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), Mary Rocco (Term, Urban Studies)

This program is supervised by the Committee on Urban Studies:

Director: Aaron Passell (Sociology)

Professor of Professional Practice: Karen Fairbanks (Chair, Architecture)
Columbia College Advisor: Amy Chazkel (History)
Professors: Ester Fuchs (International and Public Affairs, CU), Kenneth T. Jackson (History), Jose Moya (History), Elliot Sclar (Urban Planning and Policy), David Weiman (Economics)
Associate Professor: Randall Reback (Economics), Samuel Roberts (History and Sociomedical Sciences).
Assistant Professors: Gergely Baics (History), Deborah Becher (Sociology), Catherine Fennell (Anthropology), Maria Rivera Maulucci (Education), Van Tran (Sociology)

Major in Urban Studies

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

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 counts as a Sociology course, URBS UN3550 Community Building and Economic Development counts as a Political Science course, etc. Students must 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 UN3200 Spatial Analysis: GIS Methods and Urban Case Studies.

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’s website, urban.barnard.edu (http://urban.barnard.edu/).

Requirement E: Junior Seminar (2 courses)
URBS UN3545 Junior Seminar: The Shaping of the Modern City 4
URBS UN3546 Junior Colloquium: Contemporary Urban Issues 4

Requirement F: Senior Seminar (2 courses)
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 and Senior Seminar: The Built Environment
- URBS UN3993

URBS UN3994 Senior Seminar: New York Field Research and Senior Seminar: New York Field Research
- URBS UN3995

URBS UN3996 Senior Seminar: International Topics in Urban Studies and Senior Seminar: International Topics in Urban Studies
- URBS UN3997

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

There is no concentration in urban studies.

URBS UN2200 Introduction to GIS. 3 points.
Prerequisites: Must attend first class for instructor permission.
Due to the high demand for our limited-enrollment spatial analysis course (URBS V3200) the Urban Studies program is offering an introductory course to the fundamentals of GIS (Geographic Informational Systems), specifically for non-majors. 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 does fulfill the C requirement in Urban Studies.

URBS UN3420 Introduction to Urban Sociology. 3 points.
Prerequisites: Students must attend first class.
Examines the diverse ways in which sociology has defined and studied cities, focusing on the people who live and work in the city, and the transformations U.S. cities are undergoing today. Sociological methods, including ethnography, survey research, quantitative studies, and participant observation will provide perspectives on key urban questions such as street life, race, immigration, globalization, conflict, and redevelopment.

URBS UN3450 Neighborhood and Community Development. 3 points.
New York City is made up of more than 400 neighborhoods. The concept of neighborhoods in cities has had many meanings and understandings over time. Equally complex is the concept of community used to describe the people attached to or defined by neighborhood. While neighborhood can be interpreted as a spatial, social, political, racial, ethnic, or even, economic unit; community often refers to the group of stakeholders (i.e. residents, workers, investors) whose interests directly align with the conditions of their environment. Community development is “a process where these community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems” that result from the changing contexts in their neighborhoods. Using a variety of theories and approaches, residents organize themselves or work with community development practitioners on the ground to obtain safe, affordable housing, improve the public realm, build wealth, get heard politically, develop human capital, and connect to metropolitan labor and housing markets. To address the ever-changing contexts of neighborhoods, community development organizations are taking on new roles and adapting (in various cases) to larger forces within the city, region and nation such as disinvestment, reinvestment, increased cultural diversity, an uncertain macroeconomic environment, and changes in federal policy.

For more than a century, city-dwellers—and especially New Yorkers—have been tackling these challenges. This course will examine both historic and contemporary community building and development efforts, paying special attention to approaches which were shaped by New York City. This urban center, often described as a “city of neighborhoods,” has long been a seedbed for community-based problem-solving inventions. The course will focus on the theories (why?), tools (how?), and actors (who?) within the field of community development practice and is organized around important sectors (housing, economic development, food systems, arts), case studies, and contested concepts (public participation, social capital, public space).

