Mission

The Barnard–Columbia Urban Studies program enables students to explore and understand the urban experience in all of its richness and complexity. It recognizes the city as an amalgam of diverse peoples and their social, political, economic, and cultural interactions within a distinctive built environment. Students study the evolution and variety of urban forms and governance structures, which create opportunities for, as well as constrain, the exercise of human agency, individual and collective. They explore the place of the city in different historical and comparative contexts, as well as in the human imagination.

Majors build an intellectual foundation that combines interdisciplinary coursework and a concentration of study within a single field. Through the two-semester junior colloquium, students study urban history and contemporary issues, and at the same time hone their interdisciplinary, analytical and research skills. This shared experience prepares them for their independent research project in their senior year. We encourage our majors to use New York City as a laboratory, and many courses draw on the vast resources of the city and include an off-campus experience.

Student Learning Outcomes

Having successfully completed the major in Urban Studies, the student will be able to:

- Apply concepts or methods from more than one social science or adjacent discipline to analyze an urban issue or problem.
- Describe the distinctive social, cultural, and spatial features of cities and illustrate their impacts on the urban experience.
- Apply basic skills of empirical reasoning to an urban problem.
- Explain how the idea of the city varies in different historical and comparative contexts.
- Demonstrate familiarity with a particular disciplinary approach to the city as an object of study.
- Demonstrate understanding of the history and variety of urban forms and governance structures.
- Articulate a well-defined research question, conduct independent research using primary sources and a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches, and write a substantive research paper.
- Communicate ideas effectively in written or oral form.
- Organize and present group research projects.

Director: Gergely Baics (History and Urban Studies)

Associate Director: Aaron Passell (Urban Studies)

Columbia College Advisor: Amy Chazkel, Bernard Hirschhorn Associate Professor of Urban Studies

Urban Studies Faculty

Assistant Professors: Gergely Baics (History and Urban Studies), Deborah Becher (Sociology), Angela Simms (Sociology and Urban Studies)

Associate Professors: Mary Rocco (Term, Urban Studies), Christian Siener (Term, Urban Studies), Chandler Miranda (Term, Urban Studies), Marcela Tovar-Restrepo (Term, Urban Studies)

The Urban Studies Advisory Committee consults on matters of curriculum and program direction. For more information, please consult the Advisory Committee web page on the program website.

Major in Urban Studies

The major in urban studies is comprised of seven curricular requirements:

Requirement U: Introduction to Urban Studies (1 course)
URBS UN1515 Introduction to Urban Studies

Requirement A: Urban-Related Social Sciences (3 courses)
One course dealing primarily with urban subject matter from each of three of the following disciplines: Anthropology, Economics, History, Political Science, Sociology. For students declaring a major in Urban Studies after Spring 2018, one of the three courses must be History.

Many courses offered through Urban Studies may count towards Requirement A. For example, URBS UN3420 Introduction to Urban Sociology, Introduction to Urban Sociology counts as a Sociology course, URBS UN3450 Neighborhood and Community Development counts as a Political Science course, etc. Student should try to complete at least two of the Requirement A courses before taking the Junior Seminar (see Requirement E, below). It is recommended that majors fulfill this requirement before their junior year.

Requirement B: Urban-Related Non-Social Science (1 course)
One course dealing primarily with urban subject matter from a discipline not listed above (such as Architecture, Art History, English, Environmental Science, etc.)

Requirement C: Methods of Analysis (1 course)
One course in methods of analysis, such as URBS UN2200 INTRODUCTION TO GIS METHODS. Methods courses in related disciplines will also be considered for the requirement. Please consult the program website (https://urban.barnard.edu/) or the Associate Director.

Requirement D: Specialization (5 courses)
Five or more courses in a specialization from one of the participating departments. Barnard College students can double-count one A, B, or C course toward this requirement (only one of five), with the approval of the Director; Columbia College and General Studies students cannot double-count courses. Barnard majors also have specific requirements for each specialization, which are outlined in detail on the program website, urban.barnard.edu (http://urban.barnard.edu/).

Requirement E: Junior Seminar (1 course)
URBS UN3545 Junior Seminar: The Shaping of the Modern City. Multiple sections of this course are taught each semester by various faculty on different topics. For more information, please consult the program website (https://urban.barnard.edu/) or the Associate Director.
A senior thesis written in conjunction with a two-semester research seminar, chosen from the following four options:

URBS UN3992 Senior Seminar: The Built Environment
URBS UN3994 Senior Seminar: New York Field Research
URBS UN3996 Senior Seminar: International Topics in Urban Studies

A research seminar in the department of specialization. This option must be approved by the Associate Director.

A complete list and courses that fulfill requirements A–E can be found on the program's website, urban.barnard.edu (http://urban.barnard.edu/).

Appropriate substitutions may be made for courses listed above with the approval of the Associate Director.

There is no minor in Urban Studies.

There is no concentration in Urban Studies.

URBS UN2200 INTRODUCTION TO GIS METHODS. 3 points.
Prerequisites: Must attend first class for instructor permission.
Prerequisites: Must attend first class for instructor permission. Students create maps using ArcGIS software, analyze the physical and social processes presented in the digital model, and use the data to solve specific spatial analysis problems. Note: this course fulfills the C requirement in Urban Studies.

