URPL – GP 2680.001
Special Topics in Urban Design
Spring 2024

URBAN DESIGN
VISUALIZATION TOOLS & NEIGHBORHOOD CHALLENGES

Instructor’s Information
Professor        Louise Harpman
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                  Make appointments HERE

Instructor        Joanna Simon
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Office hours      By appointment

Course Information
Lectures          Mondays, 4:55 pm—6:35 pm at Bobst LL146

Overview
It is the goal of this special topics course, Urban Design—Visualization Tools & Neighborhood Challenges, to engage as spatial analysts, urban designers, and advocates for real-time design challenges. During the first half of the semester, the course will introduce students to visualization techniques in a series of linked exercises; in the second half of the semester, students will further develop these visualization and design tools as they address challenges and opportunities in a rapidly-changing New York City neighborhood. Instructor Joanna Simon will teach the first half of the course while Professor Louise Harpman will teach the second half. The shared goal of this course is to equip students with tools, techniques, and conceptual frameworks to evaluate and create urban design proposals. Using New York City as a living laboratory, students will develop methods to visualize and analyze current urban design conditions with the goal of producing new design proposals that create a more livable city.
Visualization tools
During the first half of the semester, students will complete seven weekly tutorials and two projects. These tutorials will focus on industry standard tools and visualization practices, encouraging students to develop effective ways to communicate design intentions. Each week will focus on a new design concept in order to work through the foundations of a strong design portfolio and a visually cohesive presentation.

Neighborhood challenges
During the second half of the semester, students will learn about the history of urban design and changing priorities within the field, while simultaneously coming to understand current urban design challenges in the Hunts Point neighborhood of the South Bronx. After the completion of a shared research project at the beginning of the second half of the semester, students will select one area within Hunts Point as their primary design focus, identifying challenges and opportunities.

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.

Students are 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 instructors, 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 and may also communicate via Slack.

Studio archive
Students will create and manage a studio “archive” during the second half of the course. Because information-gathering is a critical part of the design process, we will create easily accessible folders within Brightspace to make information available to all students.

Learning objectives
This advanced topics course will concentrate on developing a methodology that includes the use of digital, analytic, and graphic tools to expand students’ knowledge of urban design. The learning objectives of this course include:

Critical thinking
• develop skills of “critical looking”
• develop in-depth awareness of the built environment
• develop methods to assess urban forms and processes
• gain knowledge of visible and invisible urban design elements and systems

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

Applied research
• identify urban design challenges and opportunities
• use data and demographic information to analyze and bolster urban design proposals
Grading
You will receive feedback when or soon after you show your design work in class. You will also receive grades and instructor comments at the end of each project. Grading for each project includes specific learning objectives, as set out in the grading rubrics. Final grades for this course are on a “portfolio” basis, which means that you may revise and resubmit any work for re-grading until May 9, 2024.

¼ grasp (comprehends ideas and issues of the project);
¼ process (develops and tests ideas with consistency and rigor);
¼ participation (contributes ideas, questions, thoughtful commentary);
¼ resolution (demonstrates completeness and refinement of the project)

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.

Inclusion
We strive to foster a sense of community in and outside of the classroom and hope to offer a welcoming space where individuals of all backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, national origins, gender identities, sexual orientations, religious and political affiliations, body types and abilities are treated with respect. It is our sincere belief that the diversity students bring to the classroom is a source of inspiration, strength, and knowledge. If, at any point, you feel that these goals are not being met or could be improved, please reach out to either instructor. We want to make our classes and our school an inclusive and equitable environment for everyone.

Hardware and software
Digital design tools may include Adobe Illustrator, InDesign, and Photoshop; Cadmapper; ArcGIS, QGIS, R, 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 expected. Therefore, it is our policy that students refrain from all personal digital communication during class time. Practically speaking, this means no social media, no phone calls, no texting. To paraphrase our NYU Vice Provost Clay Shirky, class is a place where you have the luxury of focus. Please contact the instructor before class if you have a special situation that would be affected by this policy.

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 as part of Wagner Student Policies.

All work you create for this class must be your own. You are required to credit any sources, including borrowed or artificially-generated text or images (see below) which
have contributed to the development of your ideas or final products. Presenting ideas, words, objects, images and sounds as your own without acknowledging their sources is considered plagiarism. If you are unsure about what is expected and how to abide by the academic integrity policy, please ask us.

