
“Contemporary Urban Design in Theory and Critical Practice”

Meets Tuesdays 10:00 AM – 12:50 PM.

▪ Since this time period overlaps the normal lunch hour students are welcome to “brown bag” during the class.

This is an in-person class on the Portland campus.  
Portland CRNs.  435: 20850.  535: 20878.

In addition, a virtual Section is offered for Eugene-based students via Zoom.  

Instructor: Gerald Gast  ggast@uoregon.edu  
Credit: 4 units.

▪ This is a multi-discipline course open to all students of the University.  Students from disciplines other than Architecture are welcome.  There are no prerequisites.

Plan for Potsdamer Platz Berlin.  Renzo Piano Building Workshop

"Making a plan for Berlin was an impossible job, although I would never say this to my clients.  A civilized person is called urbane … and when we refer to this term, we immediately
think about all the beautiful cities that have ever been. We know, however, that they are not designed. They were, and still are, a product of organic growth. When you walk around these cities, what is beautiful is the very fact that what you are looking at has not been designed. Instead, it represents the materialization of the millions of life stories that have been enacted within their respective walls across centuries”.

-Renzo Piano on the design of Potsdamer Platz, Berlin.

Introduction

Urban Design is examined as both a subject of theoretical inquiry and an activity immersed in the real living experiences of cities, a meeting ground of theories and the actual forces at work in cities.

Comparative studies of neighborhood conservation, urban regeneration and regional growth models are debated. Future prospects for restructuring cities and metropolitan regions are examined through research, case study examples and direct field experience through an urban design project.

The course focuses on contemporary Urban Design issues in North America and selected cities abroad using case studies from Portland, Seattle, Vancouver BC, New York, Baltimore, Berlin, Barcelona, Stockholm, Curitiba (Brazil), Medellin (Colombia) and other cities.

The format combines lectures, discussions, an urban design workshop and an urban design project. There is a final project due Week 8. No final examination.

This is a positive course that highlights many creative and inspiring urban design programs and projects throughout the world that have offered precedents with transferable lessons for other communities, cities and regions.

Components

- **Urban Development Theories and Models.** Alternative visions of urbanism during the late 20th and early 21st century: the classic contemporary models and influences of Jane Jacobs, Lewis Mumford and Le Corbusier; emerging theories and approaches to urban design; and critical challenges for the future.

- **Urban Regeneration.** Central city development, conservation and design. Comparative studies and discussions focus on recent seminal and controversial urban regeneration projects.

  The debate between the need to attract investment vs social impacts such as gentrification.

- **Environmentally Sustainable Regional Growth.** Examination of the planning, design and environmental sustainability issues created by regional growth and contraction.

  Discussions focus on alternative strategies to achieve more equitable and environmentally sustainable forms of regional development. Case studies focus on Portland and other metropolitan areas in North America and abroad.
Reader and References

Course readings are provided in a digital Reader issued in sections by the instructor. Selected video documentaries and other digital resources are used. No textbook.

An outline of the course topics follows. This is provided to give prospective students a clear idea of the issues to be discussed during the course.

Class Sessions and Topics

Session 1.

"Societal Values and Critical Issues in Contemporary Urban Design".

Critical urban design issues as the world faces the challenges of environmental degradation, urban population and the disinvestment in marginalized neighborhoods.

How are the values of a society reflected in urban design?

Creative examples of transformative urban design programs and projects throughout the world.

Session 2. “Alternative Visions of the Contemporary City”:

Jane Jacob's historic urbanism, the legacy of Le Corbusier's modernism, and Mumford's vision of planned communities.

Breakout team charette and discussion. Models for a new urban neighborhood.

Historical urbanism of Jane Jacobs
Hudson Street. New York.

Hammarby Sjostad Sustainable New Community. Stockholm
Introduction to the term Urban Design project


The debate between physical development and building human capital through education.

Session 4. “Urban Development Projects, Large and Small: Economic Engines or Gentrification Engines?”

The influence of global investment on the development of large-scale urban design and architecture in urban centers. Are they necessary or desirable? What are the negative impacts in terms of gentrification, environmental impacts and local communities?

Comparative Case Studies
South Lake Union Seattle
Hudson Yards, Manhattan, New York
Kampii Center, Helsinki
MASS MOCA, West Adams, Mass

Session 5. Lecture-Discussion: “Urban Regeneration: Public Places”

Comparative Case Studies
The New York High Line. Spectacular Public Place or Engine of Gentrification?
MASS MOCA, North Adams, MA. Regeneration of a small city

The concept of “urban linkage” to address the social impacts of gentrification.

Social and racial equity in urban development and urban design.

**Comparative Case Studies**

“Dual Cities. The Controversy of Baltimore, Maryland”. Questions of Equity.

TILP: The program to promote home ownership among low income tenants of apartment buildings in New York.


Session 7: Designing Healthy Communities

The Relationship of Urban Design to Public Health.

“Social Policy in Concrete”

“Restructuring Suburban America”

Session 8.

**Presentations and Class Discussion of the Term Urban Design Project**
Session 9. Lecture-Discussion: Environmentally Sustainable Metropolitan Growth

Comparative metro growth strategies in Portland, Vancouver BC, Copenhagen and Stockholm.

- Issue the final project on Metropolitan Growth. This short project is an 8-hour final exercise focusing on metropolitan growth models. Due by digital submission.

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Week 10. No Class Meeting. In accord with Department of Architecture policy. Architecture subject course do not meet during Week 10. Work on final project on metropolitan growth. There is no final exam in the course. A final short project will be issued Week 8 and due during final exam week.

Instructor / Questions

- Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about the goals, content and format of the course.

Gerry Gast ggast@uoregon.edu geraldgast@gmail.com

Gerry Gast is an architect / urban designer and Associate Professor at the University of Oregon. He is a founding principal of Gast Hillmer Urban Design in the San Francisco Bay Area, where his practice focuses on public urban design projects in California and the western states. He has completed projects in the San Francisco Bay Area, San Diego, Los Angeles and in the Portland metro area.

For several years Professor Gast taught as Visiting Associate Professor in the Program on Urban Studies at Stanford University where he authored the core urban design theory and studio courses in the interdisciplinary Program on Urban Studies.

Current and Recent Professional Projects:

- Master Plan for the new Striyskiy Park campus of the Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU) in Lviv, Ukraine. Continuing work since 2008 with the University on the Master Plan, public spaces and buildings.

- Research and design work on educational buildings in marginalized neighborhoods of Colombia for the Pies Descalzos Foundation of Bogota, Colombia.

- Member of the Master Plan Committee and Design Advisory Group for the new Lincoln High School in the Portland central city. The school opened in Fall 2022. Lincoln High School is Portland’s first new public high school building built in the city of Portland in 60 years.