

Meets: Tuesday and Thursday, 9:30am to 10:50am

Location: Temple Buell Hall | Room 227

Instructor: Emma Walters, ewalters@illinois.edu

Office Hours: 2pm-3pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays, TBH Room 230. You can join me in person or via [zoom](#). I am also available by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Once viewed as dirty, crime-ridden and corrupt, cities now occupy a favored place in the popular imagination. From students to professionals to empty-nesters, the demographic groups that once fled are now returning. They join a growing immigrant population, non-traditional families, young adults without aspirations for formal careers and a struggling workforce to power the bustling downtowns and lively neighborhoods that define cities as places of hope, innovation and conflict. Our task in this course is to learn as much as possible about cities today. Urban economies and the role cities play in a global economy will provide a through-line to our exploration. But the real topic of this course is the people who live in cities: Their hopes, conflicts and fears; the way they organize themselves socially; and the way that race, gender and class difference shape a person's engagement with the city. Our approach to question of social difference emphasizes their practical value in making sense of gentrification, work, environment justice and politics. We could try to make sense of cities without thinking about social difference, but the results wouldn't be satisfying: We'd be confused by basic things, we'd make the same mistakes repeatedly, and we'd be surprised by basic facts of life that in fact are not surprising.

From Disinvestment to Global Gentrification

Today's urban renaissance reverses a very long-term trend of disinvestment and population loss. Twenty-five years ago, thriving cities were the exception to the rule. College graduates flocked to suburbs. Movies, music and literature treated cities as sites of violence and decay. Neighborhoods where few can afford the rent today were run down and half-empty. Pop culture from the period captures these feelings well, and the popular movies of the time will probably surprise you. We'll look at them in class.

Disinvestment and population flight were systematic: The tax code and public investment encouraged Americans to move out of cities. But cities had other problems, including the decline of manufacturing industries that fueled job growth and population growth mid-century. The recovery from disinvestment is also systematic. Individual cities have their own advantages and disadvantages, and meaningful differences in politics and institutional capacity. But it's important to recognize that cities writ large play an increasingly important role in the global economy. Today's thriving cities coordinate an increasingly complicated global trade in goods, finance and services. They draw migrants from virtually everywhere – from suburbs, rural areas, other cities and other countries –

and the diversity of opportunity in cities functions as a center of gravity for individuals, investors and businesses.

It's easy to document this change. The harder task – a task we'll explore together – is to figure out how to make sense of cities when we think about them as parts of networks. Most of what scholars know about cities focuses on individual cities. Studies focus on land use, political machines, influential mayors and other subjects that can be understood on their own terms. The basic issues that draw students to cities today can't be understood in isolation. Gentrification is driven by global investors. College graduates and professionals move to new cities every few years. Mayors spend their time negotiating with state and federal government. And cities face increasing pressure to figure out which parts of their economies they can actually control. We will look at new ideas about how to understand cities by understanding the networks in which they operate. Some of those ideas are fully developed. Others will leave a lot to be desired. There is no consensus about where we stand now.

Inequality and Social Difference

In a sense, this course is about inequality, as both an ethical problem and a complicating factor in how cities work. From exurban growth to suburban decay, from privatization to gentrification and urban agriculture, cities today are sites of rapid change and experimentation with new ideas for how people can and should live. Each of these changes has pronounced social and racial dimensions. No less important, the very groups most marginalized by these changes typically play a central role in responding and making cities better places for everyone.

The rebound of cities today comes with distinct costs and mounting challenges for large portions – if not the majority – of the urban population. Perspectives on these challenges vary, with economists generally stressing the necessity of market-driven urban development, even when it disadvantages many, and political economists suggesting that urban problems and their solutions arise from public decisions, social choices and organized political interests. Your preference for one perspective or the other will by necessity shape your ideas about how to improve cities. In the final paper, and an accompanying presentation to the class, you'll be asked to make an argument about how cities can provide more opportunities to their residents.

Throughout, we will pay attention to the forms of social difference that make up the news, specifically race, gender and class. These differences are central to the change in cities. Basic conversational terms about cities – from “white flight,” to “yuppies,” “buppies,” and the idea of gentrification itself – have either explicit or implicit race, class and gender connotations. Difference is important in its own right, and very valuable analytically. So, we'll address these issues directly and frankly.

