

# Course Syllabus

[Jump to Today](#)

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: Alexandros Hadjistryllis, ah3588@columbia.edu

Classroom: 300 Buell N

## **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**

-

### Reimagining the South Bronx

With articles in the New York Times proclaiming “[The New South Bronx \(Links to an external site.\)Links to an external site.](#)” and “[The Rebranding of the Bronx \(Links to an external site.\)Links to an external site.](#)”, the South Bronx may have finally hit the nationwide stage, but community activists have been working for decades on improving livability for the 100,000+ residents in the Mott-Haven-Port Morris area.

This studio will look primarily at a 96-acre plot of public waterfront in a flood zone that has been inaccessible to the public for decades, filled with industrial activity including a 5,000 ton per day waste transfer station, a Wall Street Journal/New York Post Printing Plant, and a fossil fuel power plant, that have had a significantly negative impact on air quality. In fact, asthma rates in the South Bronx are eight times the national average; asthma deaths are three times the national average; and it is estimated that one in every five children in the South Bronx has asthma. Public access to this waterfront and the Randalls-Island Connector is hindered by high truck traffic, lack of pedestrian amenities, and multi-lane boulevards.

Rapid gentrification puts further pressure on neighborhood groups to ensure a community-focused scale of development that addresses the environmental and social justice concerns the community has long faced.

This studio will operate in partnership with South Bronx Unite, a coalition of South Bronx residents, organizations, and allies working together to improve and protect the social, environmental, and economic future of the South Bronx.

Within the greater context, the Port Morris waterfront is within a largely underappreciated part of the New York City waterfront, known as the Inner Sound, 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 shorefront: 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).

### **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**

-

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**

Augustin 31st: Orientation

### **First Assignment: Initial Research Projects**

Topics:

History and demographic analysis of the relevant neighborhoods: 1. Port Morris 2. Mott Haven 3. Randalls and Ward's 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? What are their concerns and initiatives?
- Connectivity: Public transit, roads, pedestrian accessibility, bike lanes
- Zoning of the Area
- General Land Use and Public Space Analysis

On Tuesday, September 4<sup>th</sup> 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.

-

-

### **Week 2: Exploratory Research Phase**

September 4th:

**Assignment Due:** Presentation of Findings (Powerpoint) and Conceptual Model Due

September 7<sup>th</sup>: Illustrator & Photoshop Tutorial, presentation by Teaching Assistant

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

### **Week 3: Mapping the City**

September 11<sup>th</sup>: Group Visit to South Bronx with South Bronx Unite director, Mychal Johnson

**Assignment Due:** Illustrator and Photoshop Assignments Due

September 14<sup>th</sup>: **GIS (Intro) tutorial**

**Assignment Due:** Presentations of thesis statement and further observations about 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?

-

#### **Week 4**

-

September 18<sup>th</sup>: Group Visit to Regional Plan Association with Moses Gates, Vice President for Housing and Neighborhood Planning

**Assignment Due:** GIS Assignment Due

September 21<sup>st</sup>: Group critic session with NYP Architecture studio

-

#### **Week 5:**

-

September 25<sup>th</sup>: Desk Crit

**Assignment Due:**

September 28<sup>th</sup>: Guest lecture by Alex Wallach, AICP, Community Planning Specialist at Suffolk County Department of Economic Development & Planning + GIS (Spatial Analysis) tutorial + Desk Crit

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

**Week 6:**

October 2<sup>nd</sup>: Desk crit + Photoshop/InDesign Tutorial, presentation by teaching assistant

**Assignments Due:** GIS assignment 2 due.

October 5<sup>th</sup>: Visit to office of Janos Marton, formerly with Just Leadership, now State Campaigns Manager – Smart Justice Campaign at ACLU + Visit offices of BIG (Bjarke Ingels) with Nicole Passarella, architect.

**Assignment Due:**

**Week 7:**

October 9th: No Class (APP Hearing)

**Assignments Due:** Present initial site selection

October 12th: Desk crit

**Assignments Due:** Run through of midterm

**Week 8:**

October 16<sup>th</sup>: Midterm Review I

October 19<sup>th</sup>: Group Feedback on Midterm/Desk Crits

Presentation by Jeff Reuben, City Planner with Philip Habib & Associates

Community Engagement Assignment Distributed

**Week 9:**

October 23<sup>rd</sup>: Presentation by Megan Marini, 3x3 Design,

**Assignments Due:**

- Presentation of initial community engagement results
- Review initial videos

October 26<sup>th</sup>:

**Assignment Due:**

- Presentation of final community engagement results
- Presentation of videos

-

**Week 10:**

October 30<sup>th</sup>: Run through Midterm

November 2<sup>nd</sup>: Midterm Review II (Pin Up Boards)



-

**Week 11:**

November 6<sup>th</sup>: Election Day (Holiday)

November 9<sup>th</sup>: Visit to Design Trust for Public Space, Rhino + Google Sketchup tutorial

**Week 12:**

November 13<sup>th</sup>: Desk Crits

November 16<sup>th</sup>: Desk Crits

**Week 13:**

November 20<sup>th</sup>: Final Review

**Final Deliverables Due by December 7<sup>th</sup>:**

**Original Final Boards and Digital Presentation**

**Revised Final Boards**

**Final Video**

**Final Proposal on Website**