

URBAN STUDIES

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The Field of Urban Studies

The Barnard–Columbia Urban Studies program enables students to explore and understand the dynamics of cities and urbanization. Students engage the city as an amalgam of social, spatial, historical, cultural, and environmental phenomena. Students study the evolution of urban forms and social structures, which create opportunities and constraints for the exercise of human agency. They examine the city in different historical and comparative contexts, as well as in the human imagination.

Majors build an intellectual foundation that combines broad, interdisciplinary coursework and in-depth focus on a particular sub-field. The core courses expose students to the diversity of urban studies as a field, while the methods and Junior Seminar requirements introduce them to the challenge of doing original research. This prepares them for their independent senior thesis project, undertaken over the entirety of their final year. We encourage our majors to use New York City as a laboratory, and many courses draw on the vast resources of the city and include an off-campus experience.

Student Learning Outcomes

Having successfully completed the major in Urban Studies, the student will be able to:

- Describe and explain urban phenomena and relations from multiple theoretical and methodological perspectives.
- Identify and analyze diverse urban issues and problems, including their complex causes and the systems that frame their potential resolution.
- Evaluate approaches to collecting and analyzing diverse empirical data about cities.
- Design and conduct research on a particular urban issue or problem, including developing and defending a research question, conducting original research, considering its risks to subjects, analyzing data using recognized techniques, and interpreting results.
- Develop an extensive, clear, and carefully argued piece of writing.

Student Advising

Advising Resources

- Prospective Columbia College majors should consult with **Amy Chazkel**, Bernard Hirschhorn Associate Professor of Urban Studies
- Prospective General Studies majors should consult with **Aaron Passell**, Director of Urban Studies.
- Please send email to urbanstudies@barnard.edu to subscribe to the Urban Studies listserv.
- Urban Studies hosts Program Planning meetings in the Fall and Spring semesters and an Open House for prospective and current

majors. Scheduling information for these events is disseminated via the listserv.

Guidance for First-Year Students

URBS UN1515 INTRODUCTION TO URBAN STUDIES is recommended for first-year students who are considering or would like to explore a major in Urban Studies.

Coursework taken outside of Barnard

Advanced Placement Credit

- Urban Studies does not offer course exemptions for Advanced Placement or other exam scores.

Columbia College Courses

- Courses may be taken at Columbia College or Barnard College to fulfill major requirements.

Transfer Credit

- When students transfer to Barnard from other institutions, their coursework is first evaluated for college elective credit by the Registrar's Office. If approved, departments can consider these courses for credit toward the major or minor.
- There is no fixed maximum number of credits that transfer students may apply to the Urban Studies major, as long as the majority of major requirements are fulfilled at Barnard/Columbia. Students should present course descriptions, syllabi, and proposals to count transfer credits toward major requirements to the Director for approval.

Study Abroad Credit

- Classes taken abroad through Columbia-led programs (i.e., those administered by Columbia's Center for Global Engagement) are treated as Columbia courses, equivalent to those taken on the Morningside Heights campus.
- Classes taken abroad through other institutions or programs are treated as transfer credit and are subject to the same policies as other transfer courses. Accordingly, there will be a limit on the number of study abroad courses that can be counted toward the major or minor.
- To receive credit toward the major or minor for a study abroad course (whether taken through a Columbia program or another institution/program), students must submit a Study Abroad Approval form through Slate and obtain the approval of the Chair or departmental representative.
- Urban Studies majors can generally count two to three courses taken in a recognized abroad program toward major requirements. Students should present course descriptions, syllabi, and proposals to count abroad credits toward major requirements to the Director for approval before going abroad.

Summer Credit

- Summer courses at Barnard are equivalent to those taken during the academic year. Courses that have been approved for the fulfillment of departmental requirements will automatically count toward the major.
- Courses taken at other institutions (including Columbia) are considered transfer credit and are subject to the same policies governing other transfer courses. To receive credit for a summer course taken at another institution, students must submit a Summer

Course form through Slate and have it approved by both the Registrar's Office and the Chair or department representative.

- Urban Studies students should present course descriptions, syllabi, and proposals to count summer credits toward major requirements to the Director for approval, preferably before taking summer courses.

Senior Capstone Project

The Senior Capstone Project

- All Urban Studies majors are required to complete a senior thesis. Most do so within the year-long course URBS UN3992 URBAN STUDIES SENIOR SEMINAR and URBS UN3993 URBAN STUDIES SENIOR SEMINAR.
- Those graduating off-cycle (and other in specific circumstances) may complete the thesis requirement using two advanced seminars, usually in their area of specialization (in place of the Senior Seminar), and submit two expanded essays (20-25 pages) from those courses (in place of the thesis).

