

## Example of a Well-Designed Course in: GEOGRAPHY

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### 1. Specific Context

- **The subject matter:** Understanding the spatial organization of cities and how this varies across the world
- **The title of the course:** Urban Geography
- **Typical class size:** 20-40
- **Level of the course:** Upper-division & Graduate-level
- **Mode of delivery:**
  - Face to face
- **Type of institution:**
  - 4-year University

### 2. General Description of the Course

This course reviews the dominant themes in the sub-discipline of urban geography, with a focus on how different theoretical interpretations reveal the form and functions of cities in different ways and across regional contexts. This course will provide mechanisms for student geographers to get out in the field and apply these theories through fieldwork and primary observation in the surrounding community.

### 3. Big Purpose of the Course

This course will provide students with the tools to participate more effectively in the public policy and daily life that shapes the cities of all sizes and types in which they live. Cities are not inert backdrops, but are constructed through cultural ideas, planning policies and more ephemeral, but very real, spaces that include and exclude different people. This course will highlight the politics of urban space and how students can work to make the cities more socially-just places to live in.

#### 4. Important Situational Factors/Special Pedagogical Challenge

<p><b><u>Situational Factors:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>Nature of the students:</u> full-time students; upper-division or graduate; majors from geography &amp; planning, sustainable development, business, sociology; students have little to no experience with qualitative, experiential approaches to cities; students come from diverse urban places (small towns to big cities); almost all are from NC; almost all white; few have been to any city outside the US; most have had at least one other human geography course.</li> <li>2. <u>Characteristics of the teacher:</u> background in postcolonial urban geography; expertise on a range of qualitative methods and knowledge of GIS; research focused on African cities; this course will be offered once every year; motivated by issues of social justice in cities</li> </ol>	<p><b><u>Responses/Solutions:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Diverse academic backgrounds will be spread out among assigned groups; different experiences with cities will be spread out among groups; time spent at beginning of the class discussing what is urban geography and how the activities of the class will help students understand more than quantitative and normative approaches to cities; a global focus on cities will provide insight into different ways that cities function in different regional contexts.</li> <li>2. Bring a variety of urban issues from around the world (not just focused on North American cities as the class usually does) into the class through different activities: direct engagement with the local urban environment, but also movies and books that are set in different cities around the world to compare and contrast the experiences. Also bringing in diverse local actors (homeless advocates, city planners, local store owners) to give a variety of perspectives on the local environment.</li> </ol>
<p><b><u>Special Pedagogical Challenge:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students may not be motivated to learn this material if they are not planners, or people who think that this applied to their field.</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Responses/Solutions:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As an introduction to the course students will participate in an in-class activity to think through the importance of these issues and approaches to individuals and how they have seen this play out in their own lives or in local politics.</li> <li>• Further, through the methods of this class, and specifically the rich learning experience, students will begin to experience how the form, function, politics and daily realities of</li> </ul>

	<p>cities are not only lessons for planners, but for everyone who lives in an urban place (big or small).</p>
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## 5. 3-Column Table

Use this table below to provide information about these three aspects of your course design.

Learning Goals:  
Learning Activities:

Assessment Activities:

<p><b>1. Foundational Knowledge:</b></p> <p>Identify and interpret the main theoretical and methodological approaches to the analysis of urban spaces and processes.</p>	<p>Readiness Assessment Tests (first as individuals then collaborating as a group on the answers). Student will work in their assigned group for the course.</p> <p>Take home essays after every section to assess individual learning.</p>	<p>Reading brief chapters lecture, in-class group discussions.</p>
<p><b>2. Application:</b></p> <p>Apply these theories to analyze specific observations in a city.</p>	<p>Community Walk map with their uploaded data (see below this chart for full explanation)</p> <p>Urban Diary: Web entry addressing the field work completed for the current course theme.</p>	<p>Completing the Commu activity five times during term, once after each r theoretical approach ha presented and discusse</p> <p>Completing the group v activities and addressing questions about each o themes during the term</p>
<p><b>3. Integration:</b></p> <p>Identify the interconnected roles of processes, materials, practices and ideas in creating various urban forms.</p> <p>Identifying the connection of ideas in the course to their own personal lives.</p>	<p>Urban diary: After each of the five entries, address questions that link prior themes to the current theme and what this reveals about specific urban processes. To be posted online.</p> <p>Personal in-class reflections by individual students at the end of each theme.</p>	<p>Using questions that lin larger themes in the co together and asking stu make those connection reflections on their field</p> <p>Completing personal re on how the methods of or theoretical approach explain an experience t</p>
<p><b>4. Human Dimension:</b></p> <p><b>A. Learning about ONE-SELF:</b></p> <p>Reflect on their role in creating the city and, in turn, how their experience in the city, and the form of the city itself, shapes the student.</p>	<p>Urban diary group project</p> <p>Participation in structured debates on controversial urban issues.</p> <p>Novel map: student read a novel based in an urban setting and create a mental map based on</p>	<p>In groups, students wil 'urban diary' of their ac Boone five times during once after each theoret approach has been pre discussed in class. They reflect in their groups h experiences and those observed of others with</p>

