Geography 417: Urban Geography
Fall 2016

Prof. Benjamin Forest
Department of Geography
McGill University

Course Calendar Description: Classic and contemporary perspectives in urban geography. Range of topics including effects of capitalism, gender, suburbanism, segregation and inequality, property, urban landscapes, and urban space. Emphasizes theoretical issues but includes empirical and/or case studies.

The course includes classic and contemporary works in urban geography, and both covers topics addressed in undergraduate Urban Studies courses in greater depth and to introduce new subjects and perspectives. The class includes both theoretical and empirical works on urbanism, the effects of capitalism, gender, suburbanism, segregation and inequality, property urban landscapes, and urban space. The class is open to students with prior coursework in urban geography: GEOG 217; and one or more of the following: GEOG 315, GEOG 325, GEOG 331, and GEOG 525.

Note: GEOG 617 and GEOG 417 are taught simultaneously and meet together as a single seminar. Graduate students enrol in GEOG 617 and undergraduates enrol in GEOG 417; each group follows the requirements of their respective syllabus.

Course Requirements: Students must prepare responses to the readings each week (which serve as a basis for discussion), and must present these to the class on a rotating basis. In addition, students must submit either 3 analytic essays based on the assigned readings. Finally, students may be required to periodically attend talks in the department’s Geospectives lecture series or other venues.

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<th>Reading summaries/responses/reviews</th>
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<td>3 analytic essays (6-8 pages)</td>
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Information on university and department policies concerning student assessment can be found at the following website: [www.mcgill.ca/geography/studentassessment](http://www.mcgill.ca/geography/studentassessment)

Reading responses: See the response assignment for my expectations and an example. Typically you will need to prepare a ½ to 1 page response for each article or book chapter assigned. These responses should identify the major claims or findings of each work, summarize the essential points, and offer an insightful critique. Your written responses will be collected at the end of each class and will be returned with brief comments.

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**Due Dates:** All papers are due by email as properly formatted Word documents by 11 PM on the dates listed on the first page.

**Expectations:** This class is a seminar. This means that in addition to the usual standards regarding academic integrity (listed below), students have responsibilities and freedoms different from a typical undergraduate class. In particular, all students are expected to take considerable responsibility for understanding, digesting, and synthesizing the material. Taking the class is not a passive activity! You are expected to complete all readings and assignments on time, to actively participate in class discussions, and to generally take the initiative in engaging the material.

**Analytic Essays.** Your analytic essay should address material that we have read for class, but may also include any of the recommended readings. Please do not use texts that I have not assigned for the class. In your essay, you should offer a detailed analysis and critique (typically of two or more readings), rather than broad summaries and general arguments. I am interested more in depth than in breadth; this is your opportunity to explore the nuances and subtle details of the arguments beyond what we can do during class discussions.

There are several models for successful essays, but the most common is to explore a particular idea, concept, or theory that is used in several readings. Do the authors mean two different things but use the same term? Do they use different terms for the same concept? What are the (theoretical) consequences of these differences?

Similarly, you can offer a critique of the assumptions that underlie a set of readings. The focus here may not be on the explicit disagreements between the texts, but on the (unacknowledged) assumptions that they share.

For questions about formatting, advice about writing papers, and for writing tips, please see my Research Paper Guide on my teaching page of my website:

http://www.geog.mcgill.ca/faculty/forest/teaching.html

*McGill University policy requires the inclusion and wording of the following sections on Academic Integrity and Language Policy on all syllabi.*

**Academic Integrity:** McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l’honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/integrity).

**Language Policy:** In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.
Readings: If you would like to order one or more of the books, I suggest you do so online, or through Paragraphe Bookstore (2220 McGill College Avenue, across from the main gates). Note that many texts are available for purchase as less costly ebooks.

All required readings are available through myCourses (in compliance with copyright regulations). Note, however, that some readings are ebooks accessible via the McGill library, and that only a limited number of people can reach them at the same time.

In many cases, I have set one or more chapters from a book. In all cases, I recommend reading the entire work, time permitting. For your papers, I expect you to address relevant sections of these books even if they are not required for discussion.

Similarly, some weeks I provide a list of recommended readings as a resource if you want to address the topic further, e.g., for a research paper, or comprehensive examinations.