Program Director

Aaron Passell (Senior Lecturer, Urban Studies)

Professors

Gergely Baics (History and Urban Studies)

Associate Professors

Amy Chazkel, Hirschhorn Chair in Urban Studies, Columbia University
History Department

Assistant Professors

Amelia Simone Herbert (Education and Urban Studies)
Maricarmen Hernández (Sociology and Urban Studies)
Angela Simms (Sociology and Urban Studies)
Nick R. Smith (Architecture and Urban Studies)

Term Assistant Professors

Noah Allison (Urban Studies)
Adreina Torres Angarita (Urban Studies)

Lecturers

Leah Meisterlin (Urban Geography)
Christian Siener (Urban Geography)

Advisory Committee

Thea Abu El-Haj, Professor, Education Program Director/Chair
Elizabeth S. Blackmar, Professor of History (Columbia)
Merlin Chowkwanyun, Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (Columbia)
Karen Fairbanks, Ann Whitney Olin Professor of Professional Practice in Architecture
Catherine Fennell, Assistant Professor of Anthropology (Columbia)
Ester R. Fuchs, Professor of Public Affairs and Political Science (Columbia)
Kenneth T. Jackson, Professor of History (Columbia)
Brian Larkin, Professor of Anthropology
Eduardo Moncada, Associate Professor of Political Science
Maria Rivera Maulucci, Professor of Education
Jose C. Moya, Professor of History

Randall Reback, Professor of Economics
Samuel K. Roberts, Associate Professor of History and Sociomedical Sciences
Martin Stute, Professor of Environmental Science
David Weiman, Professor of Economics
Weiping Wu, Professor of Urban Planning and Director of Urban Planning Program (Columbia)

Major in Urban Studies

This curriculum is mandatory for majors who will graduate in 2028.
Majors graduating in 2027 may choose either this curriculum or the old curriculum, found here. A minimum of 39 credits is required to complete the Urban Studies major. There are 12 required courses in the Urban Studies major.

Introduction to Urban Studies (1 course)

URBS UN1515 INTRODUCTION TO URBAN STUDIES

Breadth Courses (4 courses)

One urban-focused course in each area; social, spatial, historical, ecological, cultural. Four courses, with one course fulfilling two areas (or five courses otherwise).

Depth Cluster (3 courses)

Three courses in an area that you propose; two must be urban-focused. Proposal for courses in consultation with the major advisor submitted by end of junior year. Depth courses may not double-count with Breadth courses. The Urban Studies Program envisions the development of the Depth Cluster Proposal as a conversation between major and advisor, not as a submission to be approved or denied.

Research Methods (1 course)

One course that explores research practices (example: URBS UN2200 INTRODUCTION TO GIS METHODS; URBS UN3308 INTRO TO URBAN ETHNOGRAPHIES). Taken in Sophomore or Junior year.

Junior Seminar (1 course)

One course to build research skills. Taken in Junior year.

URBS UN3545 JUNIOR SEMINAR IN URBAN STUDIES Multiple sections of this course are taught each semester by various faculty on different topics. For more information, please consult the [program website](#) or the Director.

Senior Seminar (2 courses)

Two semesters to design and execute a research project. Year-long course taken in Senior Year.

URBS UN3992 URBAN STUDIES SENIOR SEMINAR
URBS UN3993 URBAN STUDIES SENIOR SEMINAR

Students who, for some reason, will not be able to complete the Fall-Spring Senior Seminar sequence should consult with the Director about alternatives.

Other Important Information

A list of courses that fulfill the Breadth Courses requirement can be found [here](#).

Appropriate substitutions may be made for courses listed above with the approval of the Program Director.

Minor and Concentration

There is no minor in Urban Studies.

There is no concentration in Urban Studies.

URBS UN1515 INTRODUCTION TO URBAN STUDIES. 3.00 points.

This course is intended to be both an interdisciplinary introduction to the city and to the field of Urban Studies. As an introduction to the city, the course will address a variety of questions: What is a city? How did cities develop? How do cities function socially, politically, and economically? Why do people live in cities? What are some of the major issues facing cities in the early twenty-first century, and how can cities address these issues? As an introduction to the interdisciplinary field of Urban Studies, the course will present models of how scholars approach cities from a variety of disciplinary viewpoints, including architecture, planning, law, sociology, history, archaeology, anthropology, political science, public policy, and geography. Students will learn some of the major concepts in the field of Urban Studies, and will study the works of leading scholars in the field. Students in the course will approach cities from a number of disciplines, not only through the reading, but also through assignments that take place in different locations throughout New York City

Spring 2026: URBS UN1515

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
URBS 1515	001/00420	M W 1:10pm - 2:25pm 152 Horace Mann Hall	Andreina Torres Angarita	3.00	47/60

Fall 2026: URBS UN1515

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
URBS 1515	001/00379	M W 1:10pm - 2:25pm Room TBA	Andreina Torres Angarita	3.00	0/20
URBS 1515	002/00382	T Th 11:40am - 12:55pm Room TBA	Aaron Passell	3.00	0/20

URBS UN2100 DATA, MAPPING, AND SPATIAL ANALYSIS. 3.00 points.

