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# UNST220 - Understanding Communities

Portland State University –Spring Term 2026

## Welcome!

UNST232 is a Sophomore Inquiry that is part of the community studies cluster in the University Studies program here at Portland State. As such it “explores the nature of communities, whether defined spatially or as a set of ties based on sharing a common interest.”

Being an interdisciplinary course taught by faculty coming from a wide range of disciplines, its focus varies according to the expertise of the instructor teaching it. This term since the instructor is a geologist, the emphasis will be on community environmental resilience and sustainability.

Here is the official description for the course from the University Studies web page < <https://www.pdx.edu/university-studies/understanding-communities> >

*This course explores the nature of the communities we live in, whether defined spatially (such as a neighborhood) or as a set of ties based on sharing a common interest. Building community has become a central debate in a number of social sciences, including sociology, political science, economics, and psychology. In a culture emphasizing individualism and individual rights, how can we balance the needs for community and responsibility to others with individual needs for personal development? In this course, students have the opportunity to gain practical as well as theoretical experience with understanding communities.*

And here is a personal addendum based on this terms focus for the course

*Building community also has a strong science / technological component particularly when it comes to understanding the natural settings in which our communities exist, the hazards associated with those settings, the natural resources available to sustain our communities, how climate and resources change because of our communities, and what we can do to mitigate and adapt to those changes. The emphasis of this course is on adapting our communities to make them more environmentally resilient and sustainable. As such we will be focusing on the Portland metropolitan area, various climate action and emergency preparedness plans amongst communities within the area.*

### Instructor

Frank D. Granshaw PhD  
Department of Geology  
< [fgransha@pdx.edu](mailto:fgransha@pdx.edu) >  
Office hours (in person or via Zoom) - M 11 am to 12 pm, W 3 to 4 pm

### Course Mentor

Anis Zaman  
< [smzaman@pdx.edu](mailto:smzaman@pdx.edu) >

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## UNST Objectives for this Course

- ✓ ***Inquiry and Critical Thinking***: Students will learn various modes of inquiry through interdisciplinary curricula—problem-posing, investigating, conceptualizing—in order to become active, self-motivated, and empowered learners.
- ✓ ***Communication***: Students will enhance their capacity to communicate in various ways—writing, graphics, numeracy, and other visual and oral means—to collaborate effectively with others in group work, and to be competent in appropriate communication technologies.
- ✓ ***Ethics, Agency, & Community***: Students will examine values, theories and practices that inform their actions, and reflect on how personal choices and group decisions impact local and global communities
- ✓ ***Diversity, Equity and Social Justice***: Students will explore and analyze identity, power relationships, and social justice in historical contexts and contemporary settings from multiple perspectives.

## Understanding Communities Cluster Learning Outcomes

UNST 220 is the first course in the Understanding Communities Cluster. Students in the Understanding Communities cluster will:

1. Better understand themselves, their own communities and how their communities fit into the larger world;
2. Employ multiple disciplines to learn about community and distinguish how different fields of study or ways of questioning impact the way a community is understood;
3. Focus on the different concepts, tools and techniques that can be used in practical application today to impact community formation, the power those communities have in society, & how changes can be made in the future.

## Writing Intensive Course Requirements

This is a [Writing Intensive Courses \(WIC\)](#). WIC offers students an opportunity to engage deeply in course materials. Students learn the processes by which writers in the field develop and disseminate knowledge. In UNST 220 we will write as a process including both informal tasks and final drafts that:

- ✓ Frame writing tasks within their rhetorical situations.
- ✓ Integrate elements of the writing process en route to final products.
- ✓ Use writing as a tool for thinking and learning.
- ✓ Encourage transfer of writing knowledge and skills across contexts.
- ✓ Reflect current research on writing assessment.

## Domestic RESR (Race & Ethnic Studies Requirement) Objectives for this Course

This course fulfills PSU's Domestic [RESR requirement](#) and is committed to these learning outcomes:

- ✓ Understand, compare, and accountably apply the multiple theories, principles, and methodologies of Ethnic Studies as pertaining to domestic and global realities.

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- ✓ Discern how perspectives are deepened through centering the experiences, pedagogies and methods of Black, Indigenous, local and global communities of color into the curriculum.
  
  - ✓ Develop relational understanding and consider social responsibility while collaborating with others to address topics of inquiry.
  - ✓ Differentiate and apply a variety of perspectives regarding anti-racist, anti-white supremacist, and decolonial theories and practices, and understand the histories of these ideas and the communities they come from.
  - ✓ Identify and clarify various contemporary forms of oppression and discrimination and their origins.
  - ✓ Engage in anti-oppressive and non-discriminatory practices that reflect an awareness of interlocking dynamics of multiple identities and intersectionalities (e.g. race, ethnicity, nationalist, caste, religion, class, gender, sexuality, and ability).
  - ✓ Understand how the interlocking dynamics of identity shape communication practices and learn best practices for engaging in accountable cross-cultural communication
  - ✓ Define and learn to interpret co-existing, multiple perspectives, as well as intersectional and collective consciousness.

