

Course: USP 416/516 International Urban Issues
Term: Winter 2026
Days/Times: Fridays 11-12:40pm
Room: URBN 204

Instructor: Matthew Gebhardt
Office Hours: [By appointment](#)
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

A person who knows only one country knows no country – Seymour Martin Lisset (1922-2006)

This course was initially developed as a discussion forum linked to the PSU-China Innovation in Urbanization Program. That program facilitated the exchange of scholars, students, and practitioners between the Toulon School and planning organizations in China, and the China Seminar was intended to provide an opportunity for participants in that program and other members of the CUPA, PSU, and larger community to share and debate ideas and innovations in addressing urban issues. While the relationships that initially formed the basis for this seminar have sadly decayed, the concept of the seminar as a space for learning about and through international knowledge and examples and the lively exchange of ideas and experiences about urban issues continues.

This one credit seminar is intended to create space for conversations on international urban issues to support critical understanding of these issues and efforts to address them comparatively in a global context. The aim is to gain perspective on how urban issues manifest and are addressed in different contexts and discuss what we can learn to improve our scholarship and practice.

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants in this course will:

1. Comparatively examine how certain urban challenges manifest differently in different contexts, and
2. Critically assess ideas and approaches for addressing urban issues drawn from international examples.

TEACHING METHODS

This course is taught through a once weekly seminar/discussion scheduled for Fridays from 11-12:40pm. Collectively, we will develop a set of issues and cases for discussion and an inventory of materials to support our investigations. In between class sessions, participants will review and reflect on the supporting materials, which we will then discuss during our Friday meetings.

TEXTS AND READINGS

There are no required texts for this course. The required readings and supplemental materials are available online either through the University Library's website or other online sources. Participants will help develop the list of readings and supplemental material and we will add to this during the course of the term via the Canvas site.

ASSIGNMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

The following are brief descriptions of the assignments and activities for this course. More detail will be provided in class. Students taking this course are expected to:

- Collaborate on identifying topics and materials for the course.
- Review the materials for the week, post thoughts and questions to the Canvas discussion (by 12pm on Thursdays), attend weekly seminars, and participate in discussions. Choose weeks of your interest and write two reflection/response papers: 500 – 1,000 words each. At a minimum, papers should include: why you selected this topic and what you know/want to know about it (ideally before engaging with that week's materials and class session), your reflections on the topic including any new information or perspectives, connections to prior learning or experience (if any), how you might incorporate these reflections into future courses or scholarly or practice work, and any lingering questions you have or future avenues you would like to explore. Reflections should incorporate a minimum of one source from the session and one additional resource (e.g., report, scholarly article, long-form journalism, documentary, etc.) that extends

our knowledge of the topic. Students enrolled in USP 516 should incorporate a minimum of three resources total (two from course plus one additional or one from course and two additional).

- All reflection/response papers are due by 11pm on the Tuesday following the class discussion on your chosen topic.
- Students enrolled in USP 516 are also required to participate in the planning and running of one session during the term. Once topics have been selected, students will volunteer for one week. As a group, students will assist the instructor in identifying and sharing readings, videos, websites, or other materials for the class to review prior to the session. Together with the instructor, students will assemble in-class materials in response to comments and questions posted to Canvas, propose discussion questions/topics, and plan the session.

All work done for the course must be your own or your groups. The work must be original and prepared for this class. Plagiarism is unacceptable and will result in a failing grade for the course and may potentially expose students to additional sanctions. Use of AI is discouraged, though may be acceptable in certain circumstances, e.g., helping to generate an initial list of potential resources to review for sharing with the class. However, using AI or similar methods to write your reflections is unacceptable, and, if detected, will result in a zero. In all cases, students should clearly indicate AI use and are solely responsible for the accuracy of all results.

This course will involve discussion of potentially challenging or controversial topics. Students are expected to engage with each other with curiosity, kindness, and respect. No recording devices are welcome in the class, except as required to meet a DRC documented accommodation and with the written consent of the instructor. No recordings may be used for any purpose other than for individual work directly associated with this course. Students engaging in [disruptive behavior](#) will be invited to leave the classroom. Repeated violations may result in removal from the course and referral for disciplinary action.

