

Spring term 2026
USP 324U – Healthy Communities
Portland State University – School of Urban Studies and Planning
online asynchronous course

Instructor: Moriah McSharry McGrath, PhD, MPH, MSUP

What we're studying

From the PSU catalog:

“Addresses issues at the intersection of urban policy and planning and individual and community health. Relationships between the ways in which land is used, the transportation choices available, and the health of both urban places and city residents are explored in light of growing concern about increased rates of various health problems. Health consequences of political, economic, and social aspects of metropolitan life are also examined. Movements and programs to create and maintain healthy communities around the world are analyzed.”

Learning outcomes

In addition to the broader learning outcomes of the relevant University Studies program, students will be working toward achieving the following course-specific outcomes:

- 1) Assess relationships among physical environment, social systems such as race and class, and community health status
- 2) Discuss the roles of urban planning and public health practitioners in shaping the built environment and community health
- 3) Identify planning and design strategies that promote food access, physical activity, social solidarity, and health justice
- 4) Collect, analyze, and present information about neighborhood

Course activities also aim to ensure that students have the following administrative skills, which are directly transferrable to the workplace:

- 1) Develop a personal workplan based on the contents of a syllabus document
- 2) Find material on the basis of a bibliographic citation; and ascertain bibliographic information about a source for the purpose of preparing a reference list and using in-text citations
- 3) Consult with technical experts (librarians, information technology techs) to obtain guidance
And resolve problems
- 4) Use office suite software (MS Office and Google Workspace) to create, edit, and organize files of varying types

Course materials

Most of our readings are available to PSU students through the [PSU Library website](#), requiring you to log in with your PSU Odin ID. You may not be accustomed to searching the catalog for materials, but getting confident with this skill will help you in the long run. If you are having trouble locating a reading, please use the [Ask a Librarian](#) service for assistance. Librarians are standing by 24/7 to help you. Other readings will be available on the “plain old internet” or provided to you on Canvas. The bibliographic information in the syllabus will enable you to find the reading.

Our main text is:

Botchwey, N. D., Dannenberg, A. L., & Frumkin, H. (Eds.). (2022). *Making healthy places: Designing and building for well-being, equity, and sustainability* (2nd ed.). Island Press.

Other materials are listed in the course calendar at the end of the syllabus; the syllabus will be revised as the course unfolds.

ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

There are a set of weekly activities to do, with the assumption that people will miss a week or activity here or there. If you do every single activity, you end up with extra credit. The basic set of activities also adds up to more than 100 points, which has the overall effect of boosting your final grade.

	points
<i>Engagement with readings</i> Reading quiz in week one: 1 point Reading summaries: 2.5 points x seven = 17.5 (required wk. two, then take off two weeks of your choice as “freebies”)	18.5
<i>Engagement with colleagues</i> Weekly check-in boards: .5 points x 9 = 4.5 points (one “freebie”) Weekly activity boards: 2.5 points x 9 = 22.5 (one “freebie”) High quality participation: 3 points (overall engagement and professionalism)	30
<i>Neighborhood assessment</i> Fieldnotes: 5 points Photo essay: 5 points Policy scan: 5 points Policy video presentation: 1 point	16
<i>Data analysis</i> Map summary: 3 points Map peer review: 2 points Final essay: 10 points	15
Final exam	20
TOTAL:	102

To earn additional points, you can also:

	points
<i>Skip your freebies:</i> If you do all of the weekly activities every single week, you can get lots more points! Reading summaries: 5 points Check-ins: .5 points Activity boards: 2.5 points	8 points available
<i>Optional activities:</i> Try out a wide variety of campus services (most offer remote appointments), participate in student activities, participate in community events related to the course content! Activities must be approved in advance, see spreadsheet on Google Drive.	maximum 5 points

The following final grades will be given for the following number of *TOTAL POINTS ACCUMULATED*:

Points	<60	60	64	67	70	74	77	80	84	87	90	94
Grade	F	D-	D	D+	C-	C	C+	B-	B	B+	A-	A

Overview of assignments

The purpose of the smaller assignments is to give you credit for habits of good scholarship (i.e., interacting with classmates, taking note about your reading). Larger assignments are about practicing core scholarly skills in the topic area of community development.

