
Class meeting: M 1:30 PM – 4:10 PM
Class location: EXPL 2312
Sect/Credits: 001 / 3 credit hours
Instructor office: EXPL 2413

Instructor: Nathan Burtch
Email: nburtch@gmu.edu
Office hours: W 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM
(via Zoom)

General Information

Classmate contact information:

Name	Email	Phone

Catalog description: Structure and internal differentiation of cities. Variety of perspectives on nature of cities, and opportunities for intensive use of space. Urban problems and alternatives in their spatial context.

Course overview: The majority of people both in the United States and in the world are categorized as living in urban settings. Even if you do not consider yourself from an urban place, chances are you have in the past had interaction within an urban context. Urban geography uses the synthesizing dimension of space to study dense, populated places. By using space as a lens of inquiry, this course will examine the spatial patterns seen in urban places and urban people through historical, sociological, economic, and psychological components.

Urban and metropolitan regions are created and spatially arranged based upon the decisions, relationships, and interactions of myriad people. This course will investigate these decisions, relationships, and interactions. Why do cities develop? How do cities develop? Who chooses to live in cities? How does city life affect the sociology and psychology of people? What is ‘urban’ versus ‘metropolitan’? Why are some urban areas prosperous while others are in decline? What opportunities are afforded to people within cities? What challenges do people face within cities?

Target audience: This course is co-listed at the 300/500 level; it is therefore intended for both undergraduate and graduate students interested in urban topics. GGS 306 is a core required course for the Urban Science concentration in the BS GEOG and the Urban Informatics minor. Additionally, this course is categorized as a systematic course in GGS and can be used as such in either the GEOG BS or BA degrees, or the GEOG minor. The course can also serve as an upper-level elective for either degree or minor. Beyond academic programs, this course is appropriate for any student at Mason that wishes to learn about cities and urban areas.

Applicable learning outcomes: Successful completion of this course will enable students to:

1. Articulate different development patterns of cities through history, especially cities of the United States
2. Evaluate major theories about urban areas and urban people

3. Write effectively about urban concepts and issues
4. Understand the opportunities and constraints people face in urban areas
5. Understand the diverse experiences of people within urban contexts

Prerequisites: None

Enrollment and repeat policy: GGS 306 follows the general Mason policy that an undergraduate course can be repeated for grade up to three times. Students enrolling in this course again must submit all newly completed work.

Course Materials

Required text:

Kaplan, D. H. and S. R. Holloway. 2024. *Urban geography*. 4th ed. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

ISBN 13: 978-1-119-93027-3

In addition to this recommended text, other readings will be posted to Canvas. Students are expected to read before class and be prepared to discuss topics from the readings.

GGS computer lab and virtual computing: The lab in EXPL 2102 is open 24 hours for you to use. Registration in a GGS class should automatically grant you access. Please contact ggsit@gmu.edu to report issues.

Mason provides access to Mason Labs virtual computing through your web browser. In order to access it, you will need to install both a Mason VPN (<https://its.gmu.edu/service/virtual-private-network-vpn/>) and the Citrix Workspace app (<https://www.citrix.com/products/receiver.html>). After logging into the VPN, you can then access <https://mymasonapps.gmu.edu/> using your Mason directory ID. Once inside, you will be able to access Mason Labs and have a virtual connection to a Mason lab computer with some specialized software. You can connect to the Microsoft One Drive cloud storage that each Mason student has or connect to local storage drives.

Software, hardware, and data: There are no specific content planned for this class that requires special software, hardware, or data beyond those generically available on computing systems (like word processing software). It is recommended that students have the technological bandwidth to stream data; students should have regular, reliable access to a computer with an updated operating system and a stable broadband Internet connection (consistent 1.5 Mbps or higher download and upload speed; you can use <https://www.speedtest.net/> to check the speed of your connection).

Online materials and email: This course will make extensive use of Canvas at Mason. Course materials such as assignments will be available only in electronic version on Canvas. Also, students will be expected to submit assignments online through Canvas. **Only Word document (.docx or .doc) or Adobe PDF (.pdf) file formats will be accepted**, with some exceptions. Grades will be posted on Canvas as well. Make sure you are familiar and comfortable with the Canvas interface.

Students are required to have a Mason NetID and associated @gmu.edu email account, which will allow you access to Canvas and lab computers. Please use this university email account when

contacting the professor regarding this class; as explained in the Administrative section below, the course professor will not respond to messages sent from a non-Mason email address. Students may also use Microsoft Teams to communicate with the professor, although students should not expect instant responses from these direct chats; in other words, Teams is not a 24/7 direct support line for the class.

