

Course Syllabus

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The Shape of Two Cities: NY/Paris

Urban Studies Studio A

Tuesday/Friday 9:30 am to 12:30 pm

Professor: Michelle Young, mty2102@columbia.edu

TA: Stephanie Bigelow smb2269@columbia.edu

Classroom: 202 Fayerweather (Tuesday), 300 Avery (Friday)

Studio Procedure

The Urban Studies Workshop engages students with a studio-based approach to the issues and discourse of the contemporary city by exploring a variety of conceptual, analytical and design tools for understanding and operating within urban contexts through focused individual or collective research and design projects.

This studio is a multi-disciplinary one, structured in four phases:

1. Initial in-depth research
2. Policy formation
3. Design proposal
4. Design implementation

The course is taught in the studio method, with a substantive method of instruction that of “desk crits,” or dialogues between the student and professor and teaching assistant, as well as between the student and outside critics.

Visiting experts from city and state agencies, architecture firms, community organizations and development corporations will work weekly with the students of the studio, presenting their own past and present work in New York City as well as critiquing students.

Students will be expected to present their work twice a week in the studio either in digital form or as a pin-up where all students present their work for group critique and

discussion. In the midterm reviews and final reviews, students present their work for public evaluation by a group of visiting critics.

It is **highly** recommended that students take “Intro to GIS,” an introductory class on the mapping program Geographic Information System, in conjunction with the Urban Studies Workshop.

Studio Prompt

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Reimagining the Inner NYC Sound

One of the more underappreciated New York City waterfronts is the region that runs from the Hellgate Bridge up the East River and through the beginning of the Long Island Sound to the Whitestone Bridge. There is approximately 22 1/2 miles of shoreline: 14 on the northern shore (the Bronx and Randalls/Wards Islands), 19 on the southern shore (Queens) and 4 1/2 miles on the three islands in the harbor (North Brother, South Brother, and Rikers).

This waterfront is home to much of New York City’s most important infrastructure: The largest food distribution center in the Northeast, three waste transfer stations, four wastewater treatment facilities, a power plant, two of the largest heating oil storage and delivery facilities in the city, a major airport, an offshore prison barge, and the Rikers Island Jail Complex; slightly further down the East River and the Bronx Kill lie an additional power plant and waste transfer station. It also contains three major road bridges and one major rail bridge.

In addition, the area is also home to a wide variety of ecosystems, natural habitats, recreation facilities, and parks, including two island bird sanctuaries (North and South Brother Islands), although herons have recently stopped nesting on North Brother for unknown reasons. According to the New York City Audubon society, “significant populations of birds breed, winter or stop here during migration,” and North and South Brother Islands are designated as “important bird areas.”

With the closing of Rikers Island, there is an opportunity to revisit not just Rikers Island itself, but the entire area surrounding it, including the South Bronx Waterfront, North Queens Waterfront, LaGuardia Airport, Wards and Randall’s Islands, and the smaller islands in the inner sound.

This studio will operate in partnership with the Regional Plan Association, an urban research and advocacy organization that works to improve the prosperity, infrastructure, sustainability and quality of life of the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut metropolitan region. The studio is a follow up to the 2016 NY/Paris Urban Studies Studio Reimagine Rikers: Incarceration in NYC, operated in partnership with Just Leadership, an advocacy group in the movement to close Rikers Island, and with The Center for Justice at Columbia University..

View a successful student project from last year's studio: <https://readymag.com/u11694753/657182/> (Links to an external site.)[Links to an external site.](#)

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory for all scheduled classes. Additional sessions may be necessary with the teaching assistant and/or the professor.

Class Schedule: Studio is held every **Tuesday and Friday** beginning promptly at **9:30 am**. Students arriving 15 minutes late will be considered "late" arrivals and after 1 hour will be considered absent from the class. All anticipated absences must be reported to the professor and teaching assistant before scheduled class time. The order of the syllabus may be subject to change.

Absences will reduce a student's course grade, as will repeat late arrivals and/or early departures from class. Three late attendances are equivalent to one drop in letter grade (from A to B, for example). Three consecutive absences or four non-consecutive absences after the first week of class will mean that you have unofficially dropped the course, receiving an F on your transcript. You may not leave early after a desk crit, you should always plan to use the hours you spend in class productively, and engage in fellow students' presentations, participating in discourse when possible.

Grading

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Weekly Assignments, Presentations and Class Participation: 25%

Midterm Reviews Combined: 30%

Final Review: 25%

Final Deliverables: 20%

The final grade will take into account the improvement and development of a student over the course of the semester. Grades are determined by the quality of the work and the development level of conceptual ideas, rather than purely by skill set.

