

Urban Studies

V3992x-V3993y

Senior Seminar in Urban Studies: The Built Environment

Wednesdays 6:10 pm-8:00pm

Lehman Hall 421

Rohit T. Aggarwala

rta4@columbia.edu

Office hours: Wednesdays 5pm-6pm and by appointment

Overview

Sustainability is one of the most pervasive topics of current urban policy. From the pioneering efforts of Portland, Oregon, to the projects to build entirely new cities designed around carbon neutrality in Asia, urban leaders and planners around the world are considering sustainability as a key component of urban policy.

The goal of this course is to explore the broad topic of urban sustainability as part of the process of the senior thesis for the urban studies major. As an introduction to the topic, and with a view towards exploring and identifying a thesis topic, the class will explore the concept of sustainability using New York City's PlaNYC as a primary text.

Once topics are identified, the class will convert to a thesis writing workshop; students will develop a detailed proposal for the thesis and draft the first section of the thesis in the Fall semester; and finish the thesis in the Spring semester, with significant time allowed for a major rewrite. Through all of these stages, each student will be matched with a peer reader who will provide (along with the professor) detailed comments on each delivered assignment. The role of the peer reader is critical, and each student's performance as a peer reader will comprise 15% of his/her final grade. Not only is peer feedback important to the writer who receives it, but the practice of giving thoughtful criticism of someone else's work is fundamental to academia and to professional practice.

The thesis itself is the student's own work and each student should select a topic that he or she finds compelling. The paper could take the form of a strategy document or policy memo; a critique of an existing policy; or a historical treatment tracing the development of an idea relevant to the built environment or sustainability. There are constraints on a good topic; if you don't speak Russian, you may not be able to focus on Moscow unless there are lots of resources in English available. As a public official, the professor will also require that attention be paid to political realities when analyzing a situation or making a proposal.

As a thesis workshop, the class schedule includes many weeks when the class will not meet in its entirety but will be workshops or longer meetings between the student, the peer reader, and the professor.

Class topics and readings

Book availability: Except for Robert Moses and the Modern City (on reserve at Butler and Avery), all texts are available online.

September 3 Is the city sustainable? What is a thesis?

In-class reading: David Owen, “Green Manhattan: Why New York is the greenest city in the U.S.,” *New Yorker*, October 18, 2004

Topic Generation

September 10 Land Use and Transportation

Readings:

PlaNYC, pages 1-49, 72-97, 140-155

Betsy Gotbaum, ed, “Twelve for 2030: Responses to PlaNYC: A Greener, Greater New York,” April 2007, pages 3-8, 11-12, 15-16, 22-26
(http://pubadvocate.nyc.gov/policy/documents/Gotbaum_2030_response_000.pdf)

McKinsey Global Institute, “Preparing for China’s Urban Billion,” March 2008
(http://www.mckinsey.com/mgi/publications/china_urban_summary_of_findings.asp)

Ballon and Jackson, ed, *Robert Moses and the Modern City*, 65-133
(Note: on reserve at Butler and at Avery)

Optional: Streetsblog Congestion Pricing Q&A with Rohit Aggarwala
(www.streetsblog.org/2007/09/17/congestion-pricing-qa-with-rohit-aggarwala-part-1/)

September 17 Energy, Air, and Water

Readings:

PlaNYC, pages 50-71. 98-129

Gotbaum, ed, pages 9-10, 13-14

“The Elusive Negawatt,” the Economist, May 8, 2008
(http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story_id=11326549)

Taxi articles to be handed out

September 24 Climate Change and other topics

Readings:

PlaNYC, pages 130-139

Gotbaum, ed, pages 17-21

International Panel on Climate Change, “Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report”
(<http://www.ipcc.ch/ipccreports/ar4-syr.htm>)

The Clean Air Partnership, “Cities Preparing for Climate Change,”
(http://www.cleanairpartnership.org/pdf/cities_climate_change.pdf)

October 1 No class – no office hours -- first list of topics due

October 8 Discussion of topics in class

Problem Refinement

October 15 Extended office hours – required one-on-one meetings 5-9pm

October 22 No class – no office hours – proposals due

October 29 Discussion of proposals, assignment of readers

November 5 Short presentations I
Presentation notes due 3 days prior to professor and peer reader

November 12 Short presentations II
Presentation notes due 3 days prior to professor and peer reader

November 19 Short presentations III
Presentation notes due 3 days prior to professor and peer reader

