



GGS 590, GGS 357, GOVT 357: Urban Planning  
Geography and Geoinformation Science  
College of Science  
George Mason University

---

**Semester:** Spring 2024

**Hours:** Monday 1:30 PM - 4:10 PM

**Location:** Exploratory Hall 2312

**Credits:** 3 Credit Hours

**Website:** <https://mymason.gmu.edu>

**Instructor:** Alireza Ermagun

**Office Hours:** Monday 4:30 PM - 6:30 PM (By Appointment)

**Office Location:** 2205 Exploratory Hall

**Email:** [aermagun@gmu.edu](mailto:aermagun@gmu.edu)

**Phone:** (703) 993-1191

---

### **Course Description**

Cities are changing rapidly and are facing complex challenges. According to the World Health Organization, nearly half of the global population currently lives in cities, which is projected to grow to 70% by 2050. This necessitates thinking differently about how to solve 21<sup>st</sup>-century problems. Our Urban Planning course gives an overview of theoretical and empirical urban design and planning models that emerged to describe the spatial structure of cities. It highlights the evolving structure of cities and examines the planning and political processes as well as the economic forces forming cities. This is an interactive and engaging course with real-world applications and activities, where the hypothetical nature of the lessons is used as a jumping-off point to discuss the planning process and how planning occurs on actual projects.

### **Catalog Description**

(Prerequisite: none). Three-hours lecture. An introductory class that gives an overview of urban planning, with primary attention given to planning history, theories, problems, and solutions at national, regional, and urban levels.

### **Learning Objectives**

The goals and expectations of this course are ambitious, but the overarching goal is to give the class a taste of how to think and act as a planner. Over the course of the semester, students should expect to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of what planners do, as well as examine the possibilities and limitations they face. Specific learning goals of this course are to enable students to:

- Understand the chronological order of progress and challenges forming planning theories.
- Explain the rationale behind the origins and causes of the urbanization of America.
- Articulate, evaluate, and compare different urban planning theories, with a focus on their role in the urbanization evolution.

- Gain knowledge about historical and contemporary practices in urban planning.
- Describe how the evolution of cities and regions forms what we observe as urban characteristics, developments, and issues.
- Comprehend the discipline and practice of urban design to critique.
- Demonstrate their capacity to critique improvements and challenges to urban projects, policies, and environments.
- Develop their ability to understand, evaluate, and compare different views on ethics in planning.
- Recognize the historical and current relations between planning policies and political decisions.
- Conceptualize the evolution of land use policies as a part of increasing environmental and social benefits.
- Describe travel forecasting models, including the 4-step generation, distribution, mode choice, and trip assignment process.
- Illustrate the link between transportation planning and land use planning.
- Demonstrate written and oral analysis and communication skills.
- Prepare, present, and lead a case study discussion of a contemporary urban system.

### **Class Participation**

Classes are a combination of lectures and discussions. The students have to have something to say regarding the materials we cover in every session. Class participation will be balanced with both participating in class discussions, small group discussions, and in-class writing assignments about the topic of the day. As students of a major university in the U.S., you have to think of your own concepts based on what you read and hear in class discussions. Therefore, you should be ready to participate in group discussions, jigsaw, and think-pair-share to not only make the class a lot more interesting but also to facilitate your learning through engagement. To help determine your course grade, I will reflect on the quality and quantity of your participation in class discussions. The class starts at 1:30 PM sharp.

### **Course Materials**

**Textbook:** Levy, J. (2017). Contemporary urban planning. Routledge, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition.

Additional Readings will be drawn further from different sources. The readings, along with other course materials such as the syllabus, assignments, and lecture presentations, can be found on the course website.

### **Class Policies and Expectations**

- Your attendance is expected at all scheduled class meetings.
- Cell phones and other communication devices should be turned off or set to silent during class time. I will appoint a few students to keep smartphones out to receive Mason Alert. You are expected to adhere to Mason's student code of conduct; disruptive behavior will result in classroom removal. Audio or

video recording requires the consent of the instructor.

- You should be respectful of fellow classmates, guest speakers, and the instructor at all times.
- All the students are required to do the homework, assignments, case study, and term paper. This will, of course, help you obtain a more profound understanding of the subject.
- Late assignments are not accepted. If you miss a deadline, your grade is automatically 0. Students, however, are given three “green cards” that can be used to turn in homework assignments up to 24 hours late for any assignment throughout the course of semester.
- A student found to have engaged in plagiarism or other scholastic dishonesty as defined by the George Mason University Honor System and Code may be assigned a penalty up to and including failure in the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment, please ask the course instructor directly.
- If you require special accommodations, please contact the course instructor as soon as possible to discuss your needs. Your request and any accommodations will remain strictly confidential.

### Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend every class meeting and are responsible for all material covered during class and any in-class announcements. The official code of class attendance for George Mason University is documented in the Academic Policies: [AP.1 Registration and Attendance](#).

### Class Assignments

This course will have seven graded components consisting of participation, homework assignments, reading response assignments, urban planning news of the day, case study assignment, in-class exams, and a term paper.

