
Hours: MW 10:30 AM – 11:45 AM
Location: Buchanan Hall D003
Website: <https://mymason.gmu.edu>
Sect/Credits: 001 / 3 credit hours

Instructor: Nathan Burtch
Email: nburtch@gmu.edu
Instructor office: EXPL 2413
Office hours: T 2 – 4 PM Via Zoom

General Information

Classmate contact information:

Name	Email	Phone

Catalog description: Analyzes topics of immediate interest.

Course crosslist description: Reviews spatial, policy, and administration principles that guide urban planning activities in the United States. Outlines differences between theory and practice and provides tools, methods, and perspectives commonly incorporated into practice of urban planning and policy analysis.

Course overview: This course is intended as a general introduction to the field of urban planning. The history, practice, and theory of urban planning will be discussed, as well as a few of the different ‘flavors’ of urban planning subfields. Planning has been historically seen as a technical and applied career; this will be introduced by means of a course project intended to see the interdisciplinary and multifaceted approaches needed to be a planning practitioner. Planning is interdisciplinary and multifaceted because cities and urban areas themselves are complicated human constructs, necessitating an examination of the history, geography, sociology, politics, and economics of urban places and urban people. This course will focus upon the foundations of planning as seen in the North American (primarily the United States) context.

The format of the course is largely lecture based. There will also be occasional films, guest speakers, demonstrations, and/or class discussions. You are expected to participate and ask questions.

Choose a metropolitan region: Students will examine one metropolitan region in the United States in detail through a course project. A list of the 100 largest US Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) is on our Blackboard site. Only one person per course will be able to choose each particular MSA. There will be no requirements of physically visiting the city, so feel free to choose from any throughout the country. Details will be provided on the first day of class.

Target audience: This course is a selected topics course in geography. It is appropriate for students interested in urban areas and the practice of planning.

Applicable learning outcomes: Successful completion of this course will teach students:

1. Analyze characteristic features of a metropolis and connect how persistent problems, institutional transformations, and creative expression may emerge from this environment.
2. Interpret, evaluate, compare, and critique the views and experiences of particular social, economic, and cultural groups in the metropolis.
3. Evaluate how an individual or a group may have access to influencing public decisions in the metropolis, how they may pursue collective ends, or how they may contribute to community well-being.
4. Critically analyze a specific topic or question in order to delineate constituent elements of the situation, to define challenges that are faced, and to examine the potential for constructive resolution or development.

Prerequisites: None.

Enrollment and repeat policy: This course is a Selected Topics in Geography course, meaning that students can take up to 12 credits of GGS 590 as long as topics do not repeat. Students enrolling in this course again must submit all newly completed work. Any repeat students must choose a new metropolitan area for their project focus.

Course Materials

Required text: Levy, John M. 2017. Contemporary urban planning. 11th ed. New York: Routledge. ISBN 13: 978-1-138-66638-2

The course textbook is available from various outlets in various forms. It is available through the Mason bookstore or through your online provider of choice. The publisher sells an e-book version (<https://routledgetextbooks.com/textbooks/9781138666382/default.php>) and should also be available through the bookstore. The e-book version is the same as the hard copy, but there are various short-term purchase options that are less expensive. In addition, there may be other readings posted on Blackboard for you to complete.

GG5 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: Two assignments in this course will make use of specific software packages. Details on the usage and access of this software will be provided. 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 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; your professor will not respond to messages sent from a non-Mason email address. Students may also contact your professor through Microsoft Teams, 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

Midterm exams (20%): There will be two midterm exams in this course. Midterms will be short (roughly 20-30 minutes) and composed of short essays and multiple-choice questions. Exams will cover topics from the lectures only but completing readings will help. Each exam will be weighted equally (10% of the overall grade). The exams are not cumulative, but planning is inherently cumulative so your accumulated knowledge in the class will be useful as course topics build upon each other

Final exam (20%): The final exam will resemble the midterms, but will be longer and comprehensive. There will likely be longer essays in addition to short essays and multiple-choice questions.

Course project (30%): Over the course of the semester, students will critically analyze a major metropolitan region within in the United States. A list of the 100 most populous metropolitan regions has been posted to Blackboard. You will hand in drafts of each section of the project during the semester (see Assignments), each focused on a different aspect of the urban system. The project includes both a written document and a presentation.

Current events and issues discussions (10%): Each student will find articles to discuss with the class during the semester regarding current events, debates, policies, and issues of cities and planning. These can be articles from traditional media sources (newspapers) or online media and can include opinion pieces. These must be relatively current. If you find an article you wish to present to the class, you will need to post the article to the course discussion board by the prior Friday before the class week. Students are expected to read the article before class and discuss the issue in class. A grading rubric (number of articles, how participation is assessed, etc.) will be discussed early in class once class size has been established.

Assignments (10%): To keep students moving at a solid pace towards the course project, different sections will be due approximately every two weeks. The due dates are posted in the course calendar.

These are draft sections; students will receive comments on how to improve the section for the final project. Students are expected to expand upon these drafts for the final submission of the project. Each assignment will be graded out of 4 points (4 – Excellent; 3 – Satisfactory; 2 – Unsatisfactory; 0 – Not completed).

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 planning 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.