November 26 No class, no office hours – Thanksgiving

December 3 Last class – first section draft papers due

Due via email by Friday, December 19: comments by reader on paper

To be sent out by Dec 31 by email: comments from professor, provisional grade for fall semester

PRELIMINARY schedule for Spring 2009 – subject to change

Research and writing

January 21	Recap; group reflections on writing the first section and comments received from professor and peer reviewer
January 28	Individual meetings with reader and student I (5-9 pm)
February 4	Individual meetings with reader and student II (5-9pm)
February 11	No class; office hours instead 5-8 pm
February 18	No class, no office hours -- Potential visit to Museum of the City of New York exhibit on PlaNYC

Revising and editing

February 25	No class; office hours instead
March 4	Short presentations of findings I -- FIRST DRAFT OF THESIS DUE
March 11	Short presentations of findings II -- Comments due from reader to prof and writer
March 18	No class, no office hours – spring break
March 25	Short presentations of findings III
April 1	Short presentations of findings IV
April 8	No class – writing (office hours during class)
April 15	No class – writing (office hours during class)
April 22	Theses due to professor and reader
April 29	Last class

Potential topics for theses (not exhaustive):

Sections of a new sustainability plan for New York or another city:

- New chapter plus supporting analysis for an area not covered in PlaNYC (e.g., waste management, schools, food supply), plus a political strategy paper
- An alternative treatment of a chapter of PlaNYC or that of another city's sustainability plan, showing a different approach to the same topic, plus a critique of the existing plan's chapter (e.g., energy strategy based on renewables, not featured heavily in PlaNYC)
- A high-level sustainability plan for a city that does not have a sustainability plan, plus a political strategy paper

Academic policy critique

- Critique of a section in PlaNYC discussing its development, the choices made, and progress to date
- Post-analysis of one chapter or subsection of PlaNYC, discussing the proposal, public reaction, and implementation
- Comparison of two or three cities' plans (or specific policy chapters thereof) evaluating choices made, choices rejected, political and structural situation, and relative success

Historical papers

- Consider the development of an area related to urban sustainability in one city and explain how it developed.

Graded Assignments:

Grading for this course will be for the entire year; you will receive a “Y” on your transcript (for “year-long”) for the first semester. The final thesis itself, due in March, will account for 50% of your grade; interim products, in-class participation, and feedback to peers will account for the rest, with each semester carrying equal weight. **Late assignments** will lose 5% of the possible full credit for each day late, unless the professor’s approval has been gained in advance, in which case the penalty may be reduced at the professor’s discretion.

Fall semester (25% of your full-year grade):

- Topic list (due via email to professor on October 1): a list of 3 different ideas you are considering for your thesis, described by roughly a paragraph, including the key problem you would consider, existing resources, and what might complicate the research or analysis. (1% of the final, year-long grade)
- Thesis proposal: (due via email to professor on October 22): 3-5 pages outlining the question and why it is important; the hypotheses you are working from and what either positive or negative findings would suggest; draft outline of the thesis; and a preliminary bibliography of key sources. (2%)
- In-class presentation: (due three days prior to the presentation to the class): a 15-minute presentation of the question, key findings to date, expected outcomes of your research. This can be done via powerpoint, using handouts, or in some other way, but a key expectation is that some data that is part of your research will be shared with the group. (2%)
- First portion of thesis: The first section will be due at the end of the semester. (10%)
- Peer reviewers: Each student will be assigned another student to serve as a peer reviewer. As a peer reviewer, you will be required to provide comments to the student’s proposal, in-class presentation, and written edits on the first portion of the thesis. (8%)
- In-class participation (2%)

Spring (25% of the full-year grade, plus final thesis worth 50%):

- First draft of full thesis: (Due March 4 to professor and peer reviewer). This should be a full-length first cut at the entire paper. While the paper need not be editing for writing style, footnote format, etc., citations and bibliography should be included and the paper should be comprehensible. (10%)
- Peer reviewer comments on first draft, plus at presentation (due March 11 to professor and author): You will provide marginal comments, editing suggestions, and broad suggestions to your assigned reviewee. (7%)
- In-class presentations: a 15-minute presentation of your findings, using powerpoint or handouts if they are useful in helping your audience engage with your material and provide useful discussion and questions. (6%)
- In-class participation (2%)
- Final thesis: due to professor on April 22 (50%)
- *Note: All dates for the Spring semester are provisional and subject to change*