Week 1: Initial Research

September 1st: Orientation

First Assignment: Initial Research Projects

Topics:

History and demographic analysis of the relevant neighborhoods: 1. Rikers Island, North Brother and South Brother Island 2. North Shore of Queens, including LaGuardia Airport 3. South Bronx (Hunts Point and Port Morris) 4. Wards and Randall islands

- History of the neighborhoods including geological and waterfront history
- Demographic analysis of the three neighborhoods
- Who are the Stakeholders? What are the current and proposed plans for the area?
- Connectivity: Public transit, roads, pedestrian accessibility, bike lanes
- Zoning of the Area
- General Land Use and Public Space Analysis

On Tuesday, September 6th each student group must present:

1. A 15-minute Powerpoint presentation organizing assigned topics into distinct findings and providing supporting evidence from a site visit to be done over the weekend. Supporting evidence can be collected through a variety of creative methods: via photography, video, sound recording, mapping, interviews, hand sketches, surveys with residents and more.
2. A conceptual 3d sculpture made of found objects from their trip to their neighborhood area that demonstrates an issue or observation from the site(s).

The goal of this first assignment is not only to orient students to the area of study but also to introduce research methodologies as well as address presentation skills. Be creative! There is not one correct way to get to know a site/neighborhood.

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Week 2: Exploratory Research Phase

September 6th:

Presentation of Findings (Powerpoint) and Conceptual Model Due

September 8th: **Group Visit to North Queens with Nathan Kensinger**, founder of Chance Ecologies and urban photographer, and **Moses Gates**, Director of Community Planning and Design at the Regional Plan Association. Students will also experience, on their own, accessing Rikers Island by public transit.

Assignment Due: Students will also submit a revised presentation of week 1 findings and revised conceptual model

Week 3: Mapping the City

September 12th: **Group Visit to South Bronx with South Bronx Unite and Mott Haven Historic District**

Assignment Due:

September 15th: Illustrator & GIS Workshop, presentation by Teaching Assistant

Assignment Due: Presentations of thesis statement and further observations about North Shore of Queens and South Bronx

- What did you observe about the physical nature of this area?
- What did you learn about the challenges facing the area and community?
- What did you learn from speaking to residents on the street?

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Week 4

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September 19th: Photoshop & Google Sketchup Workshop, presentation by Teaching Assistant

Assignment Due: Illustrator Maps due

September 22nd : **Rikers Island, North Brother Island, South Brother Island Talk with Christopher Payne and Janos Marton**

Assignment Due: Photoshop & Google Sketchup assignments due

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Week 5:

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September 26th

Assignment Due: Presentations of thesis statement and further observations about Rikers/North Brother/South Brother/Ward/Randalls Islands

September 29th: Visit to Regional Plan Association offices

Assignments Due: Students will present a focus subject matter and site area for their projects

Week 6:

October 3rd: Desk crit/Steinway Factory Visit

October 6th: Presentation by Nicole Passarella and Elise Baudon from Bjarke Ingels architects about the BIG U project. Class will take place in the GSAPP Incubator, at 231 Bowery.

Assignments Due:

- Students will present first draft of project in Powerpoint form

Week 7:

October 10th: Presentation by Alex Wallach, Senior Planner Town of Babylon, formerly with FEMA

Assignments Due: Present initial site selection

October 13th: Desk crit

Assignments Due: Run through of midterm

Week 8:

October 17th: Midterm Review I

October 20th:

Group Feedback on Midterm/Desk Crits

Community Engagement Assignment Distributed

Week 9:

October 24th: Presentation by Megan Marini and Priyanka, 3x3 Design

Assignments Due:

- Presentation of community engagement results
- Video assignment distributed

October 27th:

Assignment Due: Review initial videos desk crits

October 28th: Urban Design Studio midterm (useful to see this process, and the studio leads have said you are welcome)

Week 10:

October 31st:

Assignment Due: Presentation of revised policy proposals and initial design proposals, review final video

November 3rd:

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Assignment Due: Desk crit

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Week 11:

November 7th (Holiday)

November 10th: **Assignment Due:** Midterm Review II (Pin Up Boards)

Week 12:

November 14th: Review midterm feedback

November 17th: Desk Crits

Urban Design Review: November ? (recommended)

November 24th: Thanksgiving Holiday

Assignment Due: Desk Crits and presentation run through of final

Week 13:

November 28th : Final Review

Final Deliverables Due by December 8th:

Original Final Boards and Digital Presentation

Revised Final Boards

Final Video

Final Proposal on Website