

USP 300 Intro to Urban Studies
Spring 2025 | M/W 2:00-3:50 | Urban Center 250

Instructor: Steve Marotta, PhD
Office: 370B (3rd Floor, Urban Center, through suite 350)
Office Hours: By appointment – please email to schedule
Instructor Email: smarotta@pdx.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This course introduces the interdisciplinary field of urban studies drawing on urban planning, economics, geography, sociology, politics, and the humanities to provide basic concepts for understanding the urbanized world of the twenty-first century. We examine cities as economic, social, and political systems and the myriad ways in which people have thought about cities. We also work to understand the mechanisms and structures that make cities and urban areas possible. While we will look at global cities in some aspects of the course, a majority of the course focuses on cities in the US.

Broadly, learning objectives are to:

- Broaden the ways students think about cities and the dynamic social, political, and economic forces that shape them
- Develop an inter- and multi-disciplinary approach to the city as an object of study
- Understand the historical and systematic processes through which cities derived specific cultural, spatial, and political forms
- Develop a critical familiarity with the issues relevant to modern cities
- Develop an understanding of the structural forms of power and oppression that haunt cities, particularly the urban history and reproduction of racism and white supremacy
- Develop a creative, historically informed, socially just imagination regarding better urban futures
- Enhance critical thinking skills; students will need to learn to “look behind the curtain” and ask “for whom” questions to be successful
- Develop research, communication, and planning strategies and convey knowledge and ideas clearly in assignments and in discussions

COURSE CONSIDERATIONS

In this course, I will present you with challenging, sometimes controversial material. My hope is that you will approach the course’s materials earnestly and engage on the grounds laid out by the course materials. A significant goal for me, as a teacher, is to provide space for students to develop a comprehension of the largely unjust processes and systems that have led us to where we are while concurrently developing an imagination for the future. A few other considerations:

- First, 10-week courses move very quickly. Therefore, being organized and disciplined is of utmost importance. This is a 4-credit course, which means you should expect to spend roughly 8-10 hours per week coming to class, reading/watching course materials, and working on assignments.
- Second, we will be doing a variety of in-class activities that are more engaging and richer when folks are present in class and prepared; in other words, attendance is vital to creating an optimal learning environment.

As for any of the above, I am reasonable; if life happens and you need help or accommodation, please don’t be afraid to contact me and I will do my best to provide appropriate assistance.

READINGS

There are no textbooks for this course, and there is no requirement to buy anything for this course. However, 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. Everything listed on the course schedule should be read ahead of the M/W meeting it is listed in. Lastly, everything is listed in the order you should read/watch/listen.

ASSIGNMENTS

❖ Attendance (10 points)

Show up for class and get points! You are entitled to 2 “freebies,” but after that unexcused absences will affect your grade. That said, 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.

❖ 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?”
- Each week these posts will be **due every Sunday at 11:59PM**; after that time, the discussion folder closes and you miss the potential 2 points for the week

❖ Current Issues Presentation (10 points)

Starting in week 3, each student will have an opportunity to share and discuss a current events article with the class. Students will sign up for presentation slots before the end of week 2; no more than 3 students per meeting. Presentations will be informal – roughly 5 minutes or so, no slides are required; students can discuss their article from their seats. Please post your article to the Canvas discussion board before the start of the class meeting you present in.

A current issues article could be a problem specific to cities (e.g., housing/shelter), a topic that is important to current news (e.g., sanctuary cities), something of local importance, an idea for making cities better, or really anything related to the urban scale that you want to discuss in class. Try to choose something that really interests you, and be ready for a few questions from your classmates.

❖ “Look Again” Term Project (4 x 15 points; 60 points total)

The term assignment will take place in four parts: four separate observations of the same urban space at four different points in the term. Think about each observation as an analysis of a different layer or urban space; each observation will require us to look (and think) deeper.

Students should start by identifying a space that they would like to observe – it should be a space that is small enough to observe (a neighborhood or section of a neighborhood, a route to work/school on transit, PSU campus, a commercial district, etc.) but big enough to provide a diversity of built environment, encounters, experiences, etc. to observe. It could be a space you are very familiar with, or it can be somewhere you’ve always been drawn to but know little about.

Some basic instructions (additional details will be provided on Canvas and in class):

- The first observation will primarily be to describe your chosen space and apply the material from weeks 1 & 2. Describe the space you chose, including how you

understand its boundaries, how the space is “produced” (the spatial triad), what gives it meaning, and its “sense of place.” Due Sunday @ 11:59p of week 3.