Data, Mapping, and Spatial Analysis is an introductory course for non-majors. Through the semester, the class covers the technologies for mapping, analyzing, and making spatial data as well as their histories; engages qualitative and quantitative data sets within a geographic information system (GIS) framework; discusses situated, context-specific, and community-based methods alongside top-down modes of spatial research; and introduces students to cartographic principles and map design. Students will learn the tools and techniques of digital mapping and GIS through lecture, hands-on exercises, and a small, self-designed final project

Spring 2026: URBS UN2100

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
URBS 2100	001/00954	T 8:40am - 9:55am 323 Milbank Hall	Leah Meisterlin	3.00	27/50

URBS UN2200 INTRODUCTION TO GIS METHODS. 3 points.

Prerequisites: Must attend first class for instructor permission. This course does not fulfill the C requirement for Urban Studies majors. Due to the high demand for our limited-enrollment spatial analysis course (URBS V3200) the Urban Studies program is offering an introductory course to the fundamentals of GIS (Geographic Informational Systems), specifically for non-majors. Students create maps using ArcGIS software, analyze the physical and social processes presented in the digital model, and use the data to solve specific spatial analysis problems. Note: this course does not fulfill the C requirement in Urban Studies.

Spring 2026: URBS UN2200

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
URBS 2200	001/00421	T Th 10:10am - 11:25am 102 Milstein Center	Christian Siener	3	26/24

Fall 2026: URBS UN2200

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
URBS 2200	001/00380	T Th 10:10am - 11:25am 102 Milstein Center	Christian Siener	3	0/25

URBS UN2300 INTRODUCTION TO URBAN GEOGRAPHY. 3.00 points.

Urban Geography is the study of spatial processes, practices, and relationships of cities. In this course, we aim to come to grips with the complex structures that shape urban life and landscapes in an increasingly globalized world. We read and discuss the changing economic, political, cultural, environmental, and material aspects of contemporary cities. We pay close attention to social aspects of power that impact cities such as race, class, and gender. We think about the experiences of diverse groups who inhabit cities. And we evaluate the various methods that geographers use to study cities. The final project is based on the fieldwork that you do in a New York City neighborhood of your choice

URBS UN2520 INTRODUCTION TO URBAN PLANNING. 3.00 points.

This course is a basic introduction to the field and practice of urban planning in the United States. The course will focus on key concepts in planning history, theory, and practice, including the various conflicts and dilemmas planners face, stakeholders involved in urban planning, and the tools and methods that planners use to address challenges in the built environment. The core questions that this class will return to throughout the semester are: How does planning take place, and whose interest(s) does planning serve? How does planning (re)produce social inequities? Planning is often framed as a technical exercise to rationalize the built environment and create more “livable” cities. However, planning is not value-neutral. As we will examine throughout the course of the semester, power relations fundamentally shape the planning profession, and planning decisions have contributed to racial, economic, and gender inequalities and spatial segregation in cities throughout the United States. We will also explore debates about how to encourage more inclusive cities and engage in more ethical planning practice. The course is divided into six sections. In Part I, we will explore foundational concepts in urban planning, such as how previous scholars have defined urban planning and urban space. In Part II, we will explore the historical context in which the planning profession emerged and key moments in planning history. In Part III, we will examine normative models of planning, or how the planning profession conceives of itself. In Part IV, we will learn about the different technical tools that planners use to regulate urban development and key debates surrounding these tools. In Part V, we will interrogate the role of the planner, the role of power relations in planning, and how planning decisions have resulted in racial, class, and gender exclusion in the built environment. In Part VI, we will contemplate future directions in planning

Spring 2026: URBS UN2520

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
URBS 2520	001/00422	M W 2:40pm - 3:55pm 302 Milbank Hall	Noah Allison	3.00	27/33

URBS UN3252 URBAN LATIN/X AMERICA: ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACHES. 4.00 points.

This seminar examines the social, economic, and political landscapes of Latin American cities through ethnographic literature. It explores key themes such as migration, urban poverty, marginality, violence, informality, urban segregation, grassroots movements, urban citizenship and neoliberal urban governance. Students will read both classic and contemporary ethnographies to gain an in-depth understanding of how cities are lived and experienced. The course also unsettles the category of Latin America, to introduce a discussion of the “Latinization” of U.S. cities. We will interrogate ethnographic and audiovisual materials (included to complement the readings) from a postcolonial perspective. We will discuss the politics of knowledge production and representation in ethnographic studies and popular culture, the impact of colonialism in transnational flows of knowledge and labor, as well as the contributions to urban theory from the perspective of cities located in the Global South

Spring 2026: URBS UN3252

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
URBS 3252	001/00423	M 4:10pm - 6:00pm 306 Milbank Hall	Andreina Torres Angarita	4.00	11/15

URBS UN3308 INTRO TO URBAN ETHNOGRAPHIES. 3.00 points.