POTENTIAL COURSE TOPICS

The exact list and order of topics for the course will be determined collaboratively by the students and instructor. Example topics include:

- History of international city planning and design
- History and legacy of colonialism
- Water access, quality, and management

- Housing policy and planning
- Transportation planning, infrastructure, and investment
- Megacities and slums
- Solid waste management
- Urban informality, housing and economy
- New cities
- Migration and immigration
- Shipping, freight, and ports

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. The DRC is located in 116 Smith Memorial Student Union, 503-725-4150, drc@pdx.edu, <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.
- Students who need accommodations for tests and quizzes are expected to schedule their tests to overlap with the time the class is taking the test.
- Please be aware that the accessible tables or chairs in the room should remain available for students who find that standard classroom seating is not useable.
- For information about emergency preparedness, please go to the [Fire and Life Safety webpage](https://www.pdx.edu/environmental-health-safety/fire-and-life-safety) (<https://www.pdx.edu/environmental-health-safety/fire-and-life-safety>) for information.

SEXUAL ASSULT AND HARRASSMENT

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: Albert Roberson 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.
- Taylor Burke, Deputy Title IX Coordinator and Dean of Students: 503.725.4422 | askdos@pdx.edu, Smith Memorial Student Union (SMSU), 825 SW Broadway, Suite 433

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 *Understanding Sexual Misconduct and Learning Resources* in Canvas.

CULTURAL RESOURCE CENTERS

The Cultural Resource Centers (CRCs) create a student-centered inclusive environment that enriches the university experience. We honor diversity, explore social justice issues, celebrate cultural traditions, and foster student identities, success, and leadership. Our centers include the Multicultural Student Center, La Casa Latina Student Center, Native American Student & Community Center, Pan African Commons, and Pacific Islander, Asian, Asian American Student Center and the Middle Eastern, North African, South Asian Initiative. We provide students with employment, volunteer, and leadership opportunities. Along with extensive programming, our spaces offer resources such as computer labs, lounge areas, and study spaces. All are welcome! More information about the CRCs can be found at www.pdx.edu/cultural-resource-centers and <https://www.facebook.com/psuculturalcenters/>, CRCs can be contacted at cultures@pdx.edu and 503-725-5351.

OTHER CAMPUS RESOURCES

The CARE (Coordination Assessment Response Education) Team is available to help students experiencing distress and to assist with concerns about a fellow student. More information about the CARE Team can be found at: <https://www.pdx.edu/dos/care-team>.

The CARE Team also maintains a comprehensive list of resources, both campus and community, which can be found here:

<https://www.pdx.edu/dos/sites/www.pdx.edu.dos/files/C.A.R.E.%20Resource%20Guide.pdf>.

The Center for Student Health and Counseling (SHAC) provides community-based health care for students, including physical health, dental services, mental health, and testing services. You can find information about what SHAC provides and how to access them at: <https://www.pdx.edu/shac/center-for-student-health-and-counseling>.

If you are having trouble meeting basic needs: shelter, sleep, nutrition, there are resources available to help. The PSU Food Pantry offers supplemental food items to currently enrolled PSU students. The pantry is located in SMSU 325. For more information, you can email foodhelp@pdx.edu. For more information on food and wellness assistance for students visit: <https://www.pdx.edu/student-access-center/>. For help meeting other basic needs, contact the Basic Needs Hub at basicneedshub@pdx.edu.

Student Legal Services provides legal advice and assistance on a range of areas of law including family, landlord-tenant, and immigration. More information can be found at: <https://www.pdx.edu/sls>.

Services are available for students with children, including childcare subsidies and family events, a lending library and clothing closet, lactation spaces, and a Family Resource Room. More information can be found at: <https://www.pdx.edu/students-with-children/our-services>.

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. Visit <http://www.pdx.edu/dmss/> for info.

International Student Services provides a range of assistance to international students, including help with visas and immigration status, internships and employment, and life on campus and in Portland. They also have a Student Aid Fund for international students experiencing financial difficulties. More information is available at: <https://www.pdx.edu/international-students/>.

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. See <http://www.pdx.edu/tutoring/> for more info.

The Portland State University Millar Library offers a wide range of helpful resources, databases, and tutorials to assist with coursework and research. In particular, you might find the resources that have been collated specifically for urban studies useful (<http://guides.library.pdx.edu/urbanstudies>).

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: <http://www.writingcenter.pdx.edu/>. Their website also contains resource pages that suggest ideas and strategies for completing writing projects.