

# Topics in Urban Management: New York

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Office Hours: By appointment  
Course Website:

## Course Description:

This course is designed to provide students with an opportunity to think about what makes New York great (and terrible) and how to sustain and build upon its achievements. We will draw on classical urban texts from a diverse group of historians, architects, social theorists, urban planners, geographers, anthropologists, and others to understand how cities work and what function they serve. Since this class asks you to think about policy, more on this later, we will also take a look at policy documents, academic studies, and newspaper coverage to inform your final projects. Each class period, for the most part, will take a look at a single issue, say housing or policing, and explore the topic in detail.

## Summary of Course Requirements:

- 1) **Course Readings:** I have scanned and uploaded readings to the course website. On average we'll have three readings per class, and I expect you to do them. I expect lively discussions that pull apart the readings and show a command of the different topics we examine.
- 2) **Paper #1:** This is a traditional 5-paragraph essay that allows me to see how well you formulate a thesis, write topic sentences, cite evidence, and think. It's not meant to be an arduous task that keeps you up at night. We will discuss in great detail in class.
- 3) **Paper #2:** Choose a topic from the syllabus (Housing, Transportation, Homelessness, etc.). Identify and summarize three news articles that frame the issue, one governmental study that proposes a course of action, and one relevant data set that enumerates costs, population, fatalities, arrests, etc. to provide context and insight into your topic. This paper can be used as a way to dig deeper into your semester long paper.
- 4) **Paper #3:** In no more than two-pages of written text, I want you to write an observation of a place in New York. You will go out, observe, and comment. This assignment will give you an opportunity to implement some of the tools and reflect on the ideas we review over the course of the semester. This is **not** a thesis driven assignment.

- 5) **Semester Long Paper (in two parts):** Finally all students must complete a **semester long research project**. I want you to identify an area of interest, transportation, immigration, sustainability, etc. and investigate how New York has dealt with that issue and how it will do so in the future. You will also be called upon to weigh in on those decisions and render judgment(s) based on your research. The paper will be submitted in two parts. **Part one** will explore the background on the topic: why it's relevant, what has been done, and how those efforts have fared? **Part two** will examine contemporary debates and take a stab at projecting the future: what is the current thinking, why is there agreement or disagreement, what are the leading ways forward, and what does the future hold? You will review a host of sources to inform your thesis and provide a solid context of the key issues. This means you should consult books published by university presses, journal articles written by academics, newspaper articles from the time period you're interested in, and data published by the City of New York. This is a research project so get to know your local librarian! In total, I expect this paper to be 20-30 pages long.

#### **Grading:**

- 1) Class Participation: 10 percent
- 2) Paper #1: 10 percent
- 3) Paper #2: 15 percent
- 4) Paper #3: 15 percent
- 5) Semester Long Paper Part 1: 20 percent
- 6) Final Semester Long Paper with edits to Part 1: 30 percent

**Lateness Policy:** If you decide to hand something in late without getting an extension first, you'll be docked .333 of a point (assuming a 4.0 scale) for each day it's late: an A- becomes a B+ after one day and A- becomes a B after two days.

**Extensions:** Extensions will not be given out willy-nilly. Under almost no circumstances will an extension be granted 24-hours before something is due. I am both reasonable and fair and unreasonable and unfair.

#### **Office Hours:**

I am available via email and happy to schedule in person meetings if need be. My office is located at 60 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue on the second floor.

#### **A Note on Plagiarism:**

You know what it is. Don't do it. I will be angry.

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## Course Outline and Readings

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### **Period 1: Introduction**

Let's get to know each other and review the syllabus.

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### **Period 2: What is a City Anyway?**

City is a term that is used casually. We often think about cities in terms of size and activity. This group of readings is meant to make us think a bit more systematically about cities so we can think about them intelligently.

Wirth, Louis "Urbanism as a Way of Life"  
 Sorkin, Michael "Density Noodle"  
 Eran Ben-Joseph excerpt from *The Code of the City*

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### **Period 3: What is New York?**

#### **WRITING ASSIGNMENT 1 ASSIGNED**

Since this course focuses on New York, let's wrestle with the city's history and development.

Patti Smith excerpt from *Just Kids*  
 Mason Williams excerpt from *City of Ambition*  
 Ada Calhoun excerpt from *Saint Marks is Dead*

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### **Period 4: Shaping New York**

#### **WRITING ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE**

I will take us on a walk around campus to see how zoning and land-use regulations have shaped the built environment.

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### **Period 5: Housing**

Housing is a lightning rod of controversy in New York. The baseline data is staggering. Let's take a close look at Mayor de Blasio's Housing Plan, the data that underpins it, and some background on housing in New York.

Elizabeth Blackmar excerpt from *Manhattan for Rent, 1785-1850* (pp. 183-212)  
 Richard Plunz excerpt from *A History of Housing in New York City*  
[\*Housing New York: A Five-Borough, Ten-Year Plan\*](#)

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### **Period 6: Gentrification**

Decline, decentralization, and retrenchment created the opportunity for cities to be re-imagined—I'm being generous here. After the city emptied out, or at least sections of it did, prices hit rock bottom. *Savvy*—note the italics—investors capitalized on this opportunity and snapped up derelict properties for a song. Gentrification is a sticky process: some say it's good, others are less sanguine, and then there are those who call it a mixed-bag. It's one of those topics that riles people up so get ready to rumble.

