



USC University of Southern California

Fall 2024
Sol Price School of Public Policy
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, CA

Instructor: Meredith Drake Reitan
Contact: mereditd@usc.edu

Units: 4

Location: RGL 215

Schedule: Tuesday, 6:00 pm – 9:20 pm PST

Office Hours: by appointment

PPD 644: SHAPING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Urban design shapes the appearance, layout, and organization of the built environment. The term implies a deliberate process to create functional, efficient, just, and aesthetically appealing places.

At least three disciplines - architecture, landscape architecture, and urban planning - claim expertise and authority over the scope of urban design. Architects tend to focus on the design of architectural forms in the built environment. Landscape architects are apt to emphasize the processes of the natural environment when designing large-scale built environments. Urban planners are responsible for defining urban design's social, economic, and political foundations. They identify the strategic design framework and guiding institutions that influence the direction and quality of urban change. We can imagine an overlapping Venn diagram representing urban design as a shared enterprise between architecture, landscape architecture, and urban planning, underscoring the complementary relationships between these professions. They all share similar concerns for human scale, public space, sense of place, sustainability, urbanism, aesthetic values, historic preservation, urban conservation, etc.

While the professional identity of urban design remains a shared enterprise, there is a growing sense that urban design has established an autonomous identity as a field. Scholarship about the appearance and layout of cities and the human consequences of the built environment has grown in recent years, not only within the professions but also in the disciplines of the social sciences, the humanities, environment, and health. The body of relevant literature includes critical, interpretive, and reflective work on the one hand and empirical findings about the nature of practice and human consequences of the built environment on the other.

This course will introduce students to essential concepts and foundational literature in urban design and physical planning. Students will explore urban design concepts, theories, and techniques that shape our understanding of livable cities. They will analyze key ideas such as urbanism, urban form, and the interplay between space and place while critically examining the role of public spaces and phenomena like the flaneur and defensible space. The course will cover influential theories ranging from Modernism to New Urbanism and contemporary urban design approaches like Tactical Urbanism and the 15 Minute City concept. Students will gain hands-on experience with essential urban design techniques, including figure/ground analysis, visual

rhetoric, observational methods, and innovative community engagement tools like PhotoVoice. By integrating these diverse elements, students will develop a comprehensive toolkit for analyzing, interpreting, and shaping urban environments, equipping them to address the complex challenges of contemporary city design and planning.

The concepts, theories, and methods will be presented, interrogated, and discussed in class in a seminar format. Students will be encouraged to apply the ideas and techniques through various in-class activities and assignments focusing on analyzing specific places.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of this semester, students will be able to:

1. Explain the foundational principles of urban design, including essential concepts and theories.
2. Critically evaluate existing urban environments using a combination of analytical techniques.
3. Communicate urban design ideas effectively through various media, including written reports, oral presentations, and visual representations.

ASSIGNMENTS

Besides time spent in the classroom, USC courses must meet a minimum standard for out-of-class time. The university expects two hours of out-of-class work per week for each unit of in-class contact time. This means that our four-unit class will generally require an average of 8 hours weekly for reading and preparing assignments.

To reinforce our learning, the following work beyond the classroom will be expected:

Reading: Students will demonstrate their understanding of urban design's concepts, theories, and practices through discussions of the assigned readings. All readings will be provided digitally through USC's Brightspace System using the [Perusal](#) application, a social e-reader platform. Students will be expected to discuss the required readings with each other in Perusal and to come to class ready to engage in a robust analysis of the texts.

Emerging Trends Group Project: In this collaborative assignment, students will work in groups to explore and analyze emerging trends in urban design. Groups will identify a cutting-edge urban design topic, conduct independent research, select a reading for the class, and prepare a 15-minute presentation on their findings. Students will critically analyze the potential impact of their selected trend on the future of urban environments. The assignment will include individual reflections and peer feedback, promoting collaborative and personal learning experiences.

Place-Based Investigations:

This comprehensive project forms the core of our course. Students will conduct three in-depth, place-based investigations of a single urban site, examining it through temporal, spatial, and user-centered lenses. These investigations will require students to apply the concepts, theories, and methodologies discussed in class. The project culminates in a final portfolio synthesizing the findings from all three investigations, demonstrating students' ability to analyze and communicate complex urban phenomena. The assignment emphasizes interdisciplinary approaches, advanced research methods, and the integration of theory and practice in urban design. Evaluation criteria will be developed collaboratively, and regular check-ins and peer reviews will support the learning process.

GRADING

My approach to grading is inspired by Professor Ryan Cordall of Northeastern University and others who have challenged the value of assigning reductive, numerically-determined grades.

In this course, I want you to feel empowered to explore and experiment. I hope to create an environment where risk-taking and creative scholarship are rewarded, even if assignments don't turn out as expected.