Engagement with readings: reading summaries

Through weekly reading summaries you will identify the main ideas in readings, summarize complex content, and practice APA style reference list entries.

Engagement with classroom and campus: activity boards, e-mail, extra credit

There are many ways to engage with your peers. Showing up, listening, and asking good questions in the most obvious. Helpful and courteous communication in writing (e-mails and Canvas) is another. You also have the option of participating in events in the larger PSU community.

Neighborhood assessment

Students will to conduct observations and develop a portrait of the health of one neighborhood. The project will involve several components: observations, a photo essay, and analysis of the policy context.

Data analysis assignment (PolicyMap)

To practice interpreting graphical information and to learn about spatial variation across metropolitan areas, students will explore data using the PolicyMap web interface and submit their findings in two stages: an initial description of the maps they've selected, and then a longer analytical essay.

Final exam

Evaluation of your understanding of course readings and activities, including your colleagues' research.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND RESOURCES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

Academic integrity

The PSU Student Code of Conduct and Responsibility can be found at: <https://www.pdx.edu/dos/psu-student-code-conduct>. We are all responsible for upholding it!

It states, in part:

“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.”

Please be mindful of this, particularly when it comes to writing. Do not try to pass off other people’s work (including uncited photos from the internet!) as your own. Not only is it unethical, it could result in failing an assignment or course, or getting suspended or expelled from the university. The Writing Center is available to support you as you learn appropriate practices of scholarship and attribution. You can also post to Canvas or come to office hours for help. Instead of being freaked out that you are going to plagiarize by accident, ask for help! **I reserve the right to give a failing grade for the course to any student with multiple academic integrity issues in the class.**

Turnitin

Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission review for textual similarity for the purpose of detecting unoriginal writing, including plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting unoriginal writing, including plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the Turnitin Acceptable Use posted on the Turnitin.com website.

Sharing course materials

It is unacceptable to copy or share course materials, text, or images from/of your classmates or the instructor in any space outside of this course. This includes social media and commercial websites such as Course Hero or Chegg. Recording and photography are not permitted in the classroom without prior consent of the instructor or documentation by the Disability Resource Center.

Artificial intelligence tools¹

I would prefer that you not use AI tools to do your coursework, because doing so will slow your learning at the synthesis and analysis skills that are central to the social sciences. But if you insist: AI-based assistance should be treated the same way as collaboration with other people: you are welcome to talk about your ideas and work with other people, both inside and outside the class, as well as with AI-based assistants. However, all work you submit must be your own. You should never include in your assignment anything that was not written directly by you without proper citation (in-text citation, reference list at the end of the document, and quotation marks for any verbatim). Tips for avoiding trouble:

- Never hit “Copy” within your conversation with an AI assistant. You can copy your own work into your conversation, but do not copy anything from the conversation back into your assignment. Instead, use your interaction with the AI assistant as a learning experience, then let your assignment reflect your improved understanding.
- Do not have your assignment and the AI agent itself open on your device at the same time. Similar to above, use your conversation with the AI as a learning experience, then close the interaction down, open your assignment, and let your assignment reflect your revised knowledge.

Access and inclusion for students with disabilities

My goal is to create a learning environment that is accessible, equitable, inclusive, and welcoming. I am committed to fostering mutual respect and full participation for all students. 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](#) to schedule an appointment and initiate a conversation about reasonable accommodations. The DRC works with students who have physical, learning, cognitive, mental health, sensory, chronic illness, and other disabilities.

If you already have certified accommodations, please contact me to make sure that I have received your DRC Faculty Notification Email so we can discuss your accommodations.