Activity	Grade (%)	Individual	Group	Due
Participation	60	×		-
Homework Assignment 1	50	×		Jan 30
Homework Assignment 2	50	×		Feb 6
Homework Assignment 3	50	×		Feb 27
Homework Assignment 4	50	×		Mar 12
Homework Assignment 5	50		×	Mar 19
Homework Assignment 6	50	×		Apr 16
Homework Assignment 7	50	×		Apr 23
Reading Response Assignment 1	60	×		Feb 20
Reading Response Assignment 2	60			Apr 9
Urban Planning News of the Day	30	×		Jan 30-Apr 29
Case Study Assignment	90		×	Mar 25
In Class Exam 1	50	×		Mar 18
In Class Exam 2	50	×		Apr 29
Term Paper	300		×	TBA
Total Grade	1050			

There is a strong link between these seven graded components and the objectives of the course, and student learning will be measured toward the objectives of the course through these graded components. For *undergraduate students*, the term paper assignment will be a group effort on an agreed-upon topic. For *graduate students*, the term paper assignment will be an individual effort on an agreed-upon topic. One of the homework assignments are a group effort, and six are an individual effort. For individual homework assignments, students are given two options: (i) submit five individual homework assignments rather than six individual homework assignments, or (ii) submit six individual homework assignments and eliminate the one with the lowest grade from the final grade.

### **Instructor Availability**

If you have problems or concerns with an aspect of the course, please make an appointment to come and see me. I strive to make this class manageable for all my students, so if you are having difficulties, please let me know. Office hours are not just a time to address problems but also a time to talk with me about your areas of interest, brainstorm topics for your research, and seek career advice. If you have questions about course topics or assignments, I will answer all weekday emails within 24 hours and weekend emails within 48 hours. Should you not receive a response within that time frame, please send a gentle reminder via email. Try to avoid last-minute emails, as I 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; many times, you will find the proper solution by giving yourself an hour or two to problem-solve! Please also make use of the office hours listed at the top of this document. Generally, issues can be clarified quickly in person.

### **Student Honor Code**

George Mason University has an approved Honor Code that applies to all students. The code is 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 forth 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." Upon accepting admission to George Mason University, a student immediately assumes a commitment to uphold the Honor Code, accept responsibility for learning, and follow the philosophy and rules of the Honor Code. Students will be required to state their commitment to examinations, research papers, and other academic work. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the George Mason University community from the requirements or the processes of the Honor Code. For additional information, please visit [George Mason University Honor Code Catalog](#).

### **Title IX**

George Mason University is committed to complying with Title IX, a federal law that prohibits discrimination, including violence and harassment, based on sex. This means that George Mason University's educational programs and activities must be free from sex discrimination, sexual harassment, and other forms of sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know has experienced sex discrimination, sexual violence, or harassment by any member of the University community, you are encouraged to report the conduct to Mason's [Title IX Coordinator](#) at [titleix@gmu.edu](mailto:titleix@gmu.edu) per [University Policy Number 1412](#).

## Support Services

Students who need academic accommodations based on a disability should visit the Disability Services located at Student Union Building I, call (703) 993-2474, or visit the website at <https://ds.gmu.edu/>. Students who suspect that they have a disability, temporary or permanent, but do not have documentation are encouraged to contact Disability Services for advice on how to obtain an appropriate evaluation. A memo from Disability Services authorizing your accommodation is needed before any accommodation can be made. The memo should be furnished to the instructor, preferably within the first two weeks of class or as soon as an accommodation is made.

## A Grading Scale

96-100	A <sup>+</sup>	
93-95.9	A	Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
90-92.9	A <sup>-</sup>	
86-89.9	B <sup>+</sup>	
83-85.9	B	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
80-82.9	B <sup>-</sup>	
76-79.9	C <sup>+</sup>	
73-75.9	C	Represents achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
70-72.9	C <sup>-</sup>	
60-69.9	D	Represents achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet full requirements.
< 60	F	Student fails to meet the course requirements.

## Tentative Course Schedule

Session <sup>1</sup>	Date	Topic	Readings <sup>2</sup>
0	Jan 22	Urban Planning Problems	
1	Jan 29	What is Urban Planning?	Chapter 1
2	Feb 5	History of Planning	Chapter 3 + Chapter 4
3	Feb 12	The Urbanization of America	Chapter 2
4	Feb 19	Transportation Planning	Chapter 12
5	Feb 26	Transportation Planning	Chapter 12
6	Mar 4	Spring Recess (no classes)	
7	Mar 11	In Class Exam 1 (Closed-Book)	
8	Mar 18	Urban Planning Board Games	
9	Mar 25	Case Study Assignment Presentations	
10	Apr 1	Urban Design and Planning Theories	Chapter 10 + Chapter 19
11	Apr 8	Planning and Politics	Chapter 6
12	Apr 15	Ethics and Planning	Articles
13	Apr 22	Parking	Articles
14	Apr 29	Land Use Planning+ In Class Exam 2 (Closed-Book)	Chapter 5 + Chapter 9

<sup>1</sup> Dates and topics are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.

<sup>2</sup> Readings are drawn from Contemporary Urban Planning by John Levy. When resources are insufficient, additional readings will be drawn further from different sources and provided to students.