Students will assess their work in dialogue with me. We will collaboratively assign grades and evaluate each student's work in terms of the goals they set for themselves and their intellectual growth during the class.

Formally, this means I will ask you to draft self-evaluations a few times during the semester, including a final self-evaluation in which you will assign yourself a grade. Barring extreme circumstances, this self-assessment will determine your grade for the semester. Ideally, knowing this process in advance will free you to do more ambitious work from the beginning of the semester.

I reserve the right to adjust grades if students take undue advantage of this consultative grading paradigm.

CLASSROOM NORMS

Sharing our thoughts and ideas with others can be daunting. To model the expectations of a professional environment in our field and to promote a respectful classroom environment, we agree, at a minimum, to:

- Let others speak without interruption,
- Support our points with evidence or speak from personal experience,
- Encourage everyone to get involved (i.e., ask questions of each other, make succinct points, etc.),
- Accept feedback in the positive spirit with which it is given as a means of development.

AI GENERATORS

In this class, we will explore the use of AI tools such as ChatGPT and image-generation apps. Learning to use AI is an emerging skill, and I welcome the opportunity to engage with these tools both in and outside class. Keep in mind the following:

- AI tools are permitted to help you brainstorm topics or revise work you have already written or created.
- If you provide prompts that require minimum effort, you will get low-quality results. You must refine your prompts to get good outcomes, which takes work.
- Proceed with caution when using AI tools, and do not assume the information provided is accurate or trustworthy. If it gives you a number or fact, think it is incorrect unless you know the correct answer or can verify its accuracy with another source. You will be responsible for any errors or omissions provided by the tool. It works best for topics you understand.
- AI is a tool, but one that you need to acknowledge using. Please include a paragraph at the end of any assignment that uses AI explaining how (and why) you used it and what prompts you used to get the results. Failure to do so is a violation of academic integrity policies.
- Be thoughtful about when AI is useful. Consider its appropriateness for each assignment or circumstance. The use of AI tools requires attribution. You are expected to cite any material generated by the tool.

SHARING OF COURSE MATERIALS OUTSIDE OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

USC has a policy that prohibits sharing synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS AND READING MENU

Note: the assigned readings are subject to change based on student input and interests. The final readings will be listed in the Brightspace Weekly Modules and available in Perusall.

Week 1: 8/27/2024 Introduction

Learning objective:

Understand the scope and importance of urban design in shaping cities and communities.

Assignment:

Before class: Post to the course's Discussion an image of a place you love (or perhaps a place you love to hate). Be prepared to discuss in class

Week 2: 9/3/2024 Concept: Urbanism and the Discipline of Urban Design. Technique: Walking with an Urbanist's Eyes

Learning objective:

Distinguish between urbanism as a study of urban places and the urban design profession.

Develop and apply observational skills to interpret urban environments, identifying physical, social, and economic patterns to inform urban planning decisions.

Reading:

Birch, Genie (2011) "From CIAM to CNU: The Roots and Thinkers of Modern Urban Design" in *Companion to Urban Design*

Jacobs, Allan B. 1985. "Starting to Look" and "Clues." In *Looking at Cities*, pp. 29-83. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Week 3: 9/10/2024 Concept: Urban Form and Urban Morphology. Technique: Figure/Ground Analysis

Learning objective:

Analyze and interpret the physical structure of cities, including street patterns, building layouts, and spatial relationships.

Utilize figure/ground analysis to interpret urban spatial relationships and patterns.

Reading:

Oliveira, (2016) "The Elements of Urban Form" in *Urban Morphology*

Hebbert, Michael (2016) "Figure Ground: History and Practice of a Planning Technique" *Town Planning Review* (87)6

Manchester Urban Design-LAB Toolkit "Figure Ground"

In Class Activity: Brainstorm Urban Design Trends

Week 4: 9/17/2024 Concept: Space and Place. Technique: Visual Rhetoric

Learning Objectives:

Distinguish between space and place in urban contexts and explain their significance in design.

Apply visual rhetoric techniques to communicate urban design ideas effectively.

Reading:

Hayden, Dolores (1995) "Urban Landscape History: The Sense of Place & the Politics of Space" from *The Power of Place*

Moreira, Susanna (2021) "What is Placemaking?" *ArchDaily*

Koh, A. (2017). "Placemaking When Black Lives Matter" *Progressive City*

Week 5: 9/24/2024 Concept: Public Space and the Public Realm. Technique: Observational Methods (Users)

Learning objective:

Evaluate the role and importance of public space and the public realm in urban environments.

Analyze the use of public space using observational methods.

