
Hours: Mo 4:30 PM – 7:10 PM

Location: EXPL 2103

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

Sect/Credits: UG: 001, G:002 / 3 credit hours

Instructor: Nathan Burtch

Email: nburtch@gmu.edu

Instructor office: EXPL 2413

Office hours: TuWe 3:00 – 4:45 PM

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’ and/or ‘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?

The classroom format of this course is largely lecture based, with activities, exercises, and multimedia as supplement. Students are expected to read assigned readings before class begins. The majority of each grade is comprised of written papers and peer evaluations of those papers. The papers will be both submitted on Blackboard for grading and also posted in the class blog for peers to read and evaluate.

Target audience: 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. 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. Explain the differences between the terms city, urban, and metropolitan
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: This course follows the general Mason policy that an undergraduate course can be repeated for grade up to three times. Understand that each academic unit can have more restrictive limits on specific courses. Students that repeat the course must submit all newly completed work.

Course Materials

Required text:

None.

In lieu of a required text, weekly readings will be posted to Blackboard. Students are expected to read before class and be prepared to discuss topics from the readings.

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

Students are required to have a MasonLive/Email account, which will allow you access to Blackboard and lab computers. Please use this university email account when contacting the professor regarding this class.

Grading

Papers (55% UG, 50% G): Over the course of the semester, students will write four (4) different types of papers. Each student will write a report, an op/ed, and a film critique that students will submit both as an assignment for grading and in a course blog so peers can read and evaluate. Each of these papers will be worth 15% (UG)/14% (G) of the overall course grade. The fourth paper is shorter and split into two parts, handed in at the beginning and end of the semester. This paper will be about music written about a city or urban topic, and will be worth 10% (UG)/8% (G) of the overall grade. More information will be posted to Blackboard and discussed in class.

Midterm Exam (15%): There will be one midterm exam for this course. The midterm will (most probably) be a mix of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, and short answer questions covering topics from lecture. You will be given 75 minutes to complete the midterm exam.

Final Exam (20%): The final will have longer essays included in addition to the style of questions on the midterm. Though cumulative, the last half of the course, not covered on the midterm, will have priority.

Peer Evaluations (10% UG, 5% G): Students will post their completed papers in the course blog on Blackboard. For the three longer papers (reports, op/eds, and film reviews), each student will submit an evaluation of four of each paper type. This means that 12 evaluations overall will be submitted. Evaluations will be 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.

Undergraduate grading scale:

<i>Grades</i>	<i>Percentage Required</i>	<i>Grades</i>	<i>Percentage Required</i>	<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Percentage of Total Grade</i>
A+	96 to 100	C+	76 to 79.9	Papers (4)	55%
A	93 to 95.9	C	73 to 75.9	Peer eval.	10%
A-	90 to 92.9	C-	70 to 72.9	Midterm Exam	15%
B+	86 to 89.9	D	60 to 69.9	Final Exam	20%
B	83 to 85.9	F	<60		
B-	80 to 82.9				

Graduate research (10% G): To get graduate credit for this course, graduate students will be required to complete an additional graduate research component. Graduate students will investigate an urban geography topic related to either their own graduate research (if applicable), or to another topic of interest. This research project will consist of an annotated bibliography of relevant literature. You will need to arrange to meet with the instructor during the semester to discuss the topic that you will cover. More details will be provided on Blackboard during the semester. In addition, each individual paper assigned to the class will have additional length requirements for graduate students.

Graduate grading scale:

<i>Grades</i>	<i>Percentage Required</i>	<i>Grades</i>	<i>Percentage Required</i>	<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Percentage of Total Grade</i>
A+	96 to 100	B	83 to 85.9	Papers (4)	50%
A	93 to 95.9	B-	80 to 82.9	Peer eval.	5%
A-	90 to 92.9	C	70 to 79.9	Midterm Exam	15%
B+	86 to 89.9	F	<70	Final Exam	20%
				Grad research	10%

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 is to have one of these excused absences on a day in which an assignment is due that the student submit the assignment early.

Make-up and late assignment policies: Assignment due dates are explicitly stated. **Assignments that are not turned in by the due date will result in a 50% deduction for the assignment.** This penalty begins 1 minute after the due date! Assignments will be accepted up to the final regular class meeting of the semester (May 6th). Technical excuses ("computer system error", "didn't submit correctly on Blackboard", etc.) will not be accepted as reasons for late work. You are expected to start the work early. **Never underestimate the time you will spend on the assignments.**

If you are ill or physically indisposed and cannot submit your assignment on time, you must notify the instructor before class for you to have a chance to make up the assignment. Make-up exams will be given only for University approved excused absences. This policy may seem strict, but 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. If you cannot complete the assignment on time, it can sometimes be better to turn in partially completed work than nothing at all.

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.

Disability statement: This course is in compliance 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 memo from DS authorizing your accommodation is needed before any accommodation can be made. The memo 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.

Mason diversity statement: From <https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/professional-development/mason-diversity-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.

Mason policy on sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and interpersonal violence: As a faculty member and designated “Responsible Employee,” I am required to report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason’s Title IX Coordinator per [university policy 1412](#). If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact the [Student Support and Advocacy Center](#) (703-380-1434), [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (703-993-2380), [Student Health Services](#), or Mason’s [Title IX Coordinator](#) (703-993-8730; cde@gmu.edu).

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. With the exception of 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.

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 Blackboard site for updates. Other cancellations or delays to class will be announced via Blackboard 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 Blackboard and email by the professor. You are expected to stay abreast of any changes.

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; 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.

GGS 306 / 590 Course Schedule

Dates	Lecture Topics	Reading	Due	
Week 1	Jan 21	<i>Martin Luther King Jr. Day – no class</i>		
Week 2	Jan 28	Course introduction / Urban origins	Davis	
Week 3	Feb 4	US urban growth	Palen Ch. 3	City Music 1
Week 4	Feb 11	US suburban and exurban growth	Macionis & Parrillo Ch. 4	
Week 5	Feb 18	Census; defining urban & metropolitan / Urban governance & fragmentation	Orfield Phillips Ch. 13	
Week 6	Feb 25	Internal city form / Spatial arrangements of cities	Cadwallader Ch. 3, 6	
Week 7	Mar 4	The sense of place / Classic urban social theories	Macionis & Parrillo Ch. 5 Wirth	Film Critique
Week 8	Mar 11	<i>Spring Break – no class</i>		
Week 9	Mar 18	Midterm Urban economics and labor	Cadwallader Ch. 7 Jonas et. al. Ch 5	Peer Eval
Week 10	Mar 25	Social class / Wealth and poverty	Kaplan et. al. Ch. 9 Phillips Ch. 11	
Week 11	Apr 1	Urban political economy / critical urban geography	Jonas et. al. Ch 2	Urban Report
Week 12	Apr 8	Urbanism, urban lifestyle, and urban behavior	Cadwallader Ch. 8 Palen Ch. 8	Peer Eval
Week 13	Apr 15	Race, ethnicity, gender, and segregation	Cadwallader Ch. 6 Coates Kaplan et. al. Ch. 9	
Week 14	Apr 22	Housing, homelessness, and sprawl	Kaplan Ch. 8 Palen Ch. 8	
Week 15	Apr 29	Urban crime and education	Anderson Palen Ch. 8	Urban Op/Ed
Week 16	May 6	Migration and mobility		Music 2 Peer Eval
Finals Week	May 13	Final Exam: Monday, May 13, 4:30 – 7:15 PM		Grad research

Note: The GGS 306 / 590 course schedule is tentative and is subject to revision by the instructor