What is ethnography and what makes ethnography “urban”? This course explores how social scientists use ethnography to analyze questions and dilemmas often associated with urban settings. We will combine close readings of ethnographies with field-based inquiry, including our own studies of urban public space. Through both our readings and our field exercises, we will focus on the methods at the heart of ethnography: observation and participant-observation. As we read other scholars’ work, we will ask how the author uses ethnographic tools to explore issues that are suitable for intensive fieldwork. We will assess which kinds of research problems and theoretical perspectives are a good fit with ethnography and the roles that ethnography can play in transdisciplinary research projects. You will apply what you have learned about research to design your own pilot fieldwork. The ethnographies that we read together will examine intersections of housing, race, and class in urban communities. You are welcome to extend this focus to your own fieldwork, but it’s not required to do so. This is a writing-intensive course, and we will devote a considerable portion of class time to workshop your individual projects

Fall 2026: URBS UN3308

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
URBS 3308	001/00384	M 4:10pm - 6:00pm Room TBA		3.00	0/20

URBS UN3310 RACE. SPACE, URB SCHOOLS. 3.00 points.

Many people don’t think of themselves as having attended segregated schools. And yet, most of us went to schools attended primarily by people who looked very much like us. In fact, schools have become more segregated over the past 30 years, even as the country becomes increasingly multiracial. In this class, we will use public schools as an example to examine the role race plays in shaping urban spaces and institutions. We will begin by unpacking the concept of racialization, or the process by which a person, place, phenomenon, or characteristic becomes associated with a certain race. Then, we will explore the following questions: What are the connections between city schools and their local contexts? What does it mean to be a “neighborhood school”? How do changes in neighborhoods change schools? We will use ethnographies, narrative non-fiction, and educational research to explore these questions from a variety of perspectives. You will apply what you have learned to your own experiences and to current debates over urban policies and public schools. This course will extend your understanding of key anthropological and sociological perspectives on urban inequality in the United States, as well as introduce you to critical theory

Spring 2026: URBS UN3310

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
URBS 3310	003/00793	W 2:10pm - 4:00pm LI001 Milstein Center	Amelia Herbert	3.00	40/40

Fall 2026: URBS UN3310

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
URBS 3310	002/00922	Th 4:10pm - 6:00pm Room TBA	0. FACULTY	3.00	0/20

URBS UN3315 METROPOLITICS OF RACE # PLACE. 3.00 points.

This class explores how racism and racialized capitalism and politics shape the distribution of material resources among cities and suburbs in metropolitan areas and the racial and ethnic groups residing in them. Readings and discussion focus on the history of metropolitan area expansion and economic development, as well as contemporary social processes shaping racial and ethnic groups' access to high-quality public goods and private amenities. We address racial and ethnic groups' evolving political agendas in today's increasingly market-driven socio-political context, noting the roles of residents; federal, state, and local governments; market institutions and actors; urban planners, activist organizations, foundations, and social scientists, among others. Here is a sample of specific topics: race/ethnicity and who "belongs" in what "place;" inequitable government and market investment across racial and ethnic communities over time and "sedimentation effects" (for example, the "redlining" of Black communities leading to their inability to access loan and credit markets and the resulting wealth gap between Blacks and Whites); gentrification processes; creating sufficient, sustainable tax bases; and suburban sprawl. Assignments will include two short response papers, mid-term and final exams, and another project to be determined

Spring 2026: URBS UN3315

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
URBS 3315	001/00425	T Th 2:40pm - 3:55pm 302 Barnard Hall	Angela Simms	3.00	34/45

URBS UN3351 URBAN ELSEWHERE: EXPLORING A WORLD OF CITIES. 4.00 points.

We live in an increasingly urbanized world. But what does it mean to be "urban"? As urbanization reaches more corners of the globe, its forms and processes become increasingly diverse. Urban Elsewhere is dedicated to investigating this diversity and to exploring the implications that unfamiliar urban phenomena might have for how we understand urbanization—both elsewhere in the world and in our own backyards. Through a comparative engagement with case studies drawn from around the world, this course will challenge some of our most deeply held, common sense assumptions about urbanization. Students will be asked to stretch the conceptual limits of urbanization and explore the social and political possibilities of an expanded urbanism. In doing so, the course will engage with the many of the most heated theoretical debates about urbanization, equipping students with a set of comparative analytical tools with which to explore the wider field of urban studies

Spring 2026: URBS UN3351

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
URBS 3351	001/00426	F 11:10am - 12:25pm LJ002 Milstein Center	Nick Smith	4.00	56/60
URBS 3351	001/00426	F 1:10pm - 2:25pm LJ002 Milstein Center	Nick Smith	4.00	56/60

URBS UN3420 INTRODUCTION URBAN SOCIOLOGY. 3.00 points.