### **CUSP (Community Urban Studies and Planning) Degree Objectives for this Course**

Students in UNST 220 are introduced to the ideas, topics, and theories that will be further developed in classes in the Understanding Communities Cluster and the majors and minors in Urban Studies and Planning. This course is the first class in the CUSP major and is designed to introduce students to the field.

- ✓ UNST 220 will introduce the topics of **redlining, urban renewal, and gentrification**
- ✓ Students in UNST 220 will recognize & discuss: **biases in institutional decisions, power, belonging, & social norms.**
- ✓ Students in UNST 220 will employ multiple disciplines to learn about community and focus on the different concepts, tools and techniques that can be used in practical application today to impact **community formation, the power those communities have in society**, & how changes can be made in the future.

### **NACE Career-Ready Workforce Objectives for this Course**

- ✓ **Equity & Inclusion:** Demonstrate the awareness, attitude, knowledge, and skills required to equitably engage and include people from different cultures and backgrounds.
- ✓ **Leadership:** Recognize and capitalize on personal and team strengths to achieve organizational goals.
- ✓ **Professionalism:** Knowing work environments differ greatly, understand and demonstrate effective work habits, and act in the interest of the larger community and workplace.
- ✓ **Teamwork:** Build and maintain collaborative relationships to work effectively toward common goals, while appreciating diverse viewpoints and shared responsibilities.

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## Course materials:

While we will be reading a number of articles and using a number of on-line tools this terms, there is no required text for this course. All of our readings and other resources will be available from the course Canvas site. You are strongly encouraged to regularly bring a tablet or laptop to all classes since we will be using them to access on-line tools that we will be using for classroom activities.

## Course format and principal activities:

This class is a 4 credit course having two components, lectures and mentor sessions. Lecture meets twice weekly and is a workshop where we investigate key concepts. Mentor session meets once a week and is designed to assist you with the term project.

The following is a list of principal activities that you will be engaged in during the term...

### ✓ *Lecture/workshop activities*

These are small group activities that take place during lecture. They are designed to teach the kind of problem-solving skills involved in community design for resilience and sustainability and provide a catalyst for class discussion.

### ✓ *Weekly summaries*

These are written responses to weekly guiding questions, unanswered questions you may have from the week, and the application of online tools introduced during the week to the selected portions of your term project.

### ✓ *Term project - Neighborhood redesign for resilience and sustainability*

In this project you will be working in a team of three to four to redesign selected neighborhoods in the Portland Metropolitan area to be more resilient and sustainable in the face of local natural disasters and changing regional climate.

The end product of your project will be a Google Earth “tour” of your selected neighborhood showing how you would redesign it for environmental resilience and sustainability. We will be presenting these in lieu of a final exam on the final date scheduled by the university.

Though a large portion of the grade you receive for the project (80%) will be a group grade for the end product, each of you will be required to submit two progress reports during the term. The goal of each report will be to help you develop text for the final product and tell me where you are with your project so I can assist you with feedback.

## Course Schedule

This schedule outlines major topics, individual assignments, and term project benchmarks. It is not a complete summary of what we will be doing and is subject to change in response to unexpected circumstances. Detailed schedules with due dates for each week appear in the Canvas website for the course. Regularly refer to the Canvas site for the needed additional information.

Week	Topics	Individual assignments	Term Project benchmarks
1	Starting points	Readings (see Canvas site) Weekly summaries	
2	Natural Setting	Readings (see Canvas site) Weekly summaries	Progress report (1) with neighborhood selection
3	Natural hazards and Emergency preparedness	Readings (see Canvas site) Weekly summaries	
4	Regional climate impacts, mitigation, and adaptation	Readings (see Canvas site) Weekly summaries	
5	Policy: Local planning and climate action plans	Readings (see Canvas site) Weekly summaries	Progress report (2)
6	Community systems: Energy	Readings (see Canvas site) Weekly summaries	
7	Community systems: Infrastructure	Readings (see Canvas site) Weekly summaries	
8	Community systems: Food and water	Readings (see Canvas site) Weekly summaries	Progress report (3)
9	Community systems: Circular economy	Readings (see Canvas site) Weekly summaries	
10	Weaving it all together		
<b>Finals week</b>			Group Project presentation

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### Course Policies:

The policies of this course are designed to help you get the maximum benefit out of this experience, while helping me fairly evaluate the work that you do. If you have any questions about these policies, please do not hesitate to talk to me.

- *Grading* - I grade based on accumulated points rather than a curve. The value of each type of assignment and the scheme used for calculating your final grade are shown in the table below. The percentages represent what portion of the Maximum TOTAL you accumulate during the term.

Note - the Maximum TOTAL is subject to change as needed.

