Principles of Urbanism

GCU 494/598 (proposed GCU 516)

Fall, 2008
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MW, 12:00 pm to 1:15 pm
Coor 5635

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Urbanism is the study of cities - their geographic, economic, political, social and cultural environment, and the imprint of all these forces on the built environment.

- The perfectly adequate Wikipedia definition of urbanism

Principles of Urbanism is a new course that will serve as an introduction and overview of the basic tenets, disciplinary threads, and bodies of scholarship associated with the idea of urbanism. Urbanism is generally defined as the study of cities, but different fields focus on different aspects. In urban planning and architecture, urban form and structure is the focus. In sociology, urbanism may be more about social interaction and community within the context of cities. Historians may be particularly interested in historical patterns of urban growth and change. What all fields have in common is a concern for the created human habitat and the problems – and potential solutions – that habitat inspires.

Interest in urbanism has surged in the past two decades. Urbanisms of many kinds have entered the urban lexicon, each staking out its own discriminating take on the urban realm. Recent book titles speak to the complexity of perspectives involved: the “Option of Urbanism”, “Sustainable Urbanism”, “Recombinant Urbanism”, “X-Urbanism”, “New Urbanism”, “Integral Urbanism”, “Magical Urbanism”, “Splintering Urbanism” and “Everyday Urbanism” – all books published in the last decade. These are not singular, isolated commentaries. Often they are attached to, and reflective of, broader social, cultural and political

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1 The course will constitute the required core course for a new shared Ph.D. Concentration in Urbanism.
movements. These are the kinds of cross-disciplinary perspectives students in this course will engage.

One reason for the growth of interest in urbanism is that in post-industrial, global society, many view the human habitat as problematic. There is a normative (“what ought to be”) aspect to the study of urbanism, and scholarship is very often focused on the need to find a new way of looking at, and resolving, how humans are supposed to create sustainable urban places. For this reason, students in this course will be asked to apply their reading and discussion-based understanding of urbanism to an active exploration and analysis of urbanism as they experience it.

Goals of Course

- To introduce students to the concept and meaning of urbanism from a variety of perspectives.
- To provide a general overview of how the idea of urbanism interrelates to social, political, cultural and economic forces shaping cities and regions.
- To discuss current debates about urbanism within the context of changing environmental and socio-economic factors.
- To further students’ ability to think about and articulate the current importance of urbanism, including how policy goals and sustainability concepts are affected.

Course Requirements

A. Reading

This is a reading and lecture-based course. There is an intensive reading schedule, compiled as a course reader, and students will be expected to have read these selections prior to each class period (see schedule below).

B. Course Project

Students will work individually or in teams (depending on class size) to complete a course project, to be presented in class during the final week. The project is intended to motivate students to apply knowledge gained from the readings to a “real world” understanding of urbanism in context. The project should utilize the theory, history, design and/or implications of urbanism in a creative, inter-disciplinary way. The project can be exploratory (e.g., what is urbanism?) or explanatory (e.g., what has been the experience of urbanism, for example in terms of justice/injustice?). It can be empirical and data-based or experiential and visual. A variety of methods and topics will be encouraged. An important requirement will be the preparation of a project proposal (max. 3 pages) by mid-semester. In addition to the final presentation, each student will be required to hand in a written explanation of the project (max. 10 pages).
C. Exams

There will be two exams – a midterm and a final. Exams will be drawn from course readings, lectures, and discussions in class. The final exam will be cumulative.

Grading

5% participation/attendance
5% project proposal
40% course project
20% midterm exam
30% final exam

Organization

The course will be organized around six themes:

• Urban origins (week 1, 2)
• Urbanism defined: competing models (week 3, 4, 5)
• Urbanism vs. “nature” (week 6,7)
• The economics of urbanism (week 8,9)
• Urbanism and society (week 10,11,12)
• The future of urbanism (week 13, 14)

Schedule

Urban origins

Week one


Week two


Urbanism defined: competing models

Week three


Week four


Week five


Urbanism vs. “nature”

Week six


***Midterm exam***

Week seven


The Economics of Urbanism

**Week eight**


**Week nine**


**Urbanism and society**

**Week ten**


**Week eleven**


**Future prospects**

**Week twelve**


**Week thirteen**


Week fourteen


Week fifteen

Final Student Presentations: Principles of Urbanism - Case studies