COURSE FORMAT: WHAT TO EXPECT FROM READINGS AND LECTURES

The beginning of the course examines the rebound of American cities and the basic perspectives you will need to determine whether they remain places of hope and

opportunity. After that, we embark on a crash course of current issues, including housing, gentrification and social inequalities. The last segment of the course mostly focuses on movements for social and economic equality and racial and environmental justice in U.S. cities.

For a typical class, you will read a book chapter or academic article, and a short, accompanying piece from a newspaper or blog. In most cases, the academic material frames the questions we will ask on the topic at hand. The lecture will tie together the basic questions and issues raised by the day's topic and provide discussion questions for the class to address.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The course has four basic goals:

- 1) *Understand the role social difference plays in urban fortunes.* From white flight to gentrification, deindustrialization to low-wage service work, public housing to the housing crisis, cities' signature problems are characterized by often-extreme racial and social inequalities. That part of the story is well-known. In this course, we'll pay attention to an equally important, less well-known fact: The very groups most harmed by inequality, also lead the way in reforming cities to make them stronger, fairer, happier and healthier.
- 2) *Learn as much as you can about the issues.* So much is going on right now. We live in a rapidly urbanizing society and world. Anything you're going to want to do with your life will depend in part on the way cities are evolving. In addition to being evermore important, cities are extremely complicated. The more you learn about finance, housing, transportation, the economy, city politics (and the list goes on!), the better.
- 3) *Find the connections.* A generation ago, scholars and professionals looked at individual urban issues in isolation – housing was one domain, the economy was another, transportation yet another, and so on. Today, the best practitioners understand the fundamental interconnectedness of all of these issues. Big ideas and big theories help here – they give you a sense of why things are changing and thus the ability to diagnose the origins, meaning and reach of the new changes you'll encounter in your life and career.
- 4) *Play the expert.* Today's issues confuse the experts, who make predictions that fail, use old ideas to describe new realities and draw on evidence that just doesn't work. The U.S. Census, for example, doesn't provide a way for people to report income from gig jobs, and doesn't ask about things like student debt. Professors, pundits, policymakers, think tanks – they're all at a loss to make sense of the news. This is an opportunity for you. This class insists that you step up and stake your own claim to big issues. You'll need to draw on your own evidence and combine ideas in your own way. The process should be exciting and fun, and it's excellent preparation for your working life: Employers crave employees who can think for themselves, work

independently, and make good decisions when expectation breaks down. It's just one more way in which learning about today's cities is practical.

COURSE READINGS

There is no required text for this course. All assigned readings and supplementary material have been posted on the [course Canvas website](#). You are expected to complete these readings prior to attending the respective class session. We will read a mix of book chapters, academic articles, policy reports, newspaper and magazine stories, and blog posts throughout the semester. In a typical week, you will read two articles or chapters, and a few supplementary newspaper and magazine articles.

ASSIGNMENTS

The course has four major assignments: An analysis of a U.S. city of choice to explain its deindustrialization and regrowth process, a profile of one of the zip codes that will receive community development funding under Illinois' recreational marijuana law; an evaluation of the different strategies cities use to grow; and a manifesto in which you synthesize what you've learned into a call to action to improve cities. In the final assignment (manifesto), you will make an argument *for* something: A policy, idea, or strategy that can improve cities. The simple rule for the final is to go *big* and argue for something radical, untried, expensive, etc. Those assignments account for 65% of your grade. There are no exams for this course.

35% of your grade will come from staying engaged in the course. There are four ways to show that you are reading, thinking and eager to participate: (1) Attending class regularly, (2) Participating in classroom discussions, and (3) Five in class reading responses (lowest grade dropped). In class reading responses will function like pop quizzes, so make sure to read the readings every week!

GRADING

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|---------------------------------|-----|
| 1) Attendance | 10% |
| 2) Participation | 15% |
| 3) Reading responses | 10% |
| 4) City Analysis | 15% |
| 5) Redevelopment Analysis | 15% |
| 6) Restore, Reinvest, and Renew | 15% |
| 7) Manifesto | 20% |

Assignments must be submitted via canvas at 11:59pm on the day that they are due, unless otherwise noted. Please ensure that written submissions are in PDF format, have recognizable file names (for example, assignment name and your last name) and that file sizes are appropriate. If the course website crashes or is unavailable, please send the assignment to the instructor via email attachment.

All assignments are due at the specified date and time indicated by the instructor. Late work will receive a penalty of 10 points per day beginning immediately after the assignment deadline (e.g., at 5:01 PM for an assignment due at 5:00 PM).