Prerequisites: Students must attend first class.

Prerequisites: Students must attend first class. Examines the diverse ways in which sociology has defined and studied cities, focusing on the people who live and work in the city, and the transformations U.S. cities are undergoing today. Sociological methods, including ethnography, survey research, quantitative studies, and participant observation will provide perspectives on key urban questions such as street life, race, immigration, globalization, conflict, and redevelopment

Spring 2026: URBS UN3420

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
URBS 3420	001/00430	M W 2:40pm - 3:55pm 324 Milbank Hall	Aaron Passell	3.00	14/30

URBS UN3450 NEIGHBORHOOD # COMMUNITY DVLP. 3.00 points.

New York City is made up of more than 400 neighborhoods. The concept of neighborhoods in cities has had many meanings and understandings over time. Equally complex is the concept of community used to describe the people attached to or defined by neighborhood. While neighborhood can be interpreted as a spatial, social, political, racial, ethnic, or even, economic unit; community often refers to the group of stakeholders (i.e. residents, workers, investors) whose interests directly align with the conditions of their environment. Community development is "a process where these community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems" that result from the changing contexts in their neighborhoods. Using a variety of theories and approaches, residents organize themselves or work with community development practitioners on the ground to obtain safe, affordable housing, improve the public realm, build wealth, get heard politically, develop human capital, and connect to metropolitan labor and housing markets. To address the ever-changing contexts of neighborhoods, community development organizations are taking on new roles and adapting (in various cases) to larger forces within the city, region and nation such as disinvestment, reinvestment, increased cultural diversity, an uncertain macroeconomic environment, and changes in federal policy. For more than a century, city-dwellers—and especially New Yorkers—have been tackling these challenges. This course will examine both historic and contemporary community building and development efforts, paying special attention to approaches which were shaped by New York City. This urban center, often described as a "city of neighborhoods," has long been a seedbed for community-based problem-solving inventions. The course will focus on the theories (why?), tools (how?), and actors (who?) within the field of community development practice and is organized around important sectors (housing, econom

Fall 2026: URBS UN3450

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
URBS 3450	001/00385	M W 2:40pm - 3:55pm Room TBA	Mary Rocco	3.00	0/20

URBS UN3451 URBAN ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: GENDER, RACE, CLASS AND THE ENVIRONMENT. 3.00 points.

In this course we will explore urban environmental inequalities through the lens of environmental justice. The concept of environmental justice has risen in prominence in the language of environmental activism, politics, and policymaking. Informed by critical studies of the environment, we will address the broad question of why, for some, the environment is representational of a healthy lifestyle and source of prosperity, while for others it is a source of risk and harm. Our course of study invites students to critically analyze environmental justice case studies and to develop an understanding of the complex relationships among urban populations and the social, political, and economic processes that lead to environmental inequality. We will also explore how racism is foundational to environmental exploitation and consider why global struggles for racial justice are crucial for protecting both people and the earth. We will pay particular attention to how environmental health inequalities are linked to race, class, gender, and nation. Drawing from academic texts, films, and photo essays we will explore how urban planning and economic development policies create environmental inequalities in the US and globally

Spring 2026: URBS UN3451

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
URBS 3451	001/00438	T Th 5:40pm - 6:55pm 325 Milbank Hall	Maricarmen Hernandez	3.00	12/30

URBS UN3452 HOUSING POLICY IN THE UNITED STATES. 4.00 points.

How should we define housing? As a concept, housing is both simple and complex. As a physical concept, housing provides shelter, and it is durable and visible. Yet, housing is more than just its physical components. As a social concept, housing is a clear insignia of social status and can be an investment vehicle to accumulate and hoard wealth. Additionally, housing (and housing policy) both amplifies and reinforces larger patterns of racial and economic bias witnessed in wider society. This course examines the institutional, economic, regulatory, and political factors that affect the production, subsidization, and siting of housing in the United States. We will trace the varied policy approaches that local, state, and federal governments have leveraged to deliver affordable housing over time. Throughout the course, we will pay particular attention to how U.S. housing policy historically is built on a segregationist ideology, often linking the presence of non-white and low-income households with neighborhood instability and as a threat to stable property values. We will also explore the various approaches that the public sector has pursued to attempt to undo the racially segregated housing market of its own making. The course is divided into three sections. Part I reviews how previous scholars have defined housing, provides a brief introduction to housing policy history, and introduces the basics of supply and demand in housing markets and housing finance. Part II examines various approaches to provide affordable housing at the federal, state, and local level and how these approaches have evolved over time. Part III examines contemporary housing policy debates. Since this class is an upper-level seminar, students should expect to read about 150 pages of reading per week and to listen to a podcast or watch a select movie on specific weeks. Students will be expected to complete all of the assigned readings before class. Class time primarily will be devoted to class discussions, so students should plan to formulate thoughts about the readings before class and to participate actively in class discussions each week

