Course Summary and Objectives

This 3-unit course introduces students to the interdisciplinary study of the urban world—that is, of cities, and their suburbs, too. Given the sprawling nature not just of cities today but of urban studies itself, this class cannot help being highly introductory. Rather than make you an instant expert, my principle goal is to inspire your curiosity in the urban (and suburban) places around you and hopefully pave the way for a lifetime of learning about and living within cities.

This course is both global and historical in perspective; while we pay close attention to our local Los Angeles metropolitan area, we will attempt to understand it in its larger context as one of today’s premier world cities. We will examine cities as complex social groupings of people, as well as lived-in landscapes of buildings, pathways, and public and private spaces. Our attention will turn both to what cities are and have been (the evolving urban experience of the past and present) and to ever-changing ideas about what cities should be (urban planning and design for the future).

A bit more specifically, students who successfully complete this course should expect at semester’s end to be able to:

- recognize and apply different conceptions of urban (the city) as distinct from suburban and rural;
- discuss major concepts and themes in contemporary urban planning and design, understood within their historic-geographic context;
• apply historical-geographical and/or theoretical insight to discussions of present-day urban issues such as housing, transportation, urban (re)development, segregation, and “smart growth” policies to control and combat urban sprawl;
• describe, discuss, and differentiate common types of urban spaces from a variety of historical-geographical contexts (e.g., CBD, agora, commercial strip, streetcar suburb); this includes the ability to apply a number of social-scientific models that scholars have developed to better understand patterns of urban morphology;
• critically read urban landscapes, especially those of Santa Monica and the rest of greater Los Angeles—the quintessential postmodern, “fragmented” metropolis; what is good about our city, what is bad about our city, how might conditions be improved, and what obstacles and challenges stand in the way of such improvement?;
• see and understand the world's ever-evolving connections between peoples, cities, and environments, particularly in this dynamic age of globalization; and
• locate, compile, and analyze a variety of demographic and socio-economic data, in combination with visual and textual sources, to describe and assess specific urban settings and situations.

For college administrative purposes, these course objectives have been distilled into the following pair of official “student learning outcomes”:

• Having been presented with specific lists of core concepts in urban geography and urban studies, students will be able to define and apply these concepts to specific contexts.
• Having been presented with a review of different examples of urban morphology, urbanization, and urban design, from a variety of historical geographic contexts, students will be able to critically evaluate their local urban surroundings and make a well-reasoned argument regarding what is good about their city, what is bad about their city, and how conditions might be improved—as well as the obstacles and challenges that might stand in the way.

Guidelines and Policies

It is important that you bring to this course a realistic expectation of the amount of time and effort it requires. While learning online can be more convenient than a traditional classroom setting, this is not designed to be a stripped-down, “light” version of the course. Indeed, you should expect to invest as much time working on this course online as you would in the classroom—perhaps even more. Especially because you do not have regular class meetings to attend each week, doing well in this class requires a great deal of maturity and self-discipline. My advice is to make this class a routine, and set aside a regular block of time each week in which you dedicate your attention to the online lectures, assignments, and accompanying readings that are presented with this class.

Log-in to our Canvas website and participate regularly. Not only is this essential to completing and passing the course, but with a wait list of students hoping to add the class, your failure to participate during the first couple weeks of the semester will result in you
being dropped to make room for someone else. Per SMC policy, however, also know that it is ultimately your responsibility to drop the course if you no longer wish to be enrolled. The college rarely assigns late withdrawals, so if it is your desire to receive a “W” rather than an “F” on your transcript, you will need to make sure you have officially dropped the course prior to the relevant mid-semester deadline.

In addition to motivation and self-discipline—plus the basic skills needed by a college student in any course, such as the abilities to read, write, and think critically—to succeed in this online class requires a few technological essentials. These include having reliable access to the Internet, as well as a familiarity with using the Web, email, and general computer literacy. Of course, one of the pitfalls that comes with the rapid pace of today’s technological development is that unforeseen issues always come up—a new version of a web browser, say, is no longer compatible, or a new file format is no longer readable by the software on your computer. As any such issues arise, contact the Tech Support available within Canvas as soon as possible, so that we can fix the problem or try to find a work-around.