Topics

Week 0: Introduction
Week 1: Labour Day – no class
Week 2: Modern Cities: The Conventional Wisdom
Week 3: The Roots of Modern Urban Studies: Liberalism and Pragmatism
Week 4: Capitalism and Urbanism
Week 5: Modernity and Urbanism
Week 6: Thanksgiving – no class
Week 7: Gender, Work, and the City
Week 8: Workshop: Searching the Scholarly Literature
Week 9: Re-thinking Urban Modernity: Post-colonialism
Week 10: Colonialism and the Roots of Urban Segregation
Week 11: Segregation and Inequality
Week 12: Workshop: Scholarly Writing
Week 13: Cities, Rights, and Power
Week 14: Property and Urban Space
Schedule of Classes

**Week 0: Introduction**
September 2 (Friday)

*I will be out of town, but will send introductory materials by email.*

**Week 1: Labour Day**
September 5

*Class does not meet*

**Week 2:**
**Modern Cities: The Conventional Wisdom**
September 12

Louis Mumford was a 20th century public intellectual known for as a literary critic and urban historian. Chapters 15-17 summarize the development and consequences of modern (European and North American) cities in the 19th (chapter 15) and 20th (chapters. 16 and 17) centuries. Chapter 13 emphasizes the awful physical and environmental conditions of 19th century industrial cities, blaming the elevation of profit and growth over all other values. Chapters 14 and 15, while acknowledging the improved physical conditions of 20th century cities, decry the culture of consumption and conformity that they embody. Chapter 16 focuses on rise of urban planning and attempts to reform the city, while chapter 17 offers a broad critique of the effect of large, sprawling cities that characterized the US in particular in the mid-20th century. His analysis is very normative, but is a good reflection of the “conventional wisdom” about modern cities. Southall (1998) offers a more scholarly treatment of the same period (19th-20th centuries) while Abu-Lughod (1999) focuses on three contemporary American cities. Finally, while Taylor (2013) approaches the subject from a perspective that is dramatically different from Mumford (drawing on world systems theory) he offers a similarly grand history of cities.


Recommended:


Week 3: The Roots of Modern Urban Studies: Liberalism and Pragmatism
September 19

These works helped constitute modern urban studies in the 20th century, and tend toward a mechanistic and individualistic approach to the analysis of urban social life. Simmel (1903) is a seminal essay on urban culture, postulating differences between the rapid, rational, modern city and the slow, non-rational/romantic, traditional rural lifestyle. Park (1925) echoes many of the same themes as Simmel, but attempts to tie effects to specific aspects of modern cities (i.e., Chicago in the 1920s). While the language is archaic, please read carefully, as his analysis is more subtle than it first appears. Wirth (1938) offers a synthesis of this approach, postulating the effects of population size, density, and heterogeneity, and the contradictory social and political consequences that these things produce.

Finally, there is Jane Addams. She won a Nobel Peace Prize, is considered the founder of modern social work, made important contributions to pragmatist philosophy, and worked closely with members of the Chicago School of urban studies (such as Park). In modern terms, her approach could be described as “action research” focusing on the grounded concerns of urban inhabitants. Nonetheless, she is rarely mentioned in the conventional canon of urban geography, even by modern scholars who use this approach (see Week 12).


Recommended

The so-called “Chicago School” of urban studies adopted the spirit - and to a degree, the theoretical perspectives - laid out my Simmel and Wirth. The City (1967) is a collection of classic essays from this tradition. The autobiographical Twenty Years at Hull House is probably Addams’ best known work. If you are interested, I would also recommend several contemporary articles discussing her legacy and influence (e.g., Olund 2010, Hirschmann 2015).

Addams, J. 1912. Twenty years at Hull House. Champaign, Ill.: Project Gutenberg.


**Week 4: Capitalism and Urbanism**  
September 26


**Week 5: Modernity and Urbanism**  
October 3


*Recommended:*


**Week 6: Thanksgiving**  
October 10

*Class does not meet*
Week 7: Gender, Work, and the City
October 17


Recommended:


Week 8: Workshop: Searching the Scholarly Literature
October 24

Class is split into two parts this week. For the first hour, we will wrap up our discussion from the prior weeks and/or start our discussion of the material for Week 9.

The second half will be workshop on the use of the Web of Knowledge, Scopus, and Google Scholar for searching the scholarly literature. Class will meet in one of the library's computer labs, rather than our regular classroom. The workshop will involve "hands-on" activities so it is very important for you to attend. These research skills will be critical for the course and for any future research endeavour.

Location: TBD
**Week 9: Re-thinking Urban Modernity: Post-colonialism**  
October 31


*Recommended:*

Gurel, M. O. 2009. Defining and living out the interior: the 'modern' apartment and the 'urban' housewife in Turkey during the 1950s and 1960s. *Gender Place and Culture* 16 (6): 703-722.


**Week 10: Colonialism and the Roots of Urban Segregation**  
November 7


*Recommended:*


**Week 11: Segregation and Inequality**  
November 14


Week 12: Workshop: Scholarly Writing  
November 21

This week we will depart from our usual format to address scholarly writing. We will discuss a brief reading, but most of class will be devoted to peer review of either your Proposal or Essay #2. Orwell’s piece is a classic discussion of the political implications of writing, and not as you may have thought, a discussion of Quebec politics! Orwell was an essayist, a form of writing (now sadly in decline) that lies somewhere between political journalism and scholarship. He focuses on the distortions produced by lazy and imprecise prose in political essays, but his comments are directly relevant to scholarly writing as well.

