



NYU

**ROBERT F. WAGNER GRADUATE
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE**

URPL-GP 2680.001
Special Topics in Urban Design
Spring 2023

“CITY STREETS and URBAN LANDSCAPES”

Instructor Information

Professor Louise Harpman
Email louise.harpman@nyu.edu
Office Hours Friday, 9:30 am—11:30 am, by appointment via Zoom

Course Assistant Information

Instructor Joanna Simon
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Course Information

Lectures Mondays, 4:55 pm—6:35 pm at GCASL Room 284
Digital Design Labs Mondays, 8:35 pm—9:35 pm at BOBS LL 112

Overview

This course, City Streets and Urban Landscapes, will immerse students in a study of established and emerging urban design priorities for city streets. Streets and sidewalks operate as the most public of our city’s public spaces, at once forming connective tissue between different locations while also creating borders and boundaries. Using New York City’s streets as a living laboratory, students will develop methods to evaluate the many different publics served by city streets with the goal of producing design proposals that promote livability, ecological resilience, and social justice.

Streetscapes are among the most territorialized urban spaces, as multiple city and state agencies exercise jurisdiction over their design and approved uses. Still, within these regulatory frameworks, a high degree of design innovation has taken hold. Streets are dynamic networks that embed design as well as social, political, ecological and technological priorities. The archaeological record indicates that roads were originally developed to support wheeled surface transportation. Contemporary streets remain dedicated to transportation, to be sure, but the streetscape also engages most every

other essential system that allows for dense, urban human habitation including fresh water, sewerage, trash and recycling collection, telecommunications, and emergency services. Streets also support the habitats of many non-human occupants such as plants and animals and a focus on ecological, climate-conscious design is an additional priority for this course. Extreme weather events highlight the streets' role in stormwater management, further underscoring the urgency for redesigning the street as an urban landscape.

Urban Design Focus Area: Gowanus

It is the goal of this urban topics course to engage as urban designers, spatial analysts, and advocates for real-time urban design challenges in the Gowanus neighborhood of Brooklyn. After two introductory assignments to develop design and visualization skills, students will select one area within our Urban Design Focus Area as their primary design focus.

For the final project, students will prepare streetscape designs for their selected site along with proposals for possible implementation scenarios, extending strategies already familiar to you as urban planners.

Urban Analysis and Urban Design

Since the pandemic took hold in March 2020, urban designers all over the world have focused on the redesign of city streets. Streets have retained their dominance as vital transportation corridors for motorized vehicles, but they have also adjusted to accommodate more and different modes of transportation including bicycles, scooters, mobility devices and person-powered delivery carts. Delivery vehicles have dominated some streets as they “set up shop” to organize their associated unloading and distribution regimes. Pedestrians of all ages remain key users of city streets, and we have seen many initiatives that promote a rethink of city streets to support play, pets, plants, protest, conversation, art, entertainment, education, dining, exercise, and commerce. Streets are not—and never were—simple.

Through direct research and analysis, this course will engage the current conditions and proposed initiatives for our selected Urban Design Focus Area, identifying challenges and opportunities. A number of street redesigns are already “in play” throughout the city and it is important that we educate ourselves about pilot projects that may or may not be near our Focus Area. Proposals for dedicated bus lanes, bike lanes, wider sidewalks and dedicated delivery zones already garner significant attention, while less evident systems like surveillance, sanitary sewers, stormwater management, waste and recycling collection, and bioremediation are also active areas of investment, all of which become opportunities for urban designers and planners.

Many systems structure urban life within a city, and students will be encouraged to assess direct and indirect effects of selected systems. Students are asked to immerse themselves into design research, with the goal of understanding the many interlocking issues that emerge within our Focus Area. Students will engage demographic data, regulatory frameworks, and urban systems in order to see how seemingly local problems might also connect to citywide and regional issues. It is my hope that students will discover ways to “connect the dots” between seemingly separate systems that may not have been previously identified. The aim of this advanced urban design course is to produce a set of new ideas, action items, and ultimately, urban design proposals.

Course format

Developing critical ways of “seeing” the city, learning to think like an urban designer and building a range of digital design tools to communicate design intentions are shared priorities for this course. The format of the course will be lectures followed by digital design laboratories. The “lectures” will be devoted to instructor presentations, guest speakers, field trips, student presentations, and discussions. The “digital design labs” will focus on data analysis and visualization skills that link directly to the course assignments.

Each student will complete two introductory assignments, which will lead into one longer final assignment. Students will work individually on the first two assignments and may work singly or in pairs for the final project.