- Look again: The second observation will reinterpret the space using the course materials/lessons from weeks 3-5; important considerations will include how your space has been affected by colonialism, industrialization, and globalization – how have these histories and systems shaped this space and how you perceive it? You can focus on one aspect in depth (e.g., industrialization) or multiple aspects more generally. Due Sunday @ 11:59p of week 6.
- Look again: The third observation will continue to build on your first two observations, this time reinterpreting your space using course material from weeks 6-9; how has your space been affected by gendered and sexual norms, by dis/ability, by media and mass imagination? As above, you can focus on one aspect in depth (e.g., gender/sexuality) or multiple aspects more generally. Due Sunday @ 11:59p of week 9.
- Final observation: at this point, you have (re)interpreted your space through the lenses of history, systems, and contemporary issues. What remains is a critical imagination of what the space could be – what is the future of this space? What do you wish for it and those that use it? Due Wednesday 11:59p of finals week.

Two important notes: First, *please be careful and respectful* with your observations – do not take pictures of other people, do not trespass, do not do your observations while driving, stay aware of your surroundings, and respect those you encounter. If you have concerns about a specific space, talk to me before starting the project or choose a space with less potential conflict/concern. Second, if you have a disability that limits mobility in way that would make this assignment unduly challenging, let me know and I will find an appropriate adjustment and/or accommodation.

Format: Each observation should be about 1000-1200 words and include at least two citations from the course material (except the final observation, which does not need a citation). You can submit a traditional essay or use a slide deck (e.g., if you want to include images, maps, etc.); if you'd rather submit an alternative form (e.g., a video essay), please discuss with me first.

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.

Course Schedule – materials listed for each Monday/Wednesday should be read prior to the start of the correlating class

Part 1: Introduction – (Utopian) Cities, (Urban) Space, and (Non)Place	
<u>Week 1</u> Course Introduction	Monday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course Introduction
	Wednesday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Those Who Walk Away from Omelas Read: Agassiz and the Fish
<u>Week 2</u> Space & Place	Monday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Brown, A New Way to Understand the City: Henri Lefebvre's Spatial Triad Read: 25 Powerful Pieces of Street Art
	Wednesday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Cresswell, Defining Place Read: de Graaf, I Have No Idea What Placemaking Is
Part 2: The Forces That Have Shaped Cities	
<u>Week 3</u> Settler Colonialism & Industrialization	Monday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: The Settler Colonial City Project, Mapping Chicagou Read: Dories, What is Planning without Property?
	Wednesday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Engels, The Great Towns (excerpt) Hutter, Chapter 5 (107-122, stop at "Implementations...")
<u>Week 4</u> Housing Segregation & Institutionalized Racism in Urban America	Monday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Gibson, Bleeding Albina
	Wednesday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Taylor, How Real Estate Segregated America
<u>Week 5</u> Globalization & "Post-Industrial" Cities	Monday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Davis, Planet of Slums, Ch 6 & Ch 7
	Wednesday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Solnit, Detroit Arcadia Read: Leary, Detroitism
Part 3: Contemporary Topics & Future Cities	
<u>Week 6</u> Gender & Sexuality	Monday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Massey, Space, Place, and Gender Read: Kern, Intro (in <i>Feminist Cities</i>)
	Wednesday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Segalovich, What Defines a Queer Space? Read: Witt, Reimagining Underground Rave Culture

<u>Week 7</u> Gentrification & Housing/Shelter	Monday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Smith, Class Struggle on Avenue B Read: The Whitewashing of Detroit's Culinary Scene
	Wednesday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Jock, You Are Not Welcome Here Read: Zielinski, Portland Mayor Pitches Plan [...] Read: Petter, How Finland Conquered Homelessness
<u>Week 8</u> Movement, Mobility, Media	Monday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: English, Why Did America Give Up on Mass Transit? Read: Jaffe, Crip Mobility Justice: Ableism and Active Transportation Debates
	Wednesday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: The Chaotic Image of Portland [...] Read: Ehrenhalt, Portland's Curious Case of Urban Discontent Read: Despite the Data [...]
<u>Week 9</u> Urban Critique & Activism	Monday – NO CLASS (Holiday)
	Wednesday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography & Theory of the Derive Read: How Urban Design Can Make or Break Protests Check out: Forensic Architecture "Tear Gas Tuesday"
<u>Week 10</u> Imagining Other Cities	Monday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: Solarpunk Portland: Proposals to Transform a City Read: How We Build Cities Can Help Overcome Trauma Read: Space is the Place: The Architecture of Afrofuturism Read: Gayle, 'I call it Botanarchy'
	Wednesday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TBD

****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.

Using AI in this Course

Intellectual integrity forms the bedrock of academic communities and serves as the cornerstone for impartial evaluation of your work. All coursework completed and/or submitted for this course must represent your original work and adhere to the University's Academic Integrity Guidelines. Unauthorized collaboration or the use of ChatGPT or any other generative AI applications is strictly prohibited.

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://psuwrp.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