<p><b>B. Interacting with OTHERS:</b></p> <p>Observe and reflect on the potential for and limitations upon various actors (homeless, mayors, moms pushing strollers) in their urban experience.</p> <p>Interact with various urban actors to understand how they interpret the urban environment</p> <p>Reflect upon the diversity of ideas of others in the class regarding urban phenomena discussed in the course.</p>	<p>one of the main character's experiences and perspectives.</p>	<p>framework, and find original material to present those reflections on a blog. This is accompanied by text to</p> <p>In-class discussions and structured debates on controversial issues: homelessness, alternative transport, etc.</p> <p>Reading a novel based on setting to explore the various perspectives and experiences people have in cities.</p>
<p><b>5. Caring:</b></p> <p>Develop a respect for the ways that cities can include and exclude certain actors through critical analysis of normative ideas of what a city is 'supposed to look like' and how it should function.</p>	<p>Pre- and post-assessment of attitudes towards different urban issues and populations.</p>	<p>Invite guest speaker from planning board, homeless advocates, etc., to discuss real-world application of</p>
<p><b>6. How to Continue Learning:</b></p> <p>Learn how urban policy is crafted, whose voices are included and whose are excluded.</p> <p>Learn how to address urban conflicts (over development, over ideas of how space should be used, etc.) and understand the positions of various users and stakeholders</p>	<p>Working through potential applied solutions to local problems.</p> <p>Designing a template to assess policies, attitudes and decisions of various stakeholders involved in urban decisions. They could use this template to assess situations in whatever city they live in.</p> <p>Create a rubric as a class with which to assess the templates.</p>	<p>Using various debates and studies in print and on students will create a template to assess urban conflicts</p> <p>Class will agree on a rubric which to design this template providing an opportunity to engage in their own peer process.</p>

- Add 1-2 paragraphs of comments about the goals or your effort to identify good goals and appropriate learning and assessment activities.

The community walk project uses the website community walk which utilizes a Google maps interface to allow people to create points and upload simple data (text and pictures). For this project, I will identify six points in town, near campus that students need to go to. Once there they will scan a QR code (that I will have posted with the permission of shop owners or relevant persons) that provides some information (history, politics) relevant to that place. In that place, they will

be required to conduct some sort of research activity specific to that place. These will include: observe and document a phenomenon either through written or photographic observation, interview a user of the space, ask a user to draw a mental map of the space. They may also be required to conduct archival (generally online) research about that place either before or after the event, depending on the context of the phenomenon. They should then use the theoretical approach that we've been focusing on in class to look around and address some questions I provide.

On their travels between places, they may also observe things. They should make observations, take pictures, videos, conduct brief interviews, etc., to explain what is happening in that place. These will be uploaded to the community map. This will be done five times on the same map and the exercises (like the theories) will build upon each other throughout the course. Groups will also keep a website (urban diary) of the project, bringing in outside materials that may be relevant to their experiences and presenting their reflections that tie with course content on that blog. This is an authentic experience because it takes students out of the classroom and literally guides them to use the theories to interpret their own experiences in the city.

## 6. Weekly Schedule

Here is an example of a table to do this. But modify this table to fit the time structure of your course.

Week	Date	In class	Due this day	Before next class
1	Thurs	Course intro, discussion of projects, roles, group dynamics, individual dynamics (introvert, extrovert), group work Pre-assessment of attitudes towards various urban actors & situations		Take this test <a href="http://www.humanme">http://www.humanme</a> look up the results. Be about them. Read intro reader
2	Tues	RAT, lecture & discussion: Centrality & Mobility. Discussion of groups		
	Thurs	cont... lecture and meeting in groups, group assignment		Read sections 1.3-1.4 and sign contracts
3	Tues	NO CLASS: HOLIDAY		
	Thurs	Guest speaker: transportation planner	<b>ROLES &amp; CONTRACTS</b>	Read sections 1.3-1.4
4	Tues	RAT, lecture & discussion: Global Cities & Transnationalism		
	Thurs	Group assignments, roles, contracts Hand out first mapping assmt	<b>TAKE-HOME ESSAY 1</b>	Think about how to ap group. Begin it. Coord Begin uploading to co
5	Tues	video: Gentrification in Portland		
	Thurs	Guest speaker. Topic: encouraging redevelopment in the city		Read sections 2.1-2.2
6	Tues	RAT, lecture & discussion: Nature & Materiality		Finish uploading mate
	Thurs	Personal reflections and discussion	<b>FIRST MAP &amp; WEB POST</b>	Read sections 2.3-2.4
7	Tues	RAT, lecture & discussion: Infrastructure & Architecture		
	Thurs	cont... Hand out second mapping assmt		Read sections 3.1-3.3