Grading

Papers (50%): Over the course of the semester, students will write four (4) different types of papers. Each student will write a report, an op/ed, an analysis, and a book critique that students will submit both as an assignment for grading and in a course discussion board so peers can read and evaluate. Each of these papers will be worth 12.5% of the overall course grade. More information will be posted to Canvas and discussed in class.

Final exam (20%): The final is a cumulative examination of topics covered in this course. The exam will (most probably) be a mix of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, short answer, and long answer questions. The focus of questions will be on lectures, but a few questions may come from readings or other portions of course. Details about question types and length of the exam will be given as the exam date approaches.

Peer evaluations (10%): Students will post their completed papers in the course discussion board on Canvas. For each, every student will submit an evaluation of three of their peers. This means that 12 evaluations overall will be submitted. Evaluations are composed of several rating questions and one paragraph-length comment. The professor will compile evaluations and give them anonymously to students as part of the paper grading process. Each student will be randomly assigned certain papers to evaluate to ensure that each student receives paper evaluations.

Activities (10%): A variety of activities are expected to be completed during the course. While most activities will be completed during course meeting times, occasional activities will need to be completed outside of class. Activities may include short writing, group/class discussions, data analysis, and online discussions. Details for each activity will be provided in turn.

Urban music playlist (10%): On Canvas, each student will develop over the semester a playlist of music in which lyrics relate to cities, urban features, or urban culture. Students are expected to add one song to their list on Canvas each week and will complete the 14-song playlist with a written portion by the end of the semester.

Undergraduate grading scale:

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Percent Required</i>			<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Percentage of Total Grade</i>
A+	96 to 100	C+	76 to 79.9	Papers (4)	50%
A	93 to 95.9	C	73 to 75.9	Final Exam	20%
A-	90 to 92.9	C-	70 to 72.9	Peer eval.	10%
B+	86 to 89.9	D	60 to 69.9	Activities	10%
B	83 to 85.9	F	<60	Music list	10%
B-	80 to 82.9				

Note on attendance: Regular attendance is an expectation. Those that make a habit of missing class tend to do worse in this course than those that do attend. It is in your best interest to come to class and participate as attendance will lead to a better understanding of course concepts. Students are responsible for any announcement given by the instructor during class regardless of their personal attendance.

Students that must miss classes because of religious observances or participation in University activities should provide documentation to the professor within the first two weeks of the course. Reasonable accommodations will be provided for work missed on those days. It is expected that if a student has one of these excused absences on a day in which an assignment is due that the student submits the assignment early.

Make-up and late assignment policies: Due dates are explicitly stated. All assessed/graded items in this course, besides live Activities, will be accepted past the ascribed due date until **May 12th**. Late penalties are assigned in a two-tiered system. Items turned in **within seven (7) days will result in a 10% deduction** for the item. Items **later than seven (7) days will result in a 25% deduction** for the item. This penalty begins 1 minute after the due date. Technical excuses ("computer system error", "didn't submit correctly on Canvas", etc.) will not be accepted as reasons for late work. You are expected to start work early. **Never underestimate the time you will spend on the assignments.**

If you are ill or physically indisposed and cannot submit work on time, you must notify the instructor beforehand for you to have a chance to make up the work without late penalty. It is in your best interest to turn in everything on time to avoid falling irrecoverably behind. Please contact the instructor if you are struggling and you will receive aid as best as the instructor can provide.

Incomplete policy: Students may request an incomplete for this course if they (a) currently have a 75% grade based on submitted coursework and relative weighting; (b) have completed at least 50% of coursework materials; (c) cannot complete scheduled coursework for a cause beyond reasonable control; and (d) submit an Incomplete Grade Contract with the professor. In general, students have until the 9th week of the following full semester to complete their work (unless it is the student's final semester). All incomplete work will be assigned late penalties as outlined in this syllabus.

Administrative

Academic integrity: *The following statement is adapted from the Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning.* No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. The integrity of the University community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. Mason has an Honor Code, which you can read fully at the Office for Academic Integrity (<https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/>). The Honor Code Pledge reads as follows:

To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University Community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set for this Honor Code: Student Members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.