URBS UN3480 From Homelessness to Foreclosure: NYC Geographies of Shelter and Home. 4 points.

This course will examine the social, political, and economic elements that have aligned in New York City to produce the most expansive infrastructure of homeless shelters in the United States, as well as ongoing changes in the city's homeless policy since the housing foreclosure crisis. While we will focus primarily on the past 30 to 40 years in New York City, we will consider the history of homelessness and housing in the United States since the Great Depression. Major themes will include criminalization, origin myths, and representations of people who are experiencing homelessness. Key questions will include: In what ways is the current geography of homelessness the result of historical patterns of racism and discrimination? How does studying homelessness provide insight into the ways urban spaces are made? Why have shelters become the primary public response to homelessness in New York? How are race and gender central to the project of building a shelter infrastructure in New York? How are shelters experienced by those living in them? What are some of the ways people living in shelters organize to advocate for their rights and to resist mainstream representations?

URBS UN3545 JUNIOR SEMINAR IN URBAN STUDIES. 4.00 points.

Prerequisites: Non-majors admitted by permission of instructor. Students must attend first class. Enrollment limited to 16 students per section. General Education Requirement: Historical Studies.

Prerequisites: Non-majors admitted by permission of instructor. Students must attend first class. Enrollment limited to 16 students per section. Introduction to the historical process and social consequences of urban growth, from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present

Fall 2026: URBS UN3545

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
URBS 3545	001/00386	Th 2:10pm - 4:00pm Room TBA	Nick Smith	4.00	0/12
URBS 3545	002/00387	T 4:00pm - 6:00pm Room TBA	Mary Rocco	4.00	0/12

URBS UN3800 ADVANCED GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS. 3.00 points.

Prerequisite: Successful completion of URBS UN2200 Introduction to GIS Methods, or equivalent with instructor permission. With the veritable explosion of urban data alongside the continued proliferation of new tools for its consideration, this course allows students to develop specialized approaches to spatial analysis while introducing a series of common advanced techniques and nuanced methodological questions. Aimed at covering a variety of topics with immediate relevance to urbanism in practice and in research, the course operates with a two-fold mission: (1) to critically discuss the theories, concepts, and research methods involved in spatial analysis and (2) to learn the techniques necessary for engaging those theories and deploying those methods. The class will work to meet this mission with a dedicated focus on the urban environment and the spatial particularities and relationships that arise from the urban context. Among others, this course takes as a foundational premise that spatial analysis within geographic information systems is an incredibly powerful and double-edged weapon: it provides both the methods for answering complex spatial questions and the means for effectively communicating the results. Like any other weapon it can serve many ends, and as such an advanced course in spatial analysis must frame its use within the developing discourse on professional practice and responsibility. The course is designed with a combination format. Early weeks are predominantly lecture-style presentations supplemented with discussion and technical demonstration and exercises. Students are expected to complete these exercises outside of class (as homework), bringing their questions to our discussion. The latter half of the course is a project-based seminar. Seminar-style presentation and discussion will rely heavily on student participation and preparation to consider the variety of spatial methods available and their implications on urban research and intervention. Woven throughout the semester is the development of a self-driven research project, through which students will engage and compare the methodological advantages and disadvantages of several assumptions, approaches, analyses, and datasets

URBS UN3992 URBAN STUDIES SENIOR SEMINAR. 4.00 points.
(year-long course, 4 points per term)

Prerequisites: Senior standing. Admission by application only (available at <http://urban.barnard.edu/forms-and-resources>). Year-long course; participation is for two consecutive terms. No new students admitted for spring.

Prerequisites: Senior standing. Year-long course; participation is for two consecutive terms. No new students admitted for spring. Emphasizes the study of the built environment of cities and suburbs, and the related debates. Readings, class presentations, and written work culminate in major individual projects, under the supervision of faculty trained in architecture, urban design, or urban planning

Fall 2026: URBS UN3992

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
URBS 3992	001/00388	W 9:00am - 10:50am Room TBA	0. FACULTY	4.00	0/10
URBS 3992	002/00389	W 9:00am - 10:50am Room TBA	Christian Siener	4.00	0/10
URBS 3992	003/00390	W 9:00am - 10:50am Room TBA	Andreina Torres Angarita	4.00	0/10

URBS GU4000 ADVANCED GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS. 3.00 points.

