Department of Geography
McGill University

Geog 494: Urban Field Studies

Summer 2020
Online Coronavirus Edition

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Background:

Summer 2020’s Geog 494 Urban Field Studies is an upper level geography course designed to introduce you to human geography field research in an urban environment. Using Montréal (or other cities) as our laboratory, we will explore a range of current debates in social and cultural geography and urban studies. Even in these times of social-distancing and Coronavirus, this is a ‘hands-on’ course – you will learn by experience (and trial and error) while undertaking a number of methods (picking from qualitative and/or innovative mapping approaches) and other tasks. We will focus on understanding the urban environment through active observations, exploring a range of innovative methods, media and academic literature critique and reviews, journaling, and Wikipedia-entry design.

Geog 494 is a hands-on, student-led learning experience. The TAs and I are here to guide you in the development of your assessment pieces, including the methods project that you will undertake. This approach may be challenging or unsettling to begin with for those of you used to a more formal lecture-based environment, but we will provide lots of tutorial videos, other supporting materials, and Zoom discussions/office hours, and we are excited to guide you through this learning experience.

Course Objectives:

♦ To broaden understandings and critiques of a range of urban debates.
♦ To develop skills in a range of data collection methods and analyses appropriate to urban field research.
♦ To employ these methods to examine a specific research problem, linking your research to current debates in urban geography.
♦ To recognize the strengths and weaknesses of different field research methods.
♦ To learn to organize and communicate research project findings in both academic and lay-person approaches.
♦ To develop team-working, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills.

1. How will the Summer 2020 online version of Geog 494 be run?

This course is going to focus on your own self-motivated and guided learning. You’ll be provided with a range of learning tools and support materials, but it will be your responsibility to create a timetable that works for you to make the deadlines, especially in these unusual circumstances.

Remember that this is an intensive summer course - you need to make sure that you are as available as possible for concentrated effort regarding this course from May 1-May 19 (and for the write up of some tasks for a little beyond that).
The course includes a combination of:

- videos to watch on contemporary urban debates and methods, related readings, and journal entries to prepare. These journal entries will allow you to critically reflect upon and compare the videos and readings, while developing your awareness regarding urban questions and field study approaches, and sharpening your academic writing skills.

- an individual urban field methods project to complete (from a broader range you can choose from). This will help strengthen your skills in field research methods, including designing a study, undertaking two methods, practicing coding and analysis, while hopefully having fun experimenting with novel (social-distancing safe) methods along the way.

- a group exercise with the purpose of developing a Wikipedia-entry to provide a broad audience with insights into a specific urban topic or debate regarding Montreal.

This is an abridged version of the full course outline for the Dept. website. Please contact the course instructor for more details.