Students will be expected to upload work-in-progress or completed assignments on Sunday nights before 10:00 pm to the Brightspace site and also to a dedicated Google Slides file. Certain presentations will be discussed in class on Mondays in a “review” format. Reviews are intended to promote both visual and verbal exchanges, as both design and design discourse are key skills for practitioners to master.

Course structure

The structure of this urban design course encourages collaboration, innovation, and learning-by-doing as we advance through a series of projects. One goal of this course is to foster an environment where students can come together in an open frame of inquiry, ready to offer questions and proposals that can be developed and discussed among classmates, faculty, and visitors.

The importance of making incremental progress and keeping up with the assignments cannot be overstated, as each skill set builds upon the previous one. Through meetings with the professor and lab instructor, conversations with classmates, and class presentations, each student will refine their work throughout the semester.

Learning happens in and out of the class period and classmates will become some of your best resources. Talk to them. Look at their work. Invite them to evaluate your projects. Above all, commit to your own educational process.

Course websites

Brightspace will serve as the primary online portal for this course. On the Brightspace site, you will find our syllabus, readings, assignments, lectures after they are delivered, class videos and other links. Please familiarize yourself with the assets within our course portal. In addition, we will use a dedicated folder in Google Slides.

Studio archive

Students will be asked to create and manage a studio “archive” for the duration of the course. Because information-gathering is a critical part of the design process, there is a need to create easily accessible folders to make information available to all students. We will build our archive within Brightspace.

Learning objectives

Building on the skills from foundation courses, this topics course will concentrate on developing a design methodology that includes the use of digital, analytic, and graphic tools to expand students’ knowledge. The learning objectives of this course include:

Critical thinking

- develop skills of “critical looking”
- develop in-depth awareness of the built environment
- gain knowledge of visible and invisible urban design elements and systems
- explore relationships between buildings, open space, and systems
- develop methods to assess urban forms and processes

Applied research

- identify urban design challenges and opportunities
- use data and demographic information to analyze and bolster urban design proposals

Visual communication

- develop documentary and analytic drawing skills
- understand tools urban designers use to study form, space, surfaces, systems
- develop diagramming skills
- compose information on page to establish a point of view
- develop and deliver sample professional presentation

Verbal communication

- refine public speaking
- state clearly and succinctly a point of view
- develop and deliver sample professional presentation

Course grading guide

Establishing grades for projects of a creative nature is a more complex matter than grading in other academic areas. Each assignment includes an associated grading rubric to help clarify the evaluation criteria.

Grading for this course is broken into four components for each given assignment:

- grasp (understanding the ideas and issues of the assigned project)
- process (the consistent and rigorous development of ideas)
- participation (contribution of ideas, questions, engaging with the material and your classmates on a regular basis)
- resolution (demonstration of competence, completeness, and finesse through representation)

The grading for this course is on a “portfolio” basis, which means that you may revise and resubmit any work for re-grading until May 12, 2023.

Grade descriptions

- (A) Excellent: Exceptional work for a graduate student. Work at this level is unusually thorough, well-reasoned, creative, sophisticated, and well presented. Work is of exceptional, professional quality.
- (A-) Very good: Very strong work for a graduate student. Work at this level shows signs of creativity, is thorough and well-reasoned, indicates strong understanding of appropriate methodological, analytical, and representational frameworks, and meets professional standards.
- (B+) Good: Sound work for a graduate student; well-reasoned and thorough, methodologically sound, legible. This is the graduate student grade that indicates the student has fully accomplished the basic objectives of the course.
- (B) Adequate: Competent work for a graduate student even though some weaknesses are evident. Work at this level demonstrates competency in most key course objectives but understanding of some important issues and

skills is less than complete. Methodological, analytical, or representational approaches used are adequate but student has not been thorough.

- (B-) Borderline: Weak work for a graduate student. Work at this level meets the minimal expectations for a graduate student in the course. Understanding of salient issues is incomplete. Methodological, analytical, or representational work performed in the course is minimally adequate.
- (C/-/+) Deficient: Inadequate work for a graduate student. Work at this level does not meet the minimal expectations for a graduate student in the course. Work is inadequately developed or flawed by numerous errors and misunderstanding of important issues. Methodological, analytical, or representational work performed is weak and fails to demonstrate knowledge or technical competence expected of graduate students.
- (D/F) Fail: Work fails to meet minimal expectations for course credit for a graduate student. Performance has been consistently weak in methodology and understanding, with serious limits in many areas.

Hardware and software

Students will use a range of digital design tools, which may include Adobe Illustrator, InDesign, and Photoshop; Cadmapper; ArcGIS, QGIS and SketchUp. Students may use their own computers or those at the computer labs on campus.

