URB 8010: URBAN THEORY AND PRAXIS

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COURSE DESCRIPTION
The purpose of this course is to understand the conceptual dilemmas presented when analyzing ‘the urban’, and to explore insights (and blind spots) offered by a variety of contemporary urban theoretical perspectives. Each week, students will examine the conceptual foundations and political implications of key urban theories by reading – and critically assessing – major urban writings by geographers, political scientists, sociologists, and engineers. We will then put theory into practice by applying the analytical tools they offer to explore a pressing challenge facing contemporary cities; from urban politics, democracy, and regional governance, to infrastructure provision, global suburbanization, and climate change. As urban academics have no a priori claims to urban knowledge and expertise, students will be encouraged to reflect on their own urban experiences – in Atlanta and elsewhere – to hold urban theories to account and drive in-class discussions. Through the course, students will gain a strong grounding in debates over how we understand and research the city, and will develop the critical thinking skills necessary to creatively assess and interpret processes of urbanization and the experience of global urbanism as a way of life.

LEARNING OUTCOMES
The course will train students to understand the importance of urban theory to the analysis of contemporary urban issues by exploring the philosophical foundations and mobilization of urban knowledge. By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1) Understand the conceptual dilemmas that come with attempts to define ‘the urban’.
2) Articulate what urban theory is, and identify the various epistemological and ontological perspectives that inform urban theorizing.
3) Compare and contrast multiple conceptual vantage points and develop insights on current debates in urban studies.
4) Evaluate differing urban theories’ capacity to inform our understanding of the key challenges facing contemporary cities and urban societies.
5) Put theory to work when addressing key urban challenges, issues, and opportunities

CLASS MEETINGS
Tuesdays, 4:30pm-7:00pm | Sparks Hall 309

REQUIRED READINGS
All readings listed in the syllabus are required.

***This syllabus provides a general plan for the course and deviations may be necessary***
EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

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<td>Participation and Discussion Questions</td>
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<td>Reaction Papers (x4)</td>
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<td>Encyclopedia Entry</td>
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<td>Major Paper (90%) and Paper Proposal (10%)</td>
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PARTICIPATION AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The course revolves around detailed discussions of themes raised in the assigned readings. Attendance is required to pass the course and students are expected to participate during class. Each week you must post onto iCollege 3 questions you have on the material, prior to 12pm on the day of the seminar class. Your questions will be used to inform in-class discussions, structure debate, and address issues of definitional clarity, conceptual utility, comparative application, and so on.

REACTION PAPERS

Following the introductory class, the course is structured into 4 parts. Students will write one reaction paper for each of Part. The reaction papers are short written responses to the readings. The paper should not exceed one-side, single space. It should be typed and include in-text citations and a bibliography (not included in the page count). It should not be a summary of the articles; rather you should attempt to provide either a critical response to them, or a comparison of their differing perspectives. The purpose of these reaction papers is to:

- Highlight the importance of completing the reading assignments.
- Encourage critical reflection of the course materials.
- Provide the opportunity to develop or reflect on the points you (wish to) contribute to the group discussion.
- Develop your ability to articulate your arguments in writing.

The reaction papers must be submitted via iCollege by midnight Friday on the last week of each Part. Late submissions will be accepted with a 10% deduction per day. Details on the process and expectations of the reaction papers will be provided during the introductory session.

ENCYCLOPEDIA ENTRY

Students will write an encyclopedia entry-style entry paper covering a major concept or theory in urban studies. Your entry should provide an inclusive and balanced account of its subject and acknowledge its historical and intellectual content. You should demonstrate an awareness of related topics, prominent debates, and differing disciplinary approaches to the same subject area. This involves drawing from papers covered in class and further reading beyond those listed in the syllabus.

Your encyclopedia entries should be 8 pages in length, excluding references (double-spaced, 12 pt. Times New Roman, 1” margins, no title page, and with full bibliographic information). They should also include a 50-word abstract at the beginning of your entry. Encyclopedia entries are due by midnight on October 15.