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	Midterms (2)	20%
A	93 to 95.9	B-	80 to 82.9	Final Exam	20%
A-	90 to 92.9	C	70 to 79.9	Project	30%
B+	86 to 89.9	F	<70	Assignments	10%
				Curr. Events	10%
				Grad research	10%

Graduate student expectations: In order to earn graduate credit, students enrolled in GGS 590 have additional expectations. Graduate students are expected to develop deeper knowledge of the topics presented in class and synthesize with higher-level products and writing. In other words, expectations for the work produced in GGS 590 are commensurate with expectations of a 500-level course. Details on differential grading of graduate students on the above graded items will be provided on Blackboard.

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. Assignments in this course will be accepted past the ascribed due date until December 6th. No late work will be accepted past that date. Late penalties are assigned in a two-tiered system. Assignments turned in **within seven (7) days will result in a 25% deduction** for the assignment. Assignments **later than seven (7) days will result in a 50% deduction** for the assignment. 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 cannot complete the assignment on time, it can sometimes be better to turn in partially completed work than nothing at all.

If you are ill or physically indisposed and cannot submit work on time, you must notify the instructor before class for you to have a chance to make up the work. **Special dispensation is available for students with difficulties due to COVID-19 illness or quarantine;** please contact the instructor to make any special accommodations in this regard. **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.

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.

Course materials and student privacy: All course materials posted to Blackboard 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 or all of our synchronous meetings in this class may be recorded to provide necessary information for students in this class. Recordings will be stored on Blackboard 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.**

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 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.

Diversity, non-discrimination, and anti-racism: Mason President Gregory Washington has created the President’s Task Force on Anti-Racism and Inclusive Excellence. Through a broad focus, the task force will help Mason become “a local, regional, and national beacon for the advancement of anti-racism, reconciliation, and healing.” For President Washington’s full statement, visit <https://www2.gmu.edu/news/587381>. Members of this classroom community must uphold Mason’s core values of diversity and inclusion, and help 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 Compliance, Diversity, and Ethics (<https://diversity.gmu.edu/>) for training, resources, and to submit grievances. 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 Blackboard class sites among other places. See <https://registrar.gmu.edu/updates-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.

Safe return to campus: The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our lives. Administration at Mason has developed protocols outlined in the university Safe Return to Campus website (<https://www2.gmu.edu/safe-return-campus>). Students and faculty in face-to-face courses like this must follow these public health protocols, which include the **Mason COVID Health Check**. Students are expected to complete the COVID Health Check daily regardless of whether they will step foot on campus that day. The COVID Health Check uses a color code system; **only students with a “green” notification may come to class**. Those students with a “yellow” or “red” notification may not attend face-to-face class meetings. Faculty are allowed to ask you to show your “green” notification to be allowed in class.

Another component of Safe Return to Campus is wearing a facemask. **All Mason students, faculty, staff, and guests are required to wear a facemask in all indoor settings**, regardless of vaccination status. This means that while in class, students must wear an appropriate facemask that covers both the nose and mouth. Students can obtain a mask on campus at the HUB, Suite 2300.

Please familiarize yourself with other portions of the Safe Return to Campus protocols not mentioned above in order to be knowledgeable and safe on campus.

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; 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 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.

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 590 course schedule

Dates	Lecture Topics	Coursework Due
Unit 1: The background of urban planning		
Week 1 Aug 23 – 25	Intro: Why do we plan? / What is urban and metropolitan?	Read Chapter 1
Week 2 Aug 30–Sep 1	US urbanization and suburbanization	Read Chapter 2
Week 3 Sep 6 – 8	<i>Labor Day – No class Monday 9-6</i> Planning history; solving urban problems	Read Chapter 3
Week 4 Sep 13 – 15	Planning history / Mapping the city (online lecture/tutorial)	Read Chapter 4 Assignment 1: History
Week 5 Sep 20 – 22	Planning law and rights	Read Chapter 5
Unit 2: The practice of planning		
Week 6 Sep 27 – 29	Midterm 1 (Sep 27) / Comprehensive planning / Demographics (online lecture/tutorial)	Read Chapters 8 Assignment 2: Maps
Week 7 Oct 4 – 6	Land use planning; investment and zoning	Read Chapter 9 Assignment 2.5: Bibliography
Week 8 Oct 11 – 13	<i>No class Monday *</i> Planning, politics, and social issues	Read Chapter 6, 7, 19
Unit 3: Example fields of planning		
Week 9 Oct 18 – 20	Urban design	Read Chapter 10 Assignment 3: Demography
Week 10 Oct 25 – 27	Urban renewal, community development, and housing / Midterm 2 (Oct 27)	Read Chapter 11
Week 11 Nov 1 – 3	Environmental planning / Smart growth and growth management	Read Chapter 14, 15 Assignment 4: Neighborhoods
Week 12 Nov 8 – 10	Guest speakers: Green sustainable development	
Week 13 Nov 15 – 17	Transportation planning	Read Chapter 12 Assignment 5: Environment
Week 14 Nov 22 – 24	Regional and national planning <i>Thanksgiving Break – No class Wednesday</i>	Read Chapters 16, 17
Week 15 Nov 29–Dec 1	Economic development / Design charrette	Read Chapters 13 Assignment 6: Transportation Grad project
Week 16 Dec 6 – 8	Final Exam (Dec 6) Wednesday, Dec 8, 10:30 – 1:15 PM Course presentations	Final project Final project presentation

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