The final grade for the course is derived from the components listed above, subject to the percentage weights listed in the table. All of these components are scored on a 100 point scale. Grades are not curved.

Percentages will be transformed to letter grades using the following scale:

| FINAL GRADE | TOTAL | FINAL GRADE | TOTAL |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|
| A | 94 to 100 | C | 74 to 76.9 |
| A- | 90 to 93.9 | C- | 70 to 73.9 |
| B+ | 87 to 89.9 | D+ | 67 to 69.9 |
| B | 84 to 86.9 | D | 64 to 66.9 |
| B- | 80 to 83.9 | D- | 60 to 63.9 |
| C+ | 77 to 79.9 | F | 0 to 60 |

The general grading rubric for assignment is as follows:

- An assignment at the A level demonstrates original thought and synthesis of ideas, sophisticated, cogent analysis, and is clearly written or presented. Outstanding work.
- An assignment at the B level presents above average analysis with appropriate evidence to support the ideas and is clearly written or presented. Very good work.
- An assignment at the C level shows a basic level of understanding, with analysis limited to the most obvious arguments. Writing is competent. Adequate work.
- An assignment at the D level misunderstands or misrepresents the material or is so poorly written or presented that it obscures the analysis. Inadequate work.

COURSE POLICIES

Course Attendance: As stated in Section § 1-501 of the Student Code “regular class attendance is expected of all students at the University.” For an absence to be excused, students must provide an explanation to the instructor and supply an absence letter from the Student Assistance Center in the Office of the Dean of Students, when the absence meets the criteria listed in Section § 1-501 of the Student Code. Please consult Section § 1-501 of the Student Code to see how irregular attendance is handled.

While your Teaching Assistant will be your primary point of contact for requests for excused absences, the instructor retains the sole authority to approve or deny requests for excused absences. Arriving late to class or leaving early will negatively impact your attendance grade.

Academic Integrity: The Illinois Student Code states: “It is the responsibility of the student to refrain from infractions of academic integrity, from conduct that may lead to suspicion of such infractions, and from conduct that aids others in such infractions.” Note that you are subject to the Honor Code, as well as procedures for addressing violations to the Code, regardless of whether you have read it and understand it. According to the Code, “ignorance is no excuse.”

For your written work in this course, all ideas (as well as data or other information) that are not your own must be cited. Plagiarism is an extremely serious offense and will not be tolerated. Violation of any plagiarism guidelines will be taken quite seriously and will result in a failing grade at the very least. While this course does not require a standard citation style or formatting, we suggest you use either APA (American Psychological Association) or MLA (Modern Language Association) formats for in-text references and your reference sections. Please consult your TA or a university librarian if you have questions about appropriate reference formatting. Note that ideas that require citation may not have been published or written down anywhere. While you are free—and indeed encouraged—to discuss the assignments with your peers, all of your writing, data collection, and analysis should be your own.

Student Conduct: The Department of Urban and Regional Planning (DURP) is committed to maintaining a learning environment that is rooted in the goals and responsibilities of professional planners. By enrolling in a class offered by the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, students agree to be responsible for maintaining an atmosphere of mutual respect in all DURP activities, including lectures, discussions, labs, projects, and extracurricular programs. See Student Code Article 1-Student Rights and Responsibilities, Part 1. Student Rights: §1-102 for further details.

Accommodations: This course will accommodate students with documented disabilities. To obtain disability-related adjustments and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the instructor and the Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) as soon as possible. To contact DRES, you may visit 1207 S. Oak St., Champaign, call 217-333-1970, email disability@illinois.edu, or go to the [DRES website](#). Please inform the instructor of any needs and requests at the beginning of the semester.

Learning Environment: Laptops, and other electronic devices are strongly discouraged in lecture sessions. Laptop or tablet use for the purposes of class-related note taking only is allowable – inappropriate uses will both lower your participation score but may also result in you being asked to leave the lecture section. We will ask you to put away your digital devices if we find your technology use to be distracting. Also, please turn off your phone ringers and keep your cell phones put away.

Counseling Center: The Counseling Center (<https://counselingcenter.illinois.edu/>) is committed to providing a range of services intended to help students develop improved coping skills in order to address emotional, interpersonal, and academic concerns. The Counseling Center provides individual, couples, and group counseling. All of these services are paid for through the health services fee. The Counseling Center offers primarily short-term counseling, but they do also provide referrals to the community when students could benefit from longer term services.