If you encounter anything that isn’t clear, isn’t working, or just seems wrong, do not hesitate to contact me directly. In addition to email, or voice mail, you can also interact with me directly in real time during my office hours. If you’re on campus, please stop by in person (HSS 385). If not, you can reach me by phone (310.434.8654) as well. Please direct general questions about the course to the Bulletin Board section of our Canvas website. By posting your questions to this Bulletin Board, all of your classmates will have access to the same information, getting answers to questions that they almost certainly have as well. Of course, if your question only applies to your own situation, then by all means email me directly. Make sure to include in the subject line, your name (first and last) as well as the course number (Geography/Urban Studies 8), or otherwise you’re message might get lost in the depths of my Inbox or spam filter.

### Assigned Books

In addition to the materials presented online, you are expected to regularly and carefully read two books.

1. **the Textbook:** David Kaplan, James O. Wheeler, and Steven Holloway, *Urban Geography*, 3rd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2014). This is your main textbook for the class, and it covers all of the core concepts we’ll be examining this semester, in a very clear, readable, and well-illustrated manner. The one drawback with this book—like so many texts today—is that it is expensive. One option for students on a tight budget who regularly spend time in the SMC Library on the main campus is to check out the copy that is available on two-hour reserve. The call number for the reserve copy of the book is GF125 .K37 2009; it’s the slightly older second edition, but it would still be sufficient. Another option that many of you might find convenient and significantly less expensive than purchasing a physical hard copy of the book is to rent or purchase it as an eBook. There are multiple ways to do this; I will share at least some of these via an Announcement during the first week of the class.
(2) the Glaeser book: Edward Glaeser, *Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011). Our second book is readily available as an inexpensive paperback. It’s written by a Harvard economist who grew up in New York and absolutely loves cities. He has strong, but informed and well-reasoned, opinions regarding what is best about cities, and what kind of public policies can make them better. We will discuss and debate these opinions, applying the ideas and information that we’ll be sharing from the textbook, the lectures, and our own observations of living in the urban world.

**Grades and Assignments**

The course is divided into fourteen weekly units, plus a concluding pair of weeks at the end of the semester to prepare for and complete the final exam. Each unit includes an **online lecture**, which is available as a printer-friendly set of presentation slides, a screen-readable illustrated text, and as a set of embedded videos. With the exception of weeks six and twelve, when the only assignment is a midterm exam, each unit also includes a set of **review questions**. In addition, you also will be responsible for participating actively in an online class **discussion assignment** or, every third week, you instead will have a set of **Glaeser questions** due (see below). While all this might sound confusing, don’t worry. It will be clear on our **Canvas** website what is due each week. Just know that beginning September 6, something is due **every Tuesday night** until the end of the semester (December 20).

Each of these components mentioned above will be graded separately, and your total grade for the semester will be determined by a combined grade-point average, weighted as follows:

- **Three Online Exams** (40%). At the end of the sixth and twelfth weeks, you will have online midterm exams. These exams will contain a mix of question types, including short-answer and fill-in-the-blank as well as multiple choice. Each midterm exam will count for 10% of your overall grade and will cover the preceding six weeks of material. At the end of the semester, you will be given a similar but longer comprehensive final exam, which will determine 20% of your overall grade. All three exams will be time-limited, but you will have a multi-day window in which to complete each of them.

- **Weekly Review Questions** (15%). Each weekly unit will include a set of review questions based on that week’s material. These questions will be similar to ones you’ll see on the exams, but unlike the exams, you will not be time-limited in completing the task. Instead, students are encouraged to use the entire week to thoroughly review the unit’s lecture and reading materials before submitting their final answers.

- **Weekly Discussion Assignments** (15%). In addition to the review questions, most weeks will include a group discussion assignment that will ask you to apply concepts presented in class to real-world examples in cities around the world. You are welcome, and encouraged, to make multiple contributions to these threaded discussions, which will be based on assigned readings and/or modest data collection tasks. After the
discussion closes on Tuesday night, you will be awarded a score based on the overall
quality and quantity of your responses.