Prerequisite: Successful completion of URBS UN2200 Introduction to GIS Methods, or equivalent with instructor permission. With the veritable explosion of urban data alongside the continued proliferation of new tools for its consideration, this course allows students to develop specialized approaches to spatial analysis while introducing a series of common advanced techniques and nuanced methodological questions. Aimed at covering a variety of topics with immediate relevance to urbanism in practice and in research, the course operates with a two-fold mission: (1) to critically discuss the theories, concepts, and research methods involved in spatial analysis and (2) to learn the techniques necessary for engaging those theories and deploying those methods. The class will work to meet this mission with a dedicated focus on the urban environment and the spatial particularities and relationships that arise from the urban context. Among others, this course takes as a foundational premise that spatial analysis within geographic information systems is an incredibly powerful and double-edged weapon: it provides both the methods for answering complex spatial questions and the means for effectively communicating the results. Like any other weapon it can serve many ends, and as such an advanced course in spatial analysis must frame its use within the developing discourse on professional practice and responsibility. The course is designed with a combination format. Early weeks are predominantly lecture-style presentations supplemented with discussion and technical demonstration and exercises. Students are expected to complete these exercises outside of class (as homework), bringing their questions to our discussion. The latter half of the course is a project-based seminar. Seminar-style presentation and discussion will rely heavily on student participation and preparation to consider the variety of spatial methods available and their implications on urban research and intervention. Woven throughout the semester is the development of a self-driven research project, through which students will engage and compare the methodological advantages and disadvantages of several assumptions, approaches, analyses, and datasets

Spring 2026: URBS GU4000

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
URBS 4000	001/00677	M 10:10am - 12:00pm 912 Milstein Center	Leah Meisterlin	3.00	14/16

Fall 2026: URBS GU4000

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
URBS 4000	001/00391	M 2:10pm - 4:00pm Room TBA	Leah Meisterlin	3.00	0/12

URBS GU4100 URBAN REVOLUTION: THE CITY IN POLITICS. 4.00 points.

Contemporary politics are fundamentally urban. The concentration of people, experiences, and resources in space creates a potentially explosive friction between competing aims and interests. At times, these tensions are expressed through consensual deliberation, at others through radical confrontation. As the conventional politics of representative democracy encounter new crises of legitimacy worldwide, the embodied politics of the city become even more important. This course explores the crucial role that cities play in challenging the uneven distribution of power and making claims on the redistribution of resources. The course is organized into three units: spaces, practices, and institutions. Using urban theory and historical examples, each week critically examines a distinct way in which the city matters to politics. Each unit ends by asking students to deploy this material in analyzing a contemporary case study. At the end of the semester, students synthesize what they have learned into a manifesto that outlines a sustainable, responsible, and realistic program of urban social change

Cross-listed Courses**ARCH UN3502 URBANIZING CHINA. 4 points.**

This course investigates the dramatic urban transformation that has taken place in mainland China over the last four decades. The speed and scale of this transformation have produced emergent new lifeways, settlement patterns, and land uses that increasingly blur the distinction between urban and rural areas. At the same time, Chinese society is still characterized by rigid, administrative divisions between the nation's urban and rural sectors, with profound consequences for people's lives and livelihoods. The course therefore examines the intersection between the rapid transformation of China's built environment and the glacial transformation of its administrative categories. We will take an interdisciplinary approach to this investigation, using perspectives from architecture, history, geography, political science, anthropology, urban planning, and cultural studies, among other disciplines.

The course is divided into two parts: Over the first five weeks, we will consider the historical context of China's urbanization and its urban-rural relations, including the imperial, colonial, and socialist periods, as well as the current period of reform. In the remainder of the semester, we will turn our focus to contemporary processes of urbanization, with a particular emphasis on the complex interrelationship between urban and rural China. This portion of the semester is organized into three two-week units on land and planning, housing and demolition, and citizenship and personhood.

ARCH GU4300 The Just City: Global Debates in Urban Planning and Policy. 4.00 points.

