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**Hours:** MW 12:30 – 1:20 PM (class);  
Asynchronous material weekly  
**Location:** EXPL 2310  
**Section/Credits:** 001 / 3 credit hours

**Instructor:** Nathan Burtch  
**Email:** nburtch@gmu.edu  
**Instructor office:** EXPL 2413 / Zoom  
**Office hours:** Tu 10AM – 12PM (via Zoom)

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## 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?

**Hybrid course:** GGS 590 is presented as a hybrid course. An asynchronous video lecture (often, but not always an introduction to a topic) for each week will be available on Blackboard. Students should watch this video before coming to the live in-person classes on Monday and Wednesday. 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 discussion board for peers to read and evaluate.

**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 590 is a special topics course

that can be applied to the GECA MS and the ESGS PhD programs. 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. Analyze the differences between concepts of 'city', 'urban', and 'metropolitan'
2. Critically evaluate major theories about urban areas and urban people
3. Write analytically at the graduate-level regarding urban concepts and issues
4. Analyze critically the opportunities and constraints people face in urban areas
5. Analyze the diverse experiences of people within urban contexts

**Prerequisites:** None

**Enrollment and repeat policy:** GGS 590 is an omnibus 'selected topics' course that can be repeated up to 12 credits as long as the topic varies. This course with this topic may only be repeated under special circumstances. Understand that each academic unit can have more restrictive limits on specific courses. Students enrolling in this course again must submit all newly completed work.

## Course Materials

### Required text:

Kaplan, D. H., S. R. Holloway, and J. O. Wheeler. 2009. *Urban geography*. 3rd ed. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

ISBN 13: 978-1-118-57385-3

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

**GGG 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](mailto: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.

**Online materials and email:** This course will make extensive use of Blackboard at Mason. Asynchronous video lectures will be posted to Blackboard, so ensure that you have an internet connection fast enough to stream video. 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 possible noted 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 the 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

**Papers (48%):** 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 film 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% of the overall course grade. More information will be posted to Blackboard and discussed in class.

**Final exam (25%):** 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 (5%):** Students will post their completed papers in the course discussion board on Blackboard. For each, every student will submit an evaluation of four of their peers. This means that 16 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.

**Activities (5%):** 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 (5%):** On Blackboard, 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 Blackboard each week and will complete the 14-song playlist with a written portion by the end of the semester.

**Graduate research (12%):** 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 and a presentation. 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>Grade</i>	<i>Percent Required</i>		<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Total Grade %</i>		
<b>A+</b>	96 to 100	<b>B</b>	83 to 85.9	Papers (4)	<b>48%</b>	Peer eval. <b>5%</b>
<b>A</b>	93 to 95.9	<b>B-</b>	80 to 82.9	Final Exam	<b>25%</b>	Activities <b>5%</b>
<b>A-</b>	90 to 92.9	<b>C</b>	70 to 79.9	Grad research	<b>12%</b>	Music list <b>5%</b>
<b>B+</b>	86 to 89.9	<b>F</b>	<70			

**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 analysis 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. All assessed/graded items in this course (listed above) will be accepted past the ascribed due date until **May 17<sup>th</sup>**. Late penalties are assigned in a two-tiered system. Items turned in **within seven (7) days will result in a 25% deduction** for the item. Items **later than seven (7) days will result in a 50% deduction** for the item. This penalty begins 1 minute after the due date. 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 an assignment on time, it may be better to turn in partially completed work than nothing at all.

If you are ill or physically indisposed and cannot submit an item on time, you must notify the instructor beforehand for you to have a chance to make-up the item without late penalty. **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/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.

**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](mailto: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
<b>Unit 1: The geographic history of urban growth</b>		
Week 1 Jan 24 / Jan 26	Introduction to urban geography / Urban origins	<b>Read</b> <i>Kaplan et. al.</i> (Ch. 1, 2)
Week 2 Jan 31 / Feb 2	US urban development / Urban systems	<b>Read</b> <i>Kaplan et. al.</i> (Ch. 3); <i>Palen</i> (Ch. 3)
Week 3 Feb 7 / Feb 9	US suburban development / Exurban growth and edge cities	<b>Read</b> <i>Macionis &amp; Parrillo</i> (Ch. 4)
<b>Unit 2: Political, economic, and spatial landscapes of the city</b>		
Week 4 Feb 14 / Feb 16	Background on the US Census / 'Urban' versus 'Metropolitan'	<b>Read</b> <i>US Census Bureau</i> (web)
Week 5 Feb 21 / Feb 23	Metropolitan governance and fragmentation / Urban economics and labor	<b>Read</b> <i>Kaplan et. al.</i> (Ch. 6, 11); <i>Cadwallader</i> (Ch. 7); <i>Jonas</i> (Ch. 5); <i>Orfield</i> (Pg. 296 – 314)
Week 6 Feb 28 / Mar 2	Urban land use and land value / The urban form and technology	<b>Paper 1</b> Film critique <b>Read</b> <i>Kaplan et. al.</i> (Ch. 5)
Week 7 Mar 7 / Mar 9	Spatial-regional arrangement of cities / Internal urban form and landscape	<b>Peer evaluations 1</b> <b>Read</b> <i>Kaplan et. al.</i> (Ch. 7); <i>Cadwallader</i> (Ch. 3, 6)
<b>Unit 3: The city and society</b>		
Spring Recess	<i>Spring Recess – No class</i>	
Week 8 Mar 21 / Mar 23	Cities of the developing world / Regional variations of developing world cities	<b>Paper 2</b> Urban report <b>Read</b> <i>Kaplan et. al.</i> (Ch. 14, 15)
Week 9 Mar 28 / Mar 30	Sense of place / Classic urban social theories	<b>Peer evaluations 2</b> <b>Read</b> <i>Macionis &amp; Parrillo</i> (Ch. 5); <i>Phillips</i> (Ch. 17)
Week 10 Apr 4 / Apr 6	The urban experience / Urbanism and urban behavior	<b>Paper 3</b> Urban analysis <b>Read</b> <i>Lynch</i> (Ch. 3); <i>Phillips</i> (Ch. 12)
<b>Unit 4: Power and difference in cities</b>		
Week 11 Apr 11 / Apr 13	Housing markets and redevelopment / Class and urban poverty	<b>Peer evaluations 3</b> <b>Read</b> <i>Kaplan et. al.</i> (Ch. 8, 9)
Week 12 Apr 18 / Apr 20	Segregation and race / Immigration and ethnicity	<b>Paper 4</b> Urban op/ed <b>Read</b> <i>Kaplan et. al.</i> (Ch. 9, 10)
Week 13 Apr 25 / Apr 27	Urban planning / Urban utopias	<b>Peer evaluations 4</b> <b>Read</b> <i>Kaplan et. al.</i> (Ch. 12)
Week 14 May 2 / May 4	Watch <i>10 Towns that Changed America</i> and <i>The City</i>	<b>Urban Music Playlist</b> <b>Watch</b> <i>10 Towns</i> (PBS) and <i>The City</i> (TVA Films)
Finals May 16	<b>Final exam</b> Monday, May 16 10:30 AM – 1:15 PM	<b>Grad student research paper</b>

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