Craig Wilder excerpt from *A Covenant with Color*

Neil Smith excerpt from *The New Urban Frontier* (pp. 51-74)

Yee, Vivian "[Gentrification in a Brooklyn Neighborhood...](#)"

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### **Period 7: Homelessness**

#### **Paper #2 due**

If you've followed the news, you'll know that homelessness is at a record high New York—since they began counting. Mayor de Blasio has confessed that he's done a poor job addressing this issue. Let's take a deeper look at how the City has dealt with its homeless.

Hopper, Kim et al. "Economies of Makeshift"

Matthew Desmond excerpt from *Evicted*

Stewart, Nikita "[Homelessness, Step by Step](#)"

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### **Period 8: Public Space**

How we treat public space reveals our values, especially as it relates to the bill of rights. Do we really think people should have the freedom to protest in a park all night long? What's more important, the freedom of speech or the free flow of traffic?

Alexander Garvin excerpt from *What Makes A Great City* (pp.21-55)

Abu El-Haj, Tabatha "The Neglected Right of Assembly."

Banerjee, Tridib. "The Future of Public Space: Beyond Invented Streets and Reinvented Places."

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### **Period 9: Policing**

#### **PART 1 of FINAL PROJECT DUE: HISTORY and BACKGROUND**

In this city, we talk about crime blithely. It shows up in newspaper headlines, mayoral debates, and network television dramas and comedies. Policing is about more than outcomes. The process of maintaining order has profound implications on the extent of our liberties and what is possible in our cities.

Franklin Zimring *The City That Became Safe* (ebook available via NYU Library)

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**Period 10: Transportation**

Cities are a response to a transportation problem. In this session we will show how transportation stitches cities and regions together and enables access to the promise of the city. We will also delve into one of the main questions in front of New York today, how will we build new transport infrastructure and combat congestion to accommodate population growth.

Janette Sadik-Khan excerpt from *Streetfight*

Fix NYC [Report](#)

English, Jonathan. "[Why New York City Stopped Building Subways](#)"

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**Period 11: Infrastructure**

Cities are chockfull of wires, pipes, and tunnels that keep us hydrated, illuminated, and connected to one another via WiFi connections. All of that stuff needs to go somewhere, be maintained, and upgraded.

Graham and Marvin excerpt from *Splintering Urbanism*

Mike Wallace excerpt from *Greater Gotham*

Grann, David "City of Water"

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**Period 12: Environment**

The fate of cities has swung from the site of desolation and despair to the great hope for the future. Cities are now seen as a key to saving the environment.

Robert Beuaregard excerpt from *Cities in the Urban Age: A Dissent* (pp.56-86)

Catherine McNeur excerpt from *Taming Manhattan*

OneNYC [Sustainability Report](#)

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**Period 13: You and the City**

**SUBMIT OBSERVATION PAPER BY 11:59 MAY 6**

Please read the papers posted on the course website. We've spent a lot of time talking about New York through the eyes of historians, designers, planners, etc. Now let's talk about your New York through your eyes.

**We will discuss your observation papers**

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**Period 14: Final Discussion**

**FINAL PAPER DUE**

\*\*\*\*\**A Note About Essay Writing and Grading:*

There's no neat mathematical model for grading a paper. There will be no percentages reported or anything like that in this write-up on grading. I'm not a robot and don't grade like one.

-An A paper must have a **clear thesis** (not an implied thesis OR no thesis at all). It must **use evidence**, such as quotes or data, to support each of the substantive claims made in the paper, and, finally, the paper must be **organized and proofread** for typos and grammatical errors.

-A B paper will do some of these things well and some of them poorly. An unclear thesis or an overwhelming number of typos makes it difficult for me to understand your meaning and appreciate your research.

-A C paper will not do any of these things well. Hopefully, no one will write a D paper. A strong thesis and clear organization are more important than grammar and typos. If you don't have a clearly articulated thesis, it is impossible to get an A.

A little more about all of these things:

**Thesis:** This is a sentence or two that outlines your argument and the structure of your paper. Think of it as the paper's blueprint. If there are three main claims, all three better be in your thesis. Thesis-driven essays are not thrillers. I don't want to be surprised when I get to the end. If making a provocative claim, which is perfectly reasonable, you want to painstakingly walk your reader through your thinking and the evidence. This means, you want to tell your reader right away that you're about to blow his or her socks off. Even if you aren't making a provocative claim, you want your reader to understand how you came to your conclusions and to be convinced that your argument is reasonable.

**Paragraphs:** These building blocks of papers give you the opportunity to make a claim and defend it. So your topic sentence, a paragraph's opening sentence, should be the claim. What follows should be the evidence and analytical thinking that defends the claim and connects to your other claims and broader thesis statement. Your reader is not in your head so if you lard up your paragraphs with multiple claims and ideas, rather than working your way through each claim one at a time, your reader will be confused.

**Evidence:** Inserting quotes or data shouldn't be perfunctory. Each piece of evidence should be well considered and connected to its paragraph. All paragraphs should have clear topic sentences that serve as the framework for your paragraph. These sentences advance a claim, probably one of the claims you outlined in your thesis.