Sexual misconduct

Title IX² and PSU policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex/gender, including sexual harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. For more information about PSU’s expectations of our campus community standards and resources for sex/gender discrimination and sexual violence, please complete the required student module Understanding Sexual Misconduct and Resources at <https://www.pdx.edu/diversity/understanding-sexual-misconduct-and-resources-student-module>.

Please be aware that PSU’s policies require instructors to report any instance of sexual harassment, sexual and relationship violence and/or other forms of prohibited discrimination to university officials, who will keep the information private. You may also contact other confidential employees found on the sexual misconduct resource webpage at <https://www.pdx.edu/sexual-assault/get-help>.

¹ adapted from David Joyner at Georgia Institute of Technology

² of the federal Education Amendments of 1972

TENTATIVE COURSE CALENDAR

<i>week of/topic</i>	Special schedule for the first week - complete tasks by Friday, April 3rd at 5pm
<p>1 <i>March 30th</i></p> <p>Intro to class & each other</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete getting started checklist • Post your introduction (C1) • Do the week 1 module content (includes watching a video) • Post to the discussion activity board (A1) • Read article online: Cabrera, Y. (2020, December 4). How can we heal a fractured America? This Victorian-era disease detective offers clues. <i>Grist</i>. https://grist.org/justice/how-can-we-heal-a-fractured-america-this-victorian-era-disease-detective-offers-clues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Complete reading quiz about Cabrera (R1)

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WED.	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<p>2 <i>Apr. 6th</i></p> <p>Health and place</p>	<p><i>Readings (access via PSU library website):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 1 (intro) from reader (the Botchwey, Dannenberg, and Frumkin book – make sure you’re using the 2nd edition with the cover that matches the one in this syllabus) • Introduction to Fullilove, M. T. (2013). <i>Urban alchemy: Restoring joy in America's sorted-out cities</i>. New Village Press. <p>DUE 5pm: Check-in for week 2 (C2) DUE 5pm: Summary of week 2 readings (R2)</p>	<p>DUE 5pm: first post due to for week 2 activity (A2)</p>		<p>DUE 5pm A2: reply posts due for week 2 activity</p>	<p>Review the instructions for the neighborhood project and make sure you have a good plan!</p>
<p>3 <i>Apr. 13th</i></p> <p>Transp. and built env.</p>	<p><i>Readings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reader Ch. 11 (transportation) • Lugo, A., Doerner, N., Lee, D., McCullough, S., Sulaiman, S., & Szczepanski, C. (2018). <i>Untokening mobility: Beyond pavement, paint, and place</i>. - read on Untokening Collective website or PDF version here, related webinar (optional) on YouTube <p>DUE 5pm: Check-in (C3) and reading summary (R3) for week 3</p>	<p>DUE 5pm: week 3 activity post (A3)</p>		<p>DUE 5pm: replies to week 3 activity post (A3)</p>	
<p>4 <i>Apr. 20th</i></p> <p>N’hood design</p>	<p><i>Read:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last names A-G: reader ch. 2 (physical activity) • Last names H-N: reader ch. 3 (food) • Last names O-S reader ch. 8 (social capital) • Last names T-Z: reader ch. 16 (nature) <p>DUE 5pm: C4, R4</p>	<p>DUE 5pm: A4</p>		<p>DUE 5pm: A4 replies</p>	<p>DUE 5pm: fieldnotes due for neighborhood observation due</p>