URBS UN3315 Metropolitics of Race and Place. 3 points.
Prerequisites: Students must attend first class.
This class explores how racism and racialized capitalism and politics shape the distribution of material resources among cities and suburbs in metropolitan areas and the racial and ethnic groups residing in them. Readings and discussion focus on the history of metropolitan area expansion and economic development, as well as contemporary social processes shaping racial and ethnic groups’ access to high-quality public goods and private amenities. We address racial and ethnic groups’ evolving political agendas in today’s increasingly market-driven socio-political context, noting the roles of residents; federal, state, and local governments; market institutions and actors; urban planners, activist organizations, foundations, and social scientists, among others. Here is a sample of specific topics: race/ethnicity and who “belongs” in what “place,” inequitable government and market investment across racial and ethnic communities over time and “sedimentation effects” (for example, the “redlining” of Black communities leading to their inability to access loan and credit markets and the resulting wealth gap between Blacks and Whites); gentrification processes; creating sufficient, sustainable tax bases; and suburban sprawl. Assignments will include two short response papers, mid-term and final exams, and another project to be determined.
URBS UN3310 Race, Space, and Urban Schools. 3 points.
Many people don’t think of themselves as having attended segregated schools. And yet, most of us went to schools attended primarily by people who looked very much like us. In fact, schools have become more segregated over the past 30 years, even as the country becomes increasingly multicultural. In this class, we will use public schools as an example to examine the role race plays in shaping urban spaces and institutions. We will begin by unpacking the concept of racialization, or the process by which a person, place, phenomenon, or characteristic becomes associated with a certain race. Then, we will explore the following questions: What are the connections between city schools and their local contexts? What does it mean to be a “neighborhood school”? How do changes in neighborhoods change schools? We will use ethnographies, narrative non-fiction, and educational research to explore these questions from a variety of perspectives. You will apply what you have learned to your own experiences and to current debates over urban policies and public schools. This course will extend your understanding of key anthropological and sociological perspectives on urban inequality in the United States, as well as introduce you to critical theory.

URBS UN3350 Environment, Climate Change and Vulnerability of Cities: Our New “Normal”. 3 points.
Urban experts face one of the greatest challenges in the history of urbanization: the multidimensional environmental crisis unfolding on our planet. Policymakers have responded by formulating the “sustainable development model” as an option to be implemented in our growing cities. Popularized by the 1987 United Nations’ report “Our Common Future,” commonly known as the “Brundtland Report,” the term “sustainable development” has acquired different meanings and contents depending on its socio-economic context and its historical moment. This course will explore what urban sustainability means today in light of the climate change crisis from a gender and intersectional perspective. What can urban experts do to respond to urgent consequences of environmental deterioration in both industrialized and less industrialized world regions? What are the proper interventions to mitigate the burden on vulnerable social groups of phenomena such as: weather extremes, displacement, interethnic and social conflicts, food insecurity, and spread of diseases, among others? By examining case studies and applied methodologies we will analyze how climate change impacts different social groups in our cities, identifying adaptation and mitigation strategies being currently implemented. Tools to apply climate change scientific data will be provided. Students will have the opportunity to study and engage in climate change action platforms, such as the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

URBS UN3546 Junior Colloquium: Contemporary Urban Issues. 4 points.
Prerequisites: Non-majors admitted by permission of instructor. Students must attend first class. Enrollment limited to 16 students per section. Evaluation of current political, economic, social, cultural and physical forces that are shaping urban areas.

URBS UN3993 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.

URBS UN3997 Senior Seminar: International Topics in Urban Studies. 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. A year-long research seminar for students who wish to conduct a senior thesis project that focuses on cities outside of the United States. Topics relating to the rapid urbanization of Latin America, Africa, and Asia are particularly welcome. Seminar meetings will include discussion of relevant readings, as well as occasional class presentations and peer-editing assignments.

URBS UN3995 Senior Seminar: New York Field Research. 4 points.
(year-long course, 4 points per term)
Prerequisites: Senior standing. (available at http://urban.barnard.edu/forms-and-resources). Year-long course; participation is for two consecutive terms. No new students admitted for spring. Using New York City as a research laboratory, under the guidance of the faculty coordinator, students clarify basic theoretical issues related to their chosen research problem; find ways of making a series of empirical questions operational; collect evidence to test hypotheses; analyze the data using a variety of social science techniques; and produce reports of basic findings.