The Mason Honor Code defines cheating, plagiarism, stealing, and lying. It is expected that you understand these definitions. If you have any doubts about what constitutes cheating, plagiarism, stealing, or lying in the academic context, please see your professor. **Acts of academic dishonesty in this course may be penalized with failure of either the work in question or the entire course.**

While collaboration and group learning is encouraged in this course, each student **absolutely must** turn in their own work, from their own computer, and any discussion must be theirs alone, and not attributable to another person or group, *except where noted* (for example, quoting authors as a small portion of your scholarly work). This also applies to online sources; you cannot copy the words of anyone else for any graded part of this course. It is not enough to exchange a few synonyms within a sentence! You must write, summarize, and analyze with your own words and ideas. **Student use of Generative-AI models or tools must also conform to the Honor Code.**

Course materials and student privacy: All course materials posted to Canvas or other course sites are private; by federal law, any materials that identify specific students (via their name, voice, or image) **must not be shared** with anyone not enrolled in this class. Video recordings of class meetings that include audio or visual information from other students are private and must not be shared. Live video conference meetings (e.g. Collaborate or Zoom) that include audio or visual information from other students must be viewed privately and not shared with others in your household. Some of our synchronous meetings in this class may be recorded to provide necessary information for students in this class. Recordings will be stored on Canvas and will only be accessible to students taking this course during this semester. **Sharing of instructor-created materials** (lectures, notes, videos, assignments, exams, etc.) to others not currently enrolled in this specific section of this class, **including to public or private online “study” sites, is considered a violation of Mason’s Honor Code.**

Student privacy is governed by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). In addition to the privacy concerns outlined above, FERPA dictates how communication between students and faculty can occur electronically. Students must use their Mason email accounts to discuss anything pertaining to their enrollment in this course. I will not answer questions from non-Mason email addresses pertaining to this class.

Disability statement: This course complies with Mason policies for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with Disability Services (DS). DS can be contacted by phone at (703) 993-2474, or in person at SUB I Suite 2500, or online by the link at the end of this section. Students who suspect that they have a disability, temporary or permanent, but do not have documentation are encouraged to contact DS for advice on how to obtain appropriate evaluation. A faculty contact sheet from DS authorizing your accommodation is needed before any accommodation can be made. The faculty contact sheet should be furnished to the professor preferably within the first two weeks of class or as soon as an accommodation is made. Please visit <https://ds.gmu.edu/> for more information.

Diversity, non-discrimination, and anti-racism: This course, as a part of George Mason’s community, promotes and upholds Mason’s core values of diversity and inclusion. Members of this class should seek to maintain a learning environment of respect across identity, status, origin, and ability. Being inclusive and anti-racist is an active, conscious practice involving self-reflection.

Mason's non-discrimination policy can be read at <https://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/non-discrimination-policy/>. Please utilize the office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI, <https://diversity.gmu.edu/>) for training, resources, and to submit incidence reports. The following is a short portion of the Mason Diversity Statement; visit <https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/general-teaching-resources/mason-diversity-statement/> to read the full statement:

George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty and staff. Through its curriculum, programs, policies, procedures, services and resources, Mason strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study and personal growth.

An emphasis upon diversity and inclusion throughout the campus community is essential to achieve these goals. Diversity is broadly defined to include such characteristics as, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Diversity also entails different viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives. Attention to these aspects of diversity will help promote a culture of inclusion and belonging, and an environment where diverse opinions, backgrounds and practices have the opportunity to be voiced, heard and respected.

Gender identity, pronoun use, and proper address: Students are welcome to share their chosen name and gender pronouns with the instructor and discuss how the instructor can best address you in class and via email. As well, students should be aware that they can use Mason-provided tools to update their chosen name and pronouns; these changes will appear in Canvas class sites among other places. See <https://registrar.gmu.edu/updating-chosen-name-pronouns/> for more information. Your instructor uses *he/him/his* pronouns. When addressing your instructor in writing or verbally, please use “Dr. Burtch” or “Prof. Burtch.” The surname ‘Burtch’ is pronounced the same as ‘birch.’

Instructor availability: Please do not hesitate to contact your instructor if you have questions about course topics or assignments. Your instructor will do his best to answer all weekday emails within 24 hours, and weekend emails within 48 hours. Should you not receive a response within that time frame, you may send a gentle reminder via email. Do try to avoid last-minute emails, as your instructor may not have email accessible immediately before deadlines. It is generally a good practice to avoid sending an email at the first sign of trouble with an assignment; often you will find the proper solution by giving yourself an hour or two to problem solve! Please make use of the office hours listed at the top of this document. Generally, issues can be clarified quickly in person or in a live online chat.

Sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and interpersonal violence: *The following statement is adapted from the Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning.* George Mason is a place for faculty, staff, and students to learn, live, and work. As such, Mason is committed to providing all of us this place that we call campus that is free of discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and other acts of interpersonal violence. All members of this campus are encouraged to seek support in cases of discrimination, sexual harassment/misconduct, or interpersonal violence. [University Policy 1202](#) provides information on the reporting process and resources available. Resources are also linked below.

Students should be aware of **faculty's duty of mandatory reporting**. As a faculty member, I am designated as a "Non-Confidential Employee," and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, stalking, sexual exploitation, complicity, and retaliation to Mason's Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1202 (linked above). If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason's confidential resources, such as the [Student Support and Advocacy Center](#) (SSAC) at (703) 993-3686 or [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (CAPS) at (703) 993-2380. You may also seek assistance or support measures from [Mason's Title IX Coordinator](#) by calling (703) 993-8730 or via email at titleix@gmu.edu.

University-wide closures and class cancellations/delays: There may be times during the semester in which George Mason University announces university-wide closures or delays. Should inclement weather or another emergency force Mason to close, causing our class to cancel meeting times, we will not meet. Check the Mason website and our own Canvas site for updates. Other cancellations or delays to class will be announced via Canvas by your professor. In the event that this course has missed meeting times, the course schedule, assignment deadlines, and other course alterations will be decided upon and announced via Canvas and email by the professor. You are expected to stay abreast of any changes.

Use of electronic devices: Your professor encourages the use of devices that both aid your learning ability and do not distract from the learning of others. Except for mobile phones and audio/video recorders, you are free to use any electronic device that fulfills both of those conditions. All electronic devices should be muted or silenced. Please be respectful of the class and avoid use of social media during class which can distract both you and your classmates. You are expected to adhere to Mason's student code of conduct; disruptive behavior will result in classroom removal. Audio/video recording requires the consent of the professor.

GGG 306 Course Schedule

Dates	Lecture Topics	Coursework Due
Unit 1: The geographic history of urban growth		
Week 1 Jan 27	Introduction to urban geography	Read <i>Kaplan & Holloway</i> (Ch. 1)
Week 2 Feb 3	Urban origins; birth and development of cities	Read <i>Kaplan & Holloway</i> (Ch. 2)
Week 3 Feb 10	US urban system (to 1920) / Urban economics	Read <i>Kaplan & Holloway</i> (Ch. 3); <i>Palen</i> (Ch. 3)
Week 4 Feb 17	US urban system (since 1920) / Globalization effects on US cities	Read <i>Kaplan & Holloway</i> (Ch. 4)
Week 5 Feb 24	US suburban development / Exurban growth and edge cities	Read <i>Macionis & Parrillo</i> (Ch. 4)
Unit 2: Social and spatial landscapes of the city		
Week 6 Mar 3	Urban land use and land value / Gentrification and suburbanization	Read <i>Kaplan & Holloway</i> (Ch. 5)
Spring Recess	<i>Spring Recess – No class</i>	
Week 7 Mar 17	Urban social landscapes and social theories	Paper 1 Book critique Read <i>Kaplan & Holloway</i> (Ch. 6); <i>Macionis & Parrillo</i> (Ch. 5)
Week 8 Mar 24	Watch <i>10 Towns that Changed America</i> and <i>The City</i> / Urbanism and urban behavior (online)	Peer evaluations 1 Watch films Read <i>Phillips</i> (Ch. 12), Lynch (Ch. 3)
Week 9 Mar 31	Housing markets: development and redevelopment	Paper 2 Urban report Read <i>Kaplan & Holloway</i> (Ch. 7)
Unit 3: Society, power, and difference in cities		
Week 10 Apr 7	Segregation, race, and poverty	Peer evaluations 2 Read <i>Kaplan & Holloway</i> (Ch. 8)
Week 11 Apr 14	Immigration and ethnicity / Metropolitan governance & fragmentation	Paper 3 Urban analysis Read <i>Kaplan & Holloway</i> (Ch. 9, 10)
Week 12 Apr 21	Urban transportation / Urban environment	Peer evaluations 3 Read <i>Kaplan & Holloway</i> (Ch. 12, 13)
Week 13 Apr 28	Cities of the less developed world / Regional variations of cities in the less developed world	Paper 4 Urban op/ed Read <i>Kaplan & Holloway</i> (Ch. 15, 16)
Week 14 May 5	Urban planning / Urban utopias	Peer evaluations 4 Read <i>Kaplan & Holloway</i> (Ch. 11)
Finals May 12	Final exam Monday, May 12 1:30 PM – 4:15 PM	Urban Music Playlist

Note: The GGS 306 course schedule is tentative and is subject to revision by the instructor