The goal of the assignment is to create an accessible assessment of a key topic while capturing the scholarly issues and theoretical debates shaping the field. You may select one of the subject areas below or write an entry on a topic of your choosing, pending approval from the course instructor:

- Right to the City
- New Urban Agenda
- Neighborhood Effects
- City-Region
- Transit-Oriented Development...
- Gentrification
- Planetary Urbanization
- Financialization
- Smart Cities
- Growth Machine
- Assemblage
- Residential Segregation
- New Urbanism
- Global City
- Southern Urbanism
- Suburbs
- Anthropocene
Your entry should be designed around a pyramid structure in which an overview of the subject is followed by greater detail. Begin the entry with a clear definition of the concept or introduction to the topic. The reader should be able to assess the significance and importance of the entry within the first two sentences. Avoid describing the field in a biased way or giving your own research hypotheses or epistemologies a strong preference over rival points of view. Also avoid including lengthy quotations, as they do not fit the format of an encyclopedia entry.

While not all of the following need necessarily to be covered, your entry could include:

- The topic’s intellectual and social context
- Major dimensions of the topic
- Changes over time in the topic and its treatment
- Current emphases in work on the topic in research and theory
- Future directions in research, theory, and methodology

Do not conclude your encyclopedia article with a summary of the material that you have covered in your entry. Encyclopedia entries do not require formal conclusions. Any work mentioned in the text must appear in the References section at the end of your paper. Your bibliography should include at least 10 entries.

*Guidelines for this assignment are based the entry specifications for the American Association of Geographers’ International Encyclopedia of Geography.

**MAJOR PAPER (AND PROPOSAL)**

Students will write a major term paper, approximately 12 pages in length excluding references (double-spaced, 12 pt. Times New Roman, 1” margins, no title page, and with full bibliographic information) on a topic of interest to them. The paper may either focus on a particular urban theory, or address a key urban issue or challenge, but it must directly explore the themes and concepts raised during the class. Papers are expected to substantively engage with key conceptual and theoretical questions. Students are expected to conduct supplementary individual reading to develop and substantiate their ideas. Any work mentioned in the text must appear in the reference list at the end of the paper. Your bibliography should include at least 10 entries.

You may also choose to address one of the following prompts:

- Atlanta is a post-colonial city. Discuss.
- Can we plan for diversity?
- The global extension of urbanization negates the utility of ‘the city’ as an object of analysis. Discuss.
- What are the implications of Uber, Airbnb, and other digital disruptions for the right to the city?

A one-page proposal for the term paper (worth 10% of the assignment grade) is due by midnight on October 22. Final papers are due by midnight on December 10.

Grades will be awarded based on the following assessment criteria:

- **A+ 97** Exceptional: Exceptional grasp of the subject area. Demonstrates expert-level review/innovative synthesis and great originality in discussion and analysis that clearly exceed the requirements of the assignment.
- **A 93-96** Excellent: Impressive grasp of the subject area with excellent critical use of relevant literatures. Develops a substantive argument with significant analysis and elements of originality in satisfying the requirements of the assignment.
- **A- 90-92** Exemplary: Strong grasp of the subject area. Demonstrates a substantial knowledge of key concepts and/or techniques and constructs an argument with some degree of originality in fulfilling the requirements of the assignment.
- **B+ 87-89** Very Good: Thorough grasp of the subject area. Demonstrates evidence of extensive reading, knowledge of key concepts and/or techniques, and a fairly high degree of skill when using them to satisfy the requirements of the assignment.
**B 83-86 Good:** Solid grasp of the subject area. Evidence of relevant reading with meaningful discussion and analysis. Effective use of key concepts and/or techniques to satisfy the requirements of the assignment.

**B- 80-82 Satisfactory:** Sound grasp of the subject area. Constructs a satisfactory argument that demonstrates familiarity with the literature and a reasonable use of key concepts and/or techniques to satisfy the requirements of the assignment.

**C+ 77-79 Competent:** Reasonable grasp of the subject area but primarily descriptive analysis. Evidence of adequate reading and an acceptable familiarity with basic concepts and/or techniques in meeting the requirements of the assignment.

**C 73-76 Adequate:** Some grasp of the subject area and evidence of reasonable engagement with the literature. Some understanding of key concepts and/or techniques but flawed discussion and analysis. Marginal skill in satisfying the requirements of the assignment.

**C- 70-72 Passing:** Limited grasp of the subject area. Unclear argument with limited or irrelevant reading. Poor understanding of key concepts and/or techniques with negligible skill in satisfying the requirements of the assignment.

**D 60-69 Poor:** Slightly better than minimal knowledge of required concepts and/or techniques with serious flaws in use and very limited ability to satisfy the requirements of an assignment. Incoherent argument with limited or no evidence of independent research.