The four recommended works are also worth reading, although Miller (2004) will be of use mostly to those of you working with quantitative data. Anyone who works with visual information (images, graphs, charts, maps, and the like) should read something by Edward Tufte. His book listed below is a good place to start. For writing, there are many style guides, including the perennial favourite The Elements of Style, but Williams (2005) is an outstanding modern guide and well worth buying. Finally, Biling (2013) is a delightfully acerbic commentary on contemporary writing in the social sciences.


Recommended


Week 13: Cities, Rights, and Power
November 28


Recommended:


Week 14: Property and Urban Space
December 5


Recommended:


GEOG 417: Urban Geography  
Prof. Benjamin Forest  
Weekly Reading Response Assignment

For every class you should prepare a summary, critique(s), and question(s) for each reading assignment. *These should be emailed to me no later than 10:00 a.m. on the day of class.* Please send your responses as a nicely formatted MS Word file. These responses help demonstrate your engagement and knowledge of the readings, and will serve as a basis of discussion each week. Please note that they are worth a substantial portion of your grade.

You will need to use your judgment regarding the length of each response. The example below is one page long and addresses one article, albeit a relatively long one, but you cannot include the same level of detail for entire books. For books, you should prepare a response for each chapter, as well as one for the book as a whole (if appropriate). A book response might be two or three pages long in total (chapters plus the book as a whole), but this is not a hard and fast rule. *Keep in mind, however, that more is not more.* The ability to identify the essential points a long text is an absolutely critical skill for scholarship.

Your response should identify the major point(s) or claims of each article or chapter, noting the structure of the argument (how do the claims fit together?); at least one thoughtful critique or criticism of the work; and at least one question suitable for discussion.

I also expect you to take notes on the readings. These will be longer and more detailed than the summaries that you send to me. You should bring your notes as well as responses to class.

**Example response**

Note how the response on the following page is different than notes taken on the article, and how it makes an argument about (or offers an interpretation of) an article rather than condensing the text point by point.

You should not think of this as the one “correct” interpretation of her article. There are clearly a lot of things I have left out, and other points that I have chosen to emphasize. One could write an equally good response focusing on other points – as long as you can make a compelling argument that you have identified the most significant aspects of the article.

My summary also includes a critique at the end that incorporates some of the other reading that we did for that week. This won’t always be possible (*e.g.*, when we are only reading from one book), but try to think of questions or critiques that can help relate the readings to each other. Finally, I have also given an example of my critique framed as a question.

Marston makes three major points in the article:

1) Scale can be conceptualized in three different ways: as size, as level, and as relation; traditionally, geography has only used the first two concepts, and have treated them more or less as natural, or objectively true. Recent work has developed the third idea, scale as relation, but this work is been incomplete because it focuses only on the “top-down” construction of scale.

2) She reviews the treatment of scale by political and economic geographers, but focuses on economic geographers Neil Brenner and Neil Smith. They both argue that scale is produced by global capitalist relations, particularly the tension between capitalism’s tendency toward equalization (uniform wages and labor conditions) and differentiation (uneven development, or the creation regions of economic growth and other of economic stagnation) (pp. 229-231). At particular historical moments, these two forces produce different scales. In the past, economies were defined at the state scale, but recent developments associated with globalization have generated important scales at both the sub-state and super-state level.

Although there are difference between Brenner and Smith, both identify forces of capitalist production as the primary driver of scalar relationships.

3) Finally, Marston turns to her own work on gender and households to argue that these theorists have ignored the role of social reproduction (as opposed to capitalist production). Social reproduction is as necessary to capitalism as production, but has not been seen as a force (re)creating scalar relationships. She argues, however, that the “bottom up” production of scale is just as important as “top down” forces of production, and illustrates this with examples from 19th and early 20th century efforts by women to extend their political influence beyond the household scale by conceptualizing the neighborhood, city, or region as a kind of “homespace.”

*Critique:* It is not always clear that Marston is talking about “scale” throughout the article. In particular, her discussion of Brenner and Smith, often seems to concern the idea of “regionalization” – the regions that provide the “best fit” for capitalist relations at particular moments in time. Although she rightly criticizes naturalistic concepts of scale, she often seems to substitute economic forces as the “true” source of scale, and downplays the discursive construction of scale (cf. Murphy 1990, and Newman and Paasi 1998). A true “relational” view of scale would acknowledge the role of discourse, language, and rhetoric in the creation of scalar relationships.

*Critique framed as a question:* Does Marston confuse the idea of “scale” with the idea of “regionalization” in her discussion of Brenner and Smith?