Urbanization is inherently unequal, inscribing social, economic, environmental, and political unevenness into the spatial fabric of the city. But the distribution of such inequality is not inevitable. Urbanization is a product of the collective decisions we make (or choose not to make) in response to the shared challenges we face in our cities. And, thus, the patterns of urbanization can be changed. This is the task of urban planning and the starting point for this advanced seminar, which asks how we can reshape our cities to be more just—to alleviate inequality rather than compound it. In embarking on this effort, we face numerous “wicked” problems without clear-cut solutions. The approaches one takes in addressing urban inequality are therefore fundamentally normative—they are shaped by one's place in the world and one's view of it. The central challenge in addressing inequality is thus establishing a basis for collective action amongst diverse actors with differing—and sometimes conflicting—values and views. In other words, planning the just city a matter of both empathy and debate. In this course, we will endeavor to develop informed positions that can help us engage with others as a basis for taking collective action. The course is organized into four 3-week modules, each of which addresses a dimension of the just city: equity, democracy, diversity, and sustainability. In the first week of each module, we will discuss how the issue has been understood in history and theory (with an emphasis on tradeoffs between different priorities and values); in the second week, we will apply this discussion to a global case study prepared and presented by a team of students; and in the third week, we will hold an in-class debate to determine what should be done.

Specific case studies vary each year

Spring 2026: ARCH GU4300

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
ARCH 4300	001/00641	Th 2:10pm - 4:00pm 502 Diana Center	Nick Smith	4.00	9/16

HIST UN1786 History of the City in Latin America. 4.00 points.

This course covers the historical development of cities in Latin America. Readings, lectures, and discussion sections will examine the concentration of people in commercial and political centers from the beginnings of European colonization in the fifteenth century to the present day and will introduce contrasting approaches to the study of urban culture, politics, society, and the built environment. Central themes include the reciprocal relationships between growing urban areas and the countryside; changing power dynamics in modern Latin America, especially as they impacted the lives of cities' nonelite majority populations; the legalities and politics of urban space; planned versus unplanned cities and the rise of informal economies; the way changing legal and political rights regimes have affected urban life; and the constant tension between tradition and progress through which urban society was formed. There are no prerequisites for this course.

Attendance at weekly Discussion Sections required

Fall 2026: HIST UN1786

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
HIST 1786	001/11380	M W 10:10am - 11:25am Room TBA	Amy Chazkel	4.00	0/60

HIST UN2689 COLONIAL CITIES OF THE AMERICAS. 4.00 points.

This course examines the history of cities in the Americas in the colonial era, c. 1500-1800, organized around three large themes. First, we study the precolonial origins of American urban systems, focusing especially on Mesoamerica and the Andes, and exploring questions of urban continuity, disruption and change, and the forms of indigenous cities. Second, we study various patterns of city foundations and city types across the Americas, examining Spanish, Portuguese, British, Dutch and French colonial urban systems. Third, we focus on the cities more closely by looking at key issues such as urban form, built environment, social structure. Specific themes include a critical analysis of the Spanish colonial grid, the baroque city, and 18th-century urban reforms, as well as race and class, urban slavery, and urban disease environments.

HIST UN3277 History of Urban Crime and Policing in Latin America in Global Perspective. 4 points.

This seminar will examine the social construction of criminality and the institutions that developed to impose and enforce the criminal law as reflections of Latin American society throughout the region's history, with a particular emphasis on the rise of police forces as the principal means of day-to-day urban governance. Topics include policing and urban slavery; policing the urban "underworld"; the changing cultural importance of police in urban popular culture; the growth of scientific policing methods, along with modern criminology and eugenics; policing and the enforcement of gender norms in urban public spaces; the role of urban policing in the rise of military governments in the twentieth century; organized crime; transitional justice and the contemporary question of the rule of law; and the transnational movement of ideas about and innovations in policing practice. In our readings and class discussions over the course of the semester, we will trace how professionalized, modern police forces took shape in cities across the region over time. This course actually begins, however, in the colonial period before there was anything that we would recognize as a modern, uniformed, state-run police force. We will thus have a broad perspective from which to analyze critically the role of police in the development of Latin American urban societies—in other words, to see the police in the contemporary era as contingent on complex historical processes, which we will seek to understand.

Fall 2026: HIST UN3277

Course Number	Section/Call Number	Times/Location	Instructor	Points	Enrollment
HIST 3277	001/11066	M 4:10pm - 6:00pm Room TBA	Amy Chazkel	4	0/13

HIST GU4012 HISTORY OF THE CITY IN LATIN AMERICA. 4.00 points.

This course covers the historical development of cities in Latin America. Readings examine the concentration of people in commercial and political centers from the beginnings of European colonization in the sixteenth century to the present day and will introduce contrasting approaches to the study of urban culture, politics, society, and the built environment. Central themes include the reciprocal relationships between growing urban areas and the countryside; cities as sites of imperial power and their post-colonial role in nation-building; changing power dynamics in modern Latin America, especially as they impacted the lives of cities' nonelite majority populations; the legalities and politics of urban space; the complexity and historical development of urban segregation; the rise of informal economies; and the constant tension between tradition and progress through which urban societies have formed. Reading knowledge of Spanish and/or Portuguese will be helpful but is not required. Open to both undergraduate and graduate students; graduate students will be given additional reading and writing assignments