8	Tues	RAT, lecture & discussion: Diagram, Photography & Body	<b>TAKE-HOME ESSAY 2</b>	Coordinate and complete
	Thurs	Discussion of creating final template for assessing conflict in urban politics		Read sections 3.4-3.5
9	Tues	RAT, lecture & discussion: Virtuality & Surveillance		Finish uploading materials
	Thurs	Personal reflections and discussion Hand out third mapping assmt	<b>SECOND MAP &amp; WEB POST</b>	
10	Tues	video: <i>Urbanized</i>	<b>TAKE-HOME ESSAY 3</b>	Coordinate and complete
	Thurs			read section 4.1 of course
11	Tues	RAT, lecture & discussion: Segregation		
	Thurs	Guest speaker: Affordable housing advocate		read section 4.2-4.3 in
12	Tues	RAT, lecture & discussion: Urban politics & Community	<b>TAKE-HOME ESSAY 4</b>	Finish uploading materials
	Thurs	Personal reflections and discussion Create a rubric for assessing template for conflict assessment	<b>THIRD MAP &amp; WEB POST</b>	Coordinate and complete
13	Tues	class novel map presentations	<b>NOVEL MAP</b>	read sections 5.1-5.2 in
	Thurs	RAT, lecture & discussion: Consumption & Media		
14	Tues	Guest speaker: Homeless advocate		read sections 5.3-5.4 in
	Thurs	RAT, lecture & discussion: Public Space & Commemoration		Finish uploading materials
15	Tues	Personal reflections and discussion Hand out fifth mapping assmt	<b>FOURTH MAP &amp; WEB POST</b>	
	Thurs	NO CLASS: T-DAY		
16	Tues	Post-assessment of attitudes towards various urban actors & situations	<b>TAKE-HOME ESSAY 5</b>	Coordinate and complete
	Thurs	Discussion of group projects and findings.	<b>TEMPLATE FOR ASSESSING URBAN ISSUES DUE</b>	finalize project, write

- Include, if possible, a brief description of your teaching strategy

Geography is a discipline that promotes getting out into the field and exploring the world by observing and even interacting with it. In order to expose students to urban geography and make it accessible, I focus on their own urban geographies, and how they interact with urban spaces through various media. This occurs through a variety of methods: the semester-long group project, reading a novel set in a city, in-class videos, guest speakers and short field trips out of the classroom during class periods to witness or observe a specific phenomenon (e.g. a sanctioned graffiti wall to explore the absorption of illegal activities into sanctioned space, the creek running through campus to talk about nature in the city). We then take class time to bring the themes and theory we discuss together through these encounters. Filtering the sometimes dense urban theory through their own experiences, many shared with their classmates, creates an environment where everyone can contribute.

- Add 1-2 paragraphs of comments about anything special you needed to do, to make this course work right.

This course relies heavily on group work, which students either love or hate. However, with advice and materials from a senior colleague, I began the course by having several deliberate discussions about culture, individualism and collaboration. Asking students to be deliberate about recognizing the challenges and opportunities presented by a focus on group work brought these issues into the open so everyone could acknowledge them.

I assigned groups after asking people their strengths and weaknesses relative to what would eventually be the roles of each group member (the editor, the person who managed the website, etc.). After groups were assigned, I had them decide on their individual roles and sign a

contract outlining what their responsibilities were and posted them on the course website.

I also had to have a way of evaluating individuals as well as the group. After each of the five submissions I had each group member evaluate themselves and their cohort's participation, effort and quality of work using a Likert scale and set of questions. After the second and fifth (final) submission, I had open-ended questions that asked groups members to evaluate each other, which allowed for more issues to be raised. I was able to intervene in one group after the second submission and the group worked better after that. Students were graded individually based on what other group members said about them and whether they turned in the evaluations they were supposed to.

The next time I do a project like this in a class, I will have the students create those evaluation sheets, essentially the rubric for how they want to be graded individually.

## **7. Evidence of Impact** (optional)

Provide any evidence you have, quantitative or qualitative, about the impact of the re-designed course on:

The first time I taught this course, students felt there was too much reading and that the course was too theoretical. Organizing the course around group work meant that students talked to each other more, both in and out of class.

Students really enjoyed getting out of the classroom and applying the lessons in the 'real world.' The average grades were higher after the course was redesigned and there was much more in-class discussion and engagement even during lectures. I also had more interaction with the students, especially telling me how much they enjoyed the fieldwork and crafting websites to reflect their work.

## **8. Most Exciting Aspect of the Re-Designed Course for Me** (optional)

Add 1-2 paragraphs about anything that was especially exciting to you, about the re-designed course, for example:

- Enabling you to come up with a creative exercise
- The reaction of students, the energy level of the class
- Etc.

I really enjoyed integrating fieldwork and an online component to the standard lectures and reading materials of the course. I have wanted to integrate more electronic materials into my course and given students to power to do that themselves as well made it more fun for me and them. I was impressed with the degree to which they took the design and content of the websites and how effectively they communicated information. It was more fun for them than writing a paper, and I believe they got more out of it, and I got to see better results.

Geography is about observing and getting out into the field, but most courses students must sit in a classroom for 50-75 minutes. This redesign made my course more exciting and accessible to students.

## **9. My Contact Information**

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