THE INTERDISCIPLINARY CITY

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Course Description

Rapid urbanization means that cities are where the grand societal challenges of the 21st century, from economic inequality and digital disruptions to climate change and global pandemics, will be most acutely felt, but also where innovation and adaptability will emerge and take hold. Urban society requires novel, interdisciplinary solutions. Interdisciplinarity, however, is easier said than done. Academic disciplines speak different languages while at the same time, academic knowledge often struggles to gain relevance and applicability in the *real world*. Words and concepts have different meanings in different settings.

The purpose of this course is to understand and build bridges across the academic and professional silos that shape the production and dissemination of urban knowledge. Drawing from the expertise of the Urban Studies Institute faculty, students will be trained as 'boundary agents' and gain competencies to speak different urban languages to a diverse set of academic and practitioner audiences. Each week, students will examine a particular urban lens, or compare and contrast across multiple disciplinary perspectives, through a combination of assigned readings, discussions with external speakers, and field-based research. They will assess and apply multiple disciplinary perspectives, including their own background and training, to a key theme selected. For example, equitable urban development; sustainable urbanization; sharing the city at night; building just cities; fostering regional mobility; towards the carbon-neutral city; and creating resilient communities.

The course will be interspersed with skills training sessions that will enable students to synthesize diverse bodies of knowledge and communicate through a variety of academic and professional formats.

Learning Outcomes and Goals

The course will provide students with the knowledge and skills to become interdisciplinary urbanists capable of understanding and speaking across the academic and professional bodies of knowledge that shape the growth, governance, and sustainability of cities. By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Define how different academic and professional disciplines conceptualize the city and draw connections between these fields of study and how they relate to the work of urban practitioners.
2. Identify and evaluate the methods and communities of practice needed to generate inclusive urban knowledge.
3. Compare and contrast forms of urban knowledge, using critical-thinking and effective problem-solving to relate them to key challenges facing contemporary cities.
3. Synthesize and communicate interdisciplinary perspectives to a range of audiences through written, visual, and oral presentations.

Required Reading: Core Text

Iossifova, D., Doll., and Gasparatos, A. (eds.) (2018). *Defining the urban: Interdisciplinary and professional perspectives*. New York: Routledge

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EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

Course Requirements

Participation and Discussion	.... 10%
Interviews and Reflective Essay	.... 30%
Multimedia Presentation	.... 40%
Policy Report	.... 20%

Class Structure and Participation

Class structure is organized as a three-hour block week. While there will be some variation and flexibility, classes with roughly be organized as follows: the first hour will feature short disciplinary introductions by guest speakers, which will provide insights into the urban basis, views, and methods used. Students will then have the opportunity for Q&A/discussion. The second half of the class will be devoted to either: (1) small group exercises, facilitated by course instructors, examining how the week's urban perspectives relate to the students own backgrounds and connection to the module theme; (2) external speakers discussing the role of urban knowledge and interdisciplinary skills in professional practice; or (3) skills workshops that build students' intercommunication capabilities and provide the skills needed to successfully complete course requirements. Students are expected to contribute to in-class discussions—complete assigned readings and come to class prepared to discuss them. Students are also expected to actively and professionally engage external speakers.

Interviews and Reflective Essay

Working in groups of two or three, students will identify and interview three academic and three professional urbanists. Through the interviews, students will focus on the module's theme to build an understanding of: (1) how the interviewee's discipline engages the city; (2) the methods used; and (3) their experience and understanding of working in interdisciplinary contexts. Students will individually write a 10-page report (double-spaced) drawing from the interviews and in-class readings that compares and contrasts how the disciplinary perspectives contribute to an understanding of the module's theme. The paper will examine how to synthesize these differing urban knowledges and reflect on their objectives and applicability to the module's theme.

Multimedia Presentation

Working groups of two or three students will produce a 20-minute podcast or video-blog on the module's theme that builds on the course's skills training session, including a presentation of research findings and recommendations for policy interventions.

Policy Brief

Working groups will produce a one-page policy brief based on their Working Paper or Multimedia Presentation for a key urban stakeholder, including select departments from the City of Atlanta, the Atlanta Regional Commission, the State Department of Transportation, and the Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Grades will be awarded based on the following assessment criteria:

A+	**97+***	**Exceptional:** Remarkable knowledge of concepts and/or techniques and exceptional skill or great originality in the use of these in satisfying the requirements of an assignment.
A	**90–96**	**Excellent:** Thorough knowledge of concepts and/or techniques with a high degree of skill and/or some elements of originality in satisfying the requirements of an assignment.
B+	**87–89**	**Very Good:** Thorough knowledge of concepts and/or techniques with a fairly high degree of skill in the use of them in satisfying the requirements of an assignment.
B	**80–86**	**Good:** Solid level of knowledge of concepts and/or techniques together with substantial skill in using them to satisfy the requirements of an assignment.
C+	**77–79**	**Competent:** Reasonable level of knowledge of concepts and/or techniques together with sufficient skill in using them to satisfy the requirements of an assignment.
C	**70–76**	**Adequate:** Acceptable level of knowledge of concepts and/or techniques together with some skill in using them to satisfy the requirements of an assignment.
D	**60–69**	**Passing:** Slightly better than minimal knowledge of required concepts and/or techniques together with limited ability to use them in satisfying the requirements of an assignment.
F	**0–59**	**Failing:** Minimum knowledge to lack of understanding of concepts and/or techniques needed to satisfy the requirements of an assignment.

*N.B. A+ grades are given rarely and only for exceptional pieces of work.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

Week 1: **Introduction**
Defining the City, Chapter 1
Skills 1: Systematic Reviews Workshop

PART I: ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVES

Week 2: **Sociology and Economics**
Defining the City, Chapters 2 and 6
GSU guests: Deirdre Oakley and Spencer Banzhaf

Week 3: **Geography and History**
Defining the City, Chapters 3 and 5
GSU guests: Jean-Paul Addie and Marni Davis

Week 4: **Environmental Sciences**
Defining the City, Chapters 7 and 8
External Speaker: Environmental NGO

PART II: PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Week 5: **Public Policy**
Defining the City, Chapter 9
Skills 2: Writing for Policy Workshop
External Speaker: Atlanta Regional Commission

Week 6: **Planning and Real Estate**
Defining the City, Chapter 12
GSU guests: Dan Immergluck and Vincent Yao

Week 7: **Architecture, Urban Design and Engineering**
Defining the City, Chapters 10 and 11
External Speaker: from Georgia Tech

Week 8: **Field Trip with Sam Wallace: CEOs and the City**

Week 9: **Mid-Semester Break**

Week 10: **Social Work and Public Health**
Defining the City, Chapter 14 and 15
GSU guests: Brian Bride and John Steward

Week 11: **Law**
Defining the City, Chapter 16
GSU guests: John Marshall and Karen Johnston

PART III: APPLICATIONS

Week 12: **Visualization and Geospatial Techniques**
Defining the City, Chapter 17
Skills 3: Multimedia Presentations Workshop

Week 13: **Political Ecology and Advocacy**
Defining the City, Chapters 18
External Speaker: Community Advocacy or Environmental Justice Organization

Week 14: **Sustainability and Resilience Science**
Defining the City, Chapters 20 and 21
GSU guest: David Iwaniec
External Speaker: City of Atlanta Resilience Office

Week 15: **Arts and Humanities**
Defining the City, Chapters 22
Skills 4: Co-production Workshop

Week 16: **Student Presentations and Wrap Up**
Defining the City, Chapters 23