Students may use tools such as GPT-4, ChatGPT, Dall-E 3, Midjourney or similar programs to help generate design ideas as long as their use is properly cited for any and all work submitted for grading, review, or discussion in class. The MLA provides very helpful examples for citing generative AI.

If any student in this class is unsure about what is expected of you and how to abide by the academic integrity code, please consult with us.

**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 by ½ letter grade per occurrence; 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 us 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.

**Late assignments**

Students are expected to upload work-in-progress to Brightspace and Google Slides the night before each stated due date. Late projects and papers may be penalized.

**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.

**Student accessibility**

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.

**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 us if you feel comfortable doing so. This will enable us to assist you more directly with relevant resources or referrals.

**Course schedule**

**Week 1  01/22**

*Introduction to Illustrator - Basics, Annotation & Imagery*

Students will learn the basics of Illustrator and learn how to annotate and edit an image.

*Required reading*

*Required viewing*

**Week 2  01/29**

*Illustrator & QGIS - Data and Mapping*

Students will explore new datasets and learn the process of editing a map in Illustrator.

*Required reading* to be completed before class:

Assignment 1 Issue

**Week 3  02/05**

*Illustrator - Perspective Drawing*

Students will learn the foundations of 1 point perceptive drawing in Illustrator

*Required reading* to be completed before class:

**Week 4  02/12**

*Illustrator - Axonometric Diagrams*

Students will use previous lessons to create maps, migrate layers to Illustrator and explode axonometric diagrams.

Assignment 1 Due

Spring 2024 NYU Wagner URPL 2680.001 __7
Week 5  02/19
No Class | Presidents Day

Week 6  02/26
Photoshop - Existing Conditions and Proposals
Students will learn how to edit images in photoshop, add annotation and use generative fill to make site proposals. Assignment 2 Issue

Week 7  03/04
Sketchup - 3D Modeling
Students will learn the basics of 3D modeling using Sketchup. Required reading to be completed before class

Week 8  03/11
Presentation Strategy and Design Reviews
We will use our final class in this 1/2 semester to discuss a cohesive presentation design and review student work. Assignment 2 Due

Week 9  03/18
Spring Recess

Week 10  03/25
Introduction to Urban Design & Neighborhood Challenges
We will use the first class of this 1/2 semester to discuss the arc for the remainder of the term, weekly themes, and urban design challenges and opportunities in the Hunts Point neighborhood. Assignment 3 Issue
- We will discuss required readings during class.
- Students will select research topics and locations as part of Assignment 3.
Required readings to be completed before class:

Week 11  04/01
"Reading the City"
This unit gives an overview of the vocabulary, basic principles, and history of urban design. When we look at different areas within a city, how are priorities and issues made legible?

Assignment 3 Due
- We will discuss required readings during class.

Spring 2024__NYU Wagner URPL 2680.001 __8
• Students will present and discuss their research completed as part of Assignment 3.

**Required readings to be completed before class:**


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**Week 12 04/08**  

**Issue Assignment 4**  

“What Shapes a City?”

This unit looks into the forces—economic, legal, social, environmental—that shape a city. How do different neighborhoods within a city develop their unique character and identity?

• We will discuss required readings during class.

• Students will present and discuss their progress as part of Assignment 4.

**Required readings to be completed before class:**


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**Week 13 04/15**  

“The City and its Publics”

This week focuses on how public spaces, including streets, sidewalks, parks, and plazas, form connective tissue within cities.

• We will discuss required readings during class.

• Students will present and discuss their progress as part of Assignment 4.

• [Field Trip—to be confirmed]
Required readings to be completed before class:

Week 14 04/22
“The Global City”
This unit introduces the concept of the “global city” and how mass migration, free flow of capital, and politics have contributed to our understanding of these places.

- We will discuss required readings during class.
- Students will present and discuss their progress as part of Assignment 4.

Required readings to be completed before class:

Week 15 04/29
“The Resilient and Inclusive City”
This unit connects urban design to positive public health outcomes, enhancing mobility for all city residents, mitigating urban destruction from extreme weather events, and environmental justice.

- We will discuss required readings in class.
- Students will present and discuss their progress as part of Assignment 4.
Required readings to be completed before class:

Week 16 05/06

Assignment 4 Due
Final Presentations
Changes to this schedule may occur based on opportunities/contingencies that might arise during the semester; a revised schedule will be issued if needed.