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WED.	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<p>5 Apr. 27th Climate</p>	<p><i>Read:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reader Ch. 17 (climate) Táirwò, O. O. (2022, January 10). The fight for reparations cannot ignore climate change. <i>Boston Review</i>. https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/the-fight-for-reparations-cannot-ignore-climate-change/ <p>DUE 5pm: C5, R5</p>	<p>DUE 5pm: A5</p>		<p>DUE 5pm: A5 replies</p>	<p>DUE 5pm: photo essay for neighborhood observation</p> <p>Data analysis lab available (prep for data analysis assn.)</p>
<p>6 May 4th Policy</p>	<p><i>Readings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reader Ch. 20 (policy) Feierstein, S., Harati, M., Rogers, N., & Greenberg, D. M. (2020). <i>Local change, big impact: State and local policy responses to community needs</i>. LISC. PDF posted on Google Drive <p><i>Review</i> (no need to do written summary): “How to Understand Local Government” online here</p> <p>DUE 5pm: C6, R6</p>	<p>DUE 5pm: A6</p>		<p>DUE 5pm: A6 replies</p>	<p>DUE 5pm: Policy scan memo, Policy scan video presentation</p> <p>Recommended: make your personal workplan for policy & data analysis assignments</p>
<p>7 May 11th Vulnerability & resilience</p>	<p><i>Read (ideally in this order):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smith, N. (2006). There's no such thing as a natural disaster. From <i>Understanding Katrina: Perspectives from the social sciences</i>. Read online here Algoed, L., & Hernández Torrales, M. E. (2019). The Land is Ours - Vulnerabilization and resistance in informal settlements in Puerto Rico: Lessons from the Caño Martín Peña Community Land Trust. <i>Radical Housing Journal</i>, 1(1). <p><i>Review</i> (no need to do written summary): Satija, N., Collier, K., & Shaw, A. (2016). Boom town, flood town. <i>Texas Tribune/ProPublica</i>. Online here</p> <p>DUE 5pm: C7, R7</p>	<p>DUE 5pm: A7</p>		<p>DUE 5pm: A7 replies</p>	<p>DUE 5pm: Policy scan memo, Policy scan video presentation</p> <p>DUE 5pm: Maps summary</p>
<p>8 May 18th Air</p>	<p><i>Read:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reader ch. 4 by Kinney and deSouza (air) Casey, J., & Morello-Frosch, R. (2024, September 16). How researchers measure wildfire smoke exposure doesn't capture long-term health effects – and hides racial disparities. <i>The Conversation</i>. Online here. <p>DUE 5pm: C8, R8</p>	<p>DUE 5pm: A8</p>		<p>DUE 5pm: A8 replies</p> <p>Data analysis lab due (ungraded, but preps for maps)</p>	<p>DUE 5pm: Maps summary</p> <p>DUE 5pm: Maps peer review due</p>

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WED.	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<p>9 May 25th Water</p>	<p>University closed for Memorial Day</p> <p><i>Read:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reader ch. 6 by Acey and Boamah (water) Balazs, C. L., & Ray, I. (2014). The drinking water disparities framework: On the origins and persistence of inequities in exposure. <i>American Journal of Public Health</i>, 104(4), 603-611. 	<p>DUE 5pm: C9, R9, A9</p>		<p>DUE 5pm: A9 replies</p>	<p>DUE 5pm: Maps peer review due</p> <p>DUE 5pm: Data analysis essay</p>
<p>10 Jun. 1st Synthesis</p>	<p><i>Read:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reader ch. 22 by Dannenberg (measuring healthy places) Litman, T. (2020, March 25). Planning healthy communities: Beyond the hype. <i>Planetizen</i>. Online here. <p>DUE 5pm: C10, R10</p>	<p>DUE 5pm: A10</p>		<p>DUE 5pm: A10 replies</p>	<p>DUE 5pm: Data analysis essay</p> <p>5pm: last chance for extra credit. Please complete course evaluation!</p>
<p>Exams Jun. 8th</p>		<p>9am exam posted</p>		<p>11.59pm: last chance to submit exam</p>	<p>Do course completion checklist</p>

Reminders:

A = activity board

C = check-in

R = reading summary

Grace period (submit with no penalty) for these assignments until Friday at 5pm.

Larger Friday assignments usually have grace period until the following Monday at 5pm; ask if you're not sure!