**F 0-59 Failing:** Very limited or no demonstrable grasp of the subject area. 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.*

**Attendance and Participation**
All students are expected to arrive on time and actively participate in class discussion, making a demonstrated effort to master the course material. The class discussion format assumes that the relationship between all participants is respectful and collegial. Major differences in background and theoretical inclination that may become evident are to be faced openly and debates, but without any element of interpersonal rancor, or comments that might close off discussion. If you are unable to make class, please email me ahead of time with a reason. I will decide if the absence will count as excused. In general, regular employment is not considered an excused absence. All students should be familiar with the university’s course withdrawal procedures. These can be found in section 1332 of the undergraduate catalog.

According to the Georgia State University undergraduate catalog, class attendance is expected; failure to attend classes regularly may result in poor course performance. The university requires instructors to verify attendance early in the term. Failure to attend classes may result in you not appearing on the Verification Roll and being dropped from the class. Please see section 1334 of the catalog at [http://www.gsu.edu/es/catalogs_courses.html](http://www.gsu.edu/es/catalogs_courses.html) and click on the appropriate catalog link to read about attendance policy.

**Electronics**
Please silence all cell phones and devices and remove all headsets/earphones before class begins. Laptops and tablets are the only devices allowed to be out and accessible in the classroom, and only used when taking notes. Refrain from texting and internet use. If this policy is violated, you will be asked to leave the classroom and marked absent for the day.

**Academic Honesty**
All students are required to be familiar with the Academic Honesty policy of the university and to comply with the policy. This can be found in section 1380 of the undergraduate catalog. All work submitted for this course must be completed in accordance with the Georgia State University’s policies on academic honesty and integrity. For a description of GSU’s policies, please consult the GSU section on Academic Regulations in the Undergraduate Catalog. If you are ever uncertain about these guidelines, please consult with the instructor. Any work you submit must be your own and should be submitted for this course only. If you are found in violation of the University’s academic honesty policies, the severest punishment will be pursued.
**Students with Disabilities**
Georgia State University complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students who wish to request accommodation for a disability may do so by registering with the Georgia State University Office of Disability Services. Students may only be accommodated upon issuance by the Office of Disability Services of a signed Accommodation Plan and are responsible for providing a copy of that plan to instructors of all courses in which accommodation is sought within the first two weeks of classes.

**Veterans and Serving Military**
Students who are veterans, serving in the military, their dependents, and the survivors of serving military are encouraged to avail themselves of a range of college services and activities through the Military Outreach Center (MOC). For assistance and guidance while attending Georgia State University, contact the Atlanta Campus Military Student Advocate.

**Basic Needs Statement**
Students who face challenges securing their food or housing and believe this may affect their performance in a course are urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. Notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable us to provide resources that we may possess. The Embark Program at GSU provides resources for students facing homelessness.

**Late Submission Policy and Make-Up Assignments**
Assignments submitted after the listed deadlines will not be accepted as this provides students with the unfair advantage. Students will have the opportunity to write a one-page make-up paper based on an additional reading assigned by the instructor. The make-up paper will only be offered once per student. Additional late/incomplete papers will receive zero credit.

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**SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS**

**COURSE INTRODUCTION**

**August 27**  
**What is Urban Theory?**  

**PART I: WHOSE CITY? URBAN POLITICS**

**September 3**  
**The Right to the City: DIY Urbanism**  

**September 10**  
**Power, Race, and the City: Race and urbanism in Atlanta and New Orleans**  
September 17  Seeing Like a City: Global urban governance

- WATCH: [https://www.ted.com/talks/benjamin_barber_why_mayors_should_rule_the_world](https://www.ted.com/talks/benjamin_barber_why_mayors_should_rule_the_world)

**PART II: DEBATING URBAN THEORY**

September 24  Planetary Urbanization: Urban studies beyond the city


October 1  Assemblage Urbanism: Locating urban politics in the network


October 8  Post-Colonial Urbanism: Informality and urbanization in the Global South


October 15  NO CLASS

**PART III: SUBURBAN PLANET, SUBURBAN THEORY**

October 22  Suburbs I: Suburban world(s)


**Major Paper Proposal Due**

October 29  Suburbs II: Suburban infrastructure

PART IV: URBAN DISRUPTIONS

November 5  
**Urban Political Ecology: Green and grey epistemologies**

November 12  
**Gendered Cities: What would a non-sexist city be like?**

November 19  
**The Science of Cities: Digital disruptions**

November 26  
**NO CLASS THANKSGIVING**

December 3  
**Wrap Up: The future of the urban academy**

December 10  
**Final papers due**