• **Glaeser questions** (20%). In one of our two assigned books, the economist Edward
Glaeser presents a number of provocative arguments on the good, and the bad, of
cities in our 21st-Century world. Every third week, you will have due a set of written
responses (each set roughly three typewritten pages) to discussion questions based on a
specified pair of chapters from the book. The specific schedule is as follows:
  - Glaeser #1 due September 13 (based on Introduction and chapter 1)
  - Glaeser #2 due October 4 (based on chapters 5 and 8)
  - Glaeser #3 due October 25 (based on chapters 2 and 4)
  - Glaeser #4 due November 15 (based on chapters 6 and 7)
  - Glaeser #5 due December 6 (based on chapters 3, 9, and Conclusion)

• **Participation** (10%). The last part of your grade will be based on an assessment of your
effort throughout the semester. Are you regularly logging into the class? Are you asking
questions via e-mail? Are you using the Bulletin Board to ask and answer questions, or
share “show and tell” items of interest? Are you participating in office hours, either in
person, by phone, or via chat? You shouldn’t feel like you need to do all of the above,
but the more active you are throughout the semester, the higher your Participation
score will be.

Two final comments. First, **late work will not be accepted**. As an online learning
community that will interact with each other on a weekly basis, it is important that we all
stay on the same page. Thus, while there’s a certain amount of self-paced flexibility to
completing the readings and viewing the lecture presentations, the assignments each week
are due on the corresponding Tuesday night (ending at Midnight, Pacific Time). No
exceptions. In order to give yourself a buffer in case unexpected technological problems
arise, it’s good practice to submit your work at least 24 hours before the Tuesday deadline
to provide. Recognizing that unforeseen things do happen, I **will drop your lowest single
scores** for the weekly review questions (i.e., 11 of 12 will count), discussion assignments
(6 of 7 will count), and Glaeser questions (4 of 5 will count).

Second, **I do not offer extra credit**. The cumulative grade you earn on the components
listed above is the grade you earn for the semester. There is one exception, which is
available to students who reside locally. You can increase your overall grade in the class by
one half-letter grade by completing one of SMC’s “**Student Sustainability Workshops**” this
semester and then sharing with your classmates a brief summary of something you learned
through the program. For more information about the Workshops, contact SMC’s Center
for Environmental and Urban Studies at (310) 458-8716; you also can try dropping by in
person (1744 Pearl St.), or visiting the program website: [www.sustainableworks.org/SMC](http://www.sustainableworks.org/SMC).
Schedule of Lecture Topics and Assigned Readings

We will proceed through the schedule below at a pace of one topic per week. The textbook readings are indicated by chapter number in bold, followed by specific page ranges within each chapter. Note that the reading schedule is uneven: lighter for some topics, heavier for others. Manage your time accordingly, and don’t be afraid to read ahead when the current week’s assignment is relatively light. All of the deadline dates listed in the final column fall on a Tuesday. Where indicated, you have a set of Glaeser questions due that day, rather than a weekly online discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weekly Units</th>
<th>Textbook Readings</th>
<th>Deadlines</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introductions</td>
<td>none</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>What are cities? What is urban?</td>
<td>1: all 5: 140</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Our new urban world: cities and globalization</td>
<td>4: all 6: all 14: all</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Urban morphology: the social geography of cities</td>
<td>5: 117–26 7: all</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Historical context: cities before the industrial revolution</td>
<td>2: 25–52</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Local context: Santa Monica and the Southern California metropolis</td>
<td>none</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>National context: the North American urban system</td>
<td>3: all</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Industrial revolutions: rise of the modern city</td>
<td>2: 52–58</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Urban planning I: responses to the industrial city</td>
<td>12: 334–54</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Urban planning II: responses to the centrifugal city</td>
<td>5: 132–41 12: 354–67</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Blight vs. the Slum: urban renewal and community development</td>
<td>8: 226–32 9: 262–68</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Global diversity: 21st-century urbanism around the world</td>
<td>13: all 15: all</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Review week and Final Exam</td>
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