines (WG1 & WG 2) • Check Out: Climate Science 2030 • Check Out: Climate Clock (climateclock.world) • Read: Embracing Life in the Anthropocene 	Discussion Post
Part I: History and Theory		
4/9	<i>Urban Environmental History: Land and Urban Development</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: Girardet, Chapter 2 • Read: Cronon Chapter 1 	
4/11	<i>Urban Environmental History: Industrialization</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: Girardet, Chapter 3 • Read: Bender & Bender, Chapter 3 • Read: Cities Before the EPA 	Discussion Post
4/16	<i>Globalization & Megacity Ecology</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: Davis, Slum Ecology • Read: Inside Mokoko 	
4/18	<i>Capitalism and Climate Change: A Debate</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: Cronon, Ch 4 (only first section, pgs. 148-151) • Do outside research on the relationship between capitalism and climate change; <u>bring sources to class</u> and we'll debate 	Discussion Post
4/23	<i>Urban Metabolism 1: Transforming Nature</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: Girardet, Chapter 5 • Read: Wachsmuth, Three Ecologies (Read pgs. 506-510; skim through the rest) 	
4/25	<i>Urban Metabolism 2: The Global Hinterlands</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: Urban Conundrum 	Discussion Post

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: The Dark Side of Congo’s Cobalt Rush 	
4/30	<i>Environmental Justice 1: Environmental Racism</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: Pulido, Rethinking Environmental Racism (pgs. 12-19) • Read: The Poisoned Generation • Watch: How Systemic Racism Shaped the Ecosystems of US Cities • Watch: The Father of Environmental Justice [...] 	
5/2	<i>Environmental Justice 2: Reconciling Equitable Approaches</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: Brown/Green Agenda • Read: Contesting Sustainability 	Discussion Post
Part II: Modern Urban Environmental Issues		
5/7	<i>“Natural” Disasters & Adaptation</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: There’s No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster • Watch: No Man’s Land: Barbuda After Irma • Read: Adaptation • Watch: The Uprising of Youth Climate Activists • Read: Move Beyond Hope [...] 	
5/9	<i>Urban Water</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: Troy, Thirsty City • Watch: The Only State Capital Where You Can’t Drink the Water • Watch: Jackson Water Crisis is Messing with Kids’ Future • Read: Water Warriors 	Discussion Post “Praxis” Paper
5/14	<i>Housing & Transportation</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: How Climate Change Makes Life Tougher [...] • Read: When Crises Collide • Read: Why Did America Give Up on Mass Transit? • Read: Planned I-5 Expansion in Portland 	
5/16	<i>Waste & Pollution</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: Junkyard Planet, Ch. 6 • Read: Your Recycling Gets Recycled, Right? • Read: The Law That’s Helping Fuel Delhi’s Deadly Air • Watch: What It’s Like to Live in Cancer Alley 	Discussion Post
Part III: Looking Toward the Future		
5/21	<i>Confronting the Future</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: Climate Despair • Read: Hack the Story • Read: Economic Imaginaries 	
5/23	<i>Urban Agriculture</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: Frazier, The Vertical Farm • Read: Pandemic Prompts More Black Americans [...] • Watch: Earthrise Detroit 	Discussion Post

5/28	<i>Degrowth, Solarpunk, & Library Economies</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: Degrowth Can Work – Here’s How Science Can Help • Read: Can We Save the Planet by Shrinking the Economy? • Read: Solarpunk Cities: Notes Toward a Manifesto • Read: Solarpunk, or How to Be an Optimistic Radical • Read: Library Socialism 101 • [Optional, but recommended] Listen: Growth, Degrowth, Agrowth (podcast) 	
5/30	<i>Mutual Aid & Decolonization</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: Oregon’s Wildfires [...] Mutual Aid Brought Us Together • Read: Water is Wealth 	Discussion Post
6/4	<i>Environmental Politics: Just Solutions & Imagining Different Cities</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: Feed What You Want to Grow • Read: ‘Greenway Stimulus’ Could Bring Boom • Read: A Guide to Climate Reparations 	
6/6	<i>Environmental Politics: Just Solutions & Imagining Different Cities</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: How NW Communities Are Stopping Fossil Fuel Projects • Read: Portland Clean Energy Fund Offers its First Climate Action 	Discussion Post Presentations?
6/11	Finals Week	Final Paper Presentations?

****Course schedule subject to changes. I will announce any major changes in class**

POLICIES & RESOURCES

Classroom Etiquette

It is important to follow a few simple rules of classroom courtesy. While I realize laptops are an essential learning/note taking tool, I ask that you use it exclusively for note taking and for exploring issues that come up in class (i.e. not browsing/scrolling social media). And please be on time to class. Repeated lateness (or early exits) will impact your participation grade.