Statement on personal communication devices

Paying attention to what is going on in class is critical to developing a productive, creative class environment. With this in mind, it is my policy that we have a “lids down” and device-free classroom. If, however, you see a classmate using a device to take notes, please assume that person has approval to do so.

Statement on food and beverage consumption

Drinks may be consumed during class, but please don't eat during the class period.

Academic integrity

Academic integrity is a vital component of Wagner and NYU. All students enrolled in this class are required to read and abide by NYU's and Wagner's Academic Code. [NYU Academic Integrity Policy](#) All Wagner students have already read and signed the Wagner Academic Oath and the student-written Code of Professional Responsibility which is here as part of [Wagner Student Policies](#).

If any student in this class is unsure about what is expected of you and how to abide by the academic code, please consult with me. I consider the use of ChatGPT or other AI-assisted essay writing tools a form of plagiarism.

Attendance policy

Punctual arrival and staying for the entire class period is expected. Your presence—actual and intellectual—is essential to the success of this course. More than two (2) unexcused absences and more than two (2) late arrivals to class may diminish your final grade; excused absences are allowed for medical reasons, family emergencies, and religious holidays.

Religious holidays sometimes conflict with class and project schedules. If you expect to miss a class or work assignment due to a religious observance, please let me know in advance. You will be given an opportunity to complete the work within one week after the absence. This link gives information on [NYU's Policy on Religious Holidays](#).

Statement on class recordings

Certain class sessions may be recorded and these recordings will be available to members of the class. Class recordings may be used as a learning tool, e.g. to revisit discussion topics, to assist students with different language backgrounds and abilities, and/or to provide reasonable accommodations for students. Recordings are only to be used for work related to this course and are not to be shared without the explicit consent of the instructor. There is no “hybrid” or “remote attendance” option for this course.

Students with accessibility needs

Academic accommodations are available for students who need them. Please contact the Moses Center for Student Accessibility (212-998-4980 or mosescsa@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester.

Statement on mental health

Our aim is for students to be as successful academically as they can, and to help them overcome or manage any impediments they may experience. Any student who may be struggling is urged to contact the Moses Center for Student Accessibility (212-998-4980 or mosescsa@nyu.edu.) If mental health assistance is needed, please call NYU's 24/7 Wellness Exchange hotline (212-443-9999). Furthermore, please approach me if you feel comfortable doing so. This will enable me to assist you more directly with relevant resources or referrals.



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Course Schedule

Week 1 01/23

Introduction and course overview
Lecture
Class discussion
Field Trip 1: City Streets
Issue Assignment 1 // Crossroads

Week 2 01/30

Lecture
Class discussion
Field Trip 2: City Streets
Interim Review // Assignment 1

Required reading to be completed before class:

- Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, pp. 1-13, 46-90.

Week 3 02/06

Lecture
Class discussion
Interim Review // Assignment 1

Required readings to be completed before class:

- Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, “*The Use of Sidewalks: Contact*,” pp. 55-73.
- Setha Low and Neil Smith, “*The Imperative of Public Space*” in *The Politics of Public Space*, pp. 1-16.

- David Harvey, “*The Political Economy of Public Space*” in *The Politics of Public Space*, pp.17-34.

Week 4 02/13

Guest lecture: Andrea Parker

Executive Director, Gowanus Canal Conservancy

Interim Review // Assignment 1

Week 5 02/20

No class, Presidents’ Day

Week 6 02/27

Due Date // Assignment 1

Issue Assignment 2 // Urban Datascares

Lecture

Class discussion

Week 7 03/06

Guest lecture: Daniel McPhee

Executive Director, Urban Design Forum

Interim Review // Assignment 2

Week 8 03/13

Spring Recess

Week 9 03/20

Lecture

Class discussion

Interim Review // Assignment 2

Issue Assignment 3 // Priorities and Proposals

Week 10 03/27

Due Date // Assignment 2

Lecture

Class discussion

04/01

The BIG WALK

Brooklyn’s Working Waterfront

Week 11 04/03

Guest lecture: Ben Margolis

Principal, James Lima Planning and Development

Lecture

Class discussion

Interim Review // Assignment 3

Week 12 04/10

Lecture

Class discussion

Interim Review // Assignment 3

Week 13 04/17

Lecture

Class discussion

Interim Review // Assignment 3

Week 14 04/24

Lecture

Class discussion

Interim Review // Assignment 3

Week 15 05/01

Due Date // Assignment 3

FINAL CLASS PRESENTATIONS

Week 16 05/08

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Changes to this schedule may occur based on opportunities/contingencies that might arise during the semester; a revised schedule will be issued if needed.