Project	100 pts	90-100%	=	A
Weekly summaries	90 pts	80-89%	=	B
Mentor session	40 pts	70-79%	=	C
<u>In-class activities</u>	<u>100 pts</u>	60-69%	=	D
		=<59%	=	F
Maximum TOTAL	330 pts			

- *Participation* - Though attendance at lecture is not taken, it is strongly recommended that you attend every lecture and mentor group session. Note – In class activities cannot be made up.
- *Late work* - Work that is a week late will be discounted 50%. Work that is more than 1 week overdue will not be accepted.
- *Plagiarism and other student conduct issues* - Plagiarism is copying other people's work and claiming it as your own. It is also a practice with serious legal and ethical implications. If there is evidence that you have plagiarized someone else's work, you will receive no credit for that work. For the official university position on this and other student conduct issues I refer you to the PSU Student Code of Conduct at <https://www.pdx.edu/dean-student-life/academic-misconduct> and *Academic resources* on the page <https://www.pdx.edu/history/more-links>.

*Note* plagiarism also includes having an artificial intelligence to write your papers for you. While it is OK to have generative AI to help you research a topic, in the final analysis the ideas and words you have in your work should be your own. If you do use text produced by an AI make sure to attribute it to it. Also make sure to check its references and check the university's policy on using AI < <https://www.pdx.edu/academic-affairs/ai> >

- *Disability* – If you have a disability and need an accommodation, please make arrangements with me outside of class. To finalize these arrangements, you will need to provide documentation of disabilities from the university's Disability Resource Center. For the location and contact information for the center refer to their web page at <https://www.pdx.edu/disability-resource-center/>.

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## Additional Resources and Policies

**Student Resources:** Includes a wide range of resources, including various centers for students with different identities- e.g. [Cultural Resource Center](#), [Disability Resource Center](#), [Queer Resource Center](#), [Students with Children Resource Center](#), [Women' s Resource Center](#), and [Veterans Resource Center](#); lots of academic resources like the Library, tutoring, and technical support (Office of Information Technology); and various counseling, financial, health and and wellness services- including some that are culturally specific.

**Access and Inclusion for Students with Disabilities/ DRC:** 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, usable, inclusive, and welcoming. If any aspects of instruction or course design result in barriers to your inclusion or learning, please notify me.

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, [drc@pdx.edu](mailto: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.**

**Multicultural Student Services:** Includes links to Multicultural Retention Services, Middle East, North Africa and South Asia (MENASA) Initiative, the Native American Cultural Center, and more, including some duplications from the above and some additional resources.

**University Career Center:** Job Search Resources, Networking, Resume Help, Interviewing Practice, and workshops with employers.

**PSU is a Sanctuary Campus:** Please note, I will protect the confidentiality of students and will not voluntarily participate or facilitate immigration actions.

**Basic Needs at Portland State:** 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](mailto:basicneedshub@pdx.edu)
- [Portland State Food Pantry:](#)
  - SMSU 325 [pantry@pdx.edu](mailto:pantry@pdx.edu)
- [Emergency/ Hardship Fund](#) - emergency financial assistance

## Writing Resources

This course does require you to stretch yourself as a writer. In order to be an effective communicator your writing needs to 1) meet the assigned task; 2) be designed for the intended audience; 3) convey all important information. Every writer needs to proof-read and revise their work to obtain the best finished product. If you need help with this process, PSU's Writing Center ([www.writingcenter.pdx.edu](http://www.writingcenter.pdx.edu)) has a variety of free services. **This is a writing class and this is a great free resource for everyone to use.** Please use this resource.

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## **Discrimination, Violence, & Mandated Reporter/ Title IX Reporting Obligations**

PSU is committed to fostering a safe, productive learning environment. Title IX and our school policy prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, which regards sexual misconduct — including harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. We expect a culture of professionalism and mutual respect. Please be aware that as a faculty member, I have the responsibility to report any instances of sexual harassment, sexual violence and/or other forms of prohibited discrimination to PSU's Title IX Coordinator, the Office of Equity and Compliance or the Dean of Student Life and cannot keep information confidential. You may report any incident of discrimination or discriminatory harassment, including sexual harassment, to either the Office of Equity and Compliance or the Office of the Dean of Student Life. If you would rather share information about sexual harassment or sexual violence to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can contact a confidential advocate at 503-725-5672 or by scheduling on-line ([psuwrc.youcanbook.me](https://psuwrc.youcanbook.me)) or another confidential employee found on the sexual misconduct resource webpage. For more information about your obligations and resources for sex/gender discrimination and sexual violence (Title IX), please complete the required student module Creating a Safe Campus in your Canvas.

## **Free Speech Policies & Guidelines**

Portland State University has [free speech policies and guidelines](#) for the classroom environment. I will use the PSU Conduct policy: disruptive behavior will be asked to leave and discriminatory or harassing behavior will be reported.