Policy on Academic Integrity

PSU takes academic integrity very seriously. As a PSU student, you are expected to adhere to the PSU Student Code of Conduct (see: <https://www.pdx.edu/dos/psu-student-code-conduct>). Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. The PSU Student Code of Conduct defines academic misconduct as follows:

(9) Academic Misconduct. Academic Misconduct is defined as, actual or attempted, fraud, deceit, or unauthorized use of materials prohibited or inappropriate in the context of the academic assignment. Unless otherwise specified by the faculty member, all submissions, whether in draft or final form, must either be the Student’s own work, or must clearly acknowledge the source(s). Academic Misconduct includes, but is not limited to: (a) cheating, (b) fraud, (c) plagiarism, such as word for word copying, using borrowed words or phrases from original text into new patterns without attribution, or paraphrasing another writer’s ideas; (d) the buying or selling of all or any portion of course assignments and research papers; (e) performing academic assignments (including tests and examinations) in another person’s stead; (f) unauthorized disclosure

or receipt of academic information; (g) falsification of research data (h) unauthorized collaboration; (i) using the same paper or data for several assignments or courses without proper documentation; (j) unauthorized alteration of student records; and (k) academic sabotage, including destroying or obstructing another student's work.

Students are responsible for knowing both in-class behavior and rules governing use of materials in academic work. Plagiarism includes both other students' work and/or anything from the internet (including Wikipedia) that is not properly cited. Any student found plagiarizing work or violating any part of PSU's academic integrity policy will receive no credit for the assignment and will not receive an opportunity to make up the work.

Canvas Web-based Course Management

We will be using Canvas in this course including: access to and updates to the syllabus/reading assignments and assignment submissions. There will be a learning curve we are transition from D2L to Canvas, so let's all do our best and be understanding when there are challenges.

Student Resources

Access and Inclusion for Students with Disabilities. PSU values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to fostering mutual respect and full participation for all students. My goal is to create a learning environment that is equitable, useable, inclusive, and welcoming. If any aspects of instruction or course design result in barriers to your inclusion or learning, please notify me. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) provides reasonable accommodations for students who encounter barriers in the learning environment. If you have, or think you may have, a disability that may affect your work in this class and feel you need accommodations, contact the Disability Resource Center to schedule an appointment and initiate a conversation about reasonable accommodations. Call 503-725-4150 or email drc@pdx.edu. The DRC website is <https://www.pdx.edu/drc>. If you already have accommodations, please contact me to make sure that I have received a faculty notification letter and discuss your accommodations.

Title IX. Portland State is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of prohibited discrimination and sexual harassment (sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, and gender or sex-based harassment and stalking). If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or sexual harassment, know that help and support are available. Information about PSU's support services on campus, including confidential services and reporting options, can be found on PSU's Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response website at: <http://www.pdx.edu/sexual-assault/get-help> or you may call a confidential IPV Advocate at 503-725-5672 or schedule Online at <https://psuwrc.youcanbook.me>. You may report any incident of discrimination or discriminatory harassment, including sexual harassment, to:

- PSU's Title IX Coordinator: Julie Caron by calling 503-725-4410, via email at titleixcoordinator@pdx.edu or in person at Richard and Maureen Neuberger Center (RMNC), 1600 SW 4th Ave, Suite 830
- Deputy Title IX Coordinator: Yesenia Gutierrez by calling 503-725-4413, via email at yesenia.gutierrez.gdi@pdx.edu or in person at RMNC, 1600 SW 4th Ave, Suite 830

Please be aware that all PSU faculty members and instructors are required to report information of an incident that may constitute prohibited discrimination, including sexual harassment and sexual violence. This means that if you tell me about a situation of sexual harassment or sexual violence that may have violated university policy or student code of conduct, I have to share the information with my supervisor, the University's Title IX Coordinator or the Office of the Dean of Student Life. However, the Title IX Coordinators will keep the information confidential and refer you to a confidential advocate. For more information about Title IX please complete the required student module *Creating a Safe Campus* in your D2L.

Other resources you should know about:

- For information on assistance with food, housing, financial, utility, and childcare, please visit: <https://www.pdx.edu/dos/student-resources>
- The Office of Diversity & Multicultural Student Services (Smith Memorial Union 425) provides structured, academic support service, advising, referrals, and advocacy for first-generation college students, low- income and others facing special challenges. Please visit: <https://www.pdx.edu/diversity-multicultural-student-services/>
- The Learning Center (Millar Library 245) mission is to foster the learning process by empowering PSU students to accomplish their academic and personal goals. In addition to helping with current coursework, academic support services can assist in developing effective learning strategies. <http://www.pdx.edu/tutoring/>
- The Writing Center (Cramer 188) will help you with all varieties of projects, including class assignments, resumes, application essays, presentations, and creative writing. It aims to help writers at any stage of the writing process, from brainstorming to the final draft. You can schedule an appointment online and their website also suggests ideas and strategies for completing writing assignments. <http://www.writingcenter.pdx.edu/>
- It can be challenging to do your best in class if you have trouble meeting basic needs like safe shelter, sleep, and nutrition. Resource centers across campus are here to provide assistance, referrals, and support. Please contact anyone on this list for assistance:
 - Basic Needs Hub: basicneedshub@pdx.edu
 - Portland State Food Pantry: Psufp.com; pantry@pdx.edu
 - C.A.R.E. Team: askdos@pdx.edu; (503) 725-4422
 - Student Health and Counseling: askshac@pdx.edu; (503) 725-2800