URBS S1517 INTRODUCTION TO URBAN STUDIES. 3.00 points.
This course is intended to be both an interdisciplinary introduction to the city and to the field of Urban Studies. As an introduction to the city, the course will address a variety of questions: What is a city? How did cities develop? How do cities function socially, politically, and economically? Why do people live in cities? What are some of the major issues facing cities in the early twenty-first century, and how can cities address these issues? As an introduction to the interdisciplinary field of Urban Studies, the course will present models of how scholars approach cities from a variety of disciplinary viewpoints, including architecture, planning, law, sociology, history, archaeology, anthropology, political science, public policy, and geography. Students will learn some of the major concepts in the field of Urban Studies, and will study the works of leading scholars in the field. Students in the course will approach cities from a number of disciplines, not only through the reading, but also through assignments that take place in different locations throughout New York City.

URBS S3309 INTRODUCTION TO URBAN ETHNOGRAPHIES. 3 points.
What is an ethnography and what makes an ethnography “urban”? This course explores how social scientists use ethnography to analyze questions and dilemmas often associated with urban settings. We will combine close readings of ethnographies with field-based inquiry, including our own studies of urban public space. Through both our readings and our field exercises, we will focus on the methods at the heart of ethnography: observation and participant-observation.

URBS UN1515 Introduction to Urban Studies. 3 points.
This course is intended to be both an interdisciplinary introduction to the city and to the field of Urban Studies. As an introduction to the city, the course will address a variety of questions: What is a city? How did cities develop? How do cities function socially, politically, and economically? Why do people live in cities? What are some of the major issues facing cities in the early twenty-first century, and how can cities address these issues? As an introduction to the interdisciplinary field of Urban Studies, the course will present models of how scholars approach cities from a variety of disciplinary viewpoints, including architecture, planning, law, sociology, history, archaeology, anthropology, political science, public policy, and geography. Students will learn some of the major concepts in the field of Urban Studies, and will study the works of leading scholars in the field. Students in the course will approach cities from a number of disciplines, not only through the reading, but also through assignments that take place in different locations throughout New York City.

URBS UN3440 Shrinking Cities. 3 points.
While some cities thrive and struggle to house the global majority, others struggle with the effects of urban shrinkage—population loss, disinvestment, and abandonment. The path to urban decline is paved by social, economic and spatial forces that result in shrinking cities. This class explores how to understand and engage with urban decline. It includes a consideration of sundry efforts to reverse, live with, and rethink urban decline in a variety of locales. The hope is that this exercise will shed light not only on iconic declining places like Detroit, but also on the nature of uneven development and how it is the rule rather than the anomalous exception within capitalist urbanization.

Course materials draw on disciplines such as planning, economics, architecture, history and sociology to help understand urban decline and its outcomes from a variety of perspectives. Over the course of the semester, we will investigate larger processes—globalization, deindustrialization and socioeconomic change—to understand how cities and communities respond to the consequences of these forces. We will engage with the global literature on shrinking cities but will be focused primarily on exploring the dynamics of shrinkage in US cities. To that end, following a wide-reaching examination of nation-wide phenomena, we will study in-depth a sample of cities to understand local and regional variations and responses. How do we treat cities that do not grow? Given the constrained or complete lack of resources in these places, to what extent should some cities be allowed to “die”? What is the impact on the residents that remain in these places?
URBS UN3480 From Homelessness to Foreclosure: NYC Geographies of Shelter and Home. 4 points.
This course will examine the social, political, and economic elements that have aligned in New York City to produce the most expansive infrastructure of homeless shelters in the United States, as well as ongoing changes in the city’s homeless policy since the housing foreclosure crisis. While we will focus primarily on the past 30 to 40 years in New York City, we will consider the history of homelessness and housing in the United States since the Great Depression. Major themes will include criminalization, origin myths, and representations of people who are experiencing homelessness. Key questions will include: In what ways is the current geography of homelessness the result of historical patterns of racism and discrimination? How does studying homelessness provide insight into the ways urban spaces are made? Why have shelters become the primary public response to homelessness in New York? How are race and gender central to the project of building a shelter infrastructure in New York? How are shelters experienced by those living in them? What are some of the ways people living in shelters organize to advocate for their rights and to resist mainstream representations?

URBS UN3545 Junior Seminar: The Shaping of the Modern City. 4 points.
Prerequisites: Non-majors admitted by permission of instructor. Students must attend first class. Enrollment limited to 16 students per section.
General Education Requirement: Historical Studies.
Introduction to the historical process and social consequences of urban growth, from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present.

URBS UN3992 Senior Seminar: The Built Environment. 4 points.
(year-long course, 4 points per term)
Prerequisites: Senior standing. Year-long course; participation is for two consecutive terms. No new students admitted for spring.
Emphasizes the study of the built environment of cities and suburbs, and the related debates. Readings, class presentations, and written work culminate in major individual projects, under the supervision of faculty trained in architecture, urban design, or urban planning.