Reading:

Iveson, Kurt (1998) "Putting the Public Pack in Public Space"

Stevens, Quentin (2014) "Public Space as Lived" in *Explorations in Urban Design*, Carmona Editor

In-Class Activity: Public Space Observation

Week 6: 10/1/2024 Concept: Flaneur, Flaneuse, and Flanerie. Technique: Serial Vision

Learning objective:

Analyze the concept of the flaneur and its relevance to understanding urban experiences.

Employ serial vision techniques to understand urban experiences.

Reading:

De Certeau, Michel (1984) "Spatial Practices: Walking in the City"

Elken, Lauren (2016) "A tribute to female flâneurs: the women who reclaimed our city streets" *The Guardian*

Manchester Urban Design LAB (2020) "MUD-Lab Toolkit: Serial Vision" accessible at www.seed.manchester.ac.uk/mudlab

Week 7: 10/8/2024 Concept: Defensible Space and Hostile Architecture. Technique: Safety Audits

Learning objective:

Critically assess the implications of defensible space and hostile architecture in urban design.

Develop strategies to create inclusive and welcoming urban spaces for all.

Reading:

Newman, Oscar (1996). "Chapter 1: Defensible Space Principles" *Creating Defensible Space*. US Department of Housing and Urban Development

Davis, Mike, (2011) "Fortress LA" in *The City Reader*, edited by Richard T. LeGates, and Frederic Stout, Taylor & Francis Group

In-Class Activity: Finalize Urban Design Trends and Groups

Assignment: Place-Based Investigation 1

Week 8: 10/15/2024 Theory: Modernism and Its Discontents. Technique: Cognitive Mapping/Legibility Analysis

Learning objective:

Analyze the fundamental principles and characteristics of modernist urban planning, including its ideological foundations and signature design interventions.

Evaluate the long-term impacts of modernist city design on urban form, social dynamics, and contemporary planning practices.

Create and interpret cognitive maps to understand subjective perceptions of urban spaces.

Reading:

The School of Life Art/Architecture Le Corbusier YouTube

Scott, James C. (1998) "The High Modernist City" from *Seeing Like a State* Yale University Press

Lynch, Kevin (1960) "The Image of the Environment" and "The City Image and Its Elements" from *The Image of the City*

Manchester Urban Design Lab Legibility Analysis

Week 9: 10/22/2024 Theory: New Urbanism. Technique: Transect Analysis

Learning objective:

Evaluate the principles and impact of New Urbanism on contemporary urban planning.

Reading:

Congress for New Urbanism. [Charter for New Urbanism](#)

Talen, Emily (2011) "Form-based codes vs. conventional zoning" *Companion to Urban Design*

Pyatok, Michael. 2000. "Martha Stewart vs. Studs Terkel." *Places* 13(1): 40-43.

Week 10: 10/29/2024 Theory: Landscape and Ecological Urbanism. Technique: Green Infrastructure Mapping

Learning objective:

Integrate ecological principles into urban design strategies.

Reading:

Waldheim, Charles (2006) "Landscape as Urbanism" from the *Landscape Urbanism Reader*

Gintoff, Vladimir (2016) "12 Projects that Explain Landscape Urbanism and How It's Changing the Face of Cities" *Arch Daily*

Pulido, Laura (2000) "Rethinking Environmental Racism, White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*

Assignment: Place-Based Investigation 2

Week 11: 11/5/2024 Theory: Everyday Urbanism. Technique: Tracing Public Life and Photo Elicitation

Learning objective:

Recognize and analyze the significance of everyday spaces and activities in urban environments.

Document public life and its meaning through photographs

Reading:

Crawford, Margaret (2008) "Introduction," "Preface: The Current State of Everyday Urbanism," and "Blurring the Boundaries: Public Space and Private Life" in *Everyday Urbanism*

Rojas, James (1995) "Los Angeles, The Enacted Environments of East LA" *Places* 8(3)

Renteria, Jennifer (2020) "The Starlite Swap Meet" from *East of East: the Making of Greater El Monte*, Rutgers University Press

Harper, Douglas (2002) "Talking about Pictures: A Case for Photo Elicitation" *Visual Studies* 17(1), 13-26

Assignment: Group Upload Urban Design Trend Reading

Week 12: 11/12/2024 Theory: Tactical or Guerilla Urbanism. Technique: PhotoVoice

Learning objective:

Develop and evaluate tactical or guerilla urbanism interventions.

Design and implement PhotoVoice projects to engage communities in urban design processes.

Reading:

Hou, Jeffrey (2011) "Citizen Design: Participation and Beyond" from *Companion to Urban Design*

Hurley, A. K. (2016). DIY urban planning is happening all over the country. Is it only for white people? *The Washington Post*.

"Reclaiming City Spaces with Tactical Urbanism" video

Milne, E-J and Rachel Muir (2020) "Photovoice: A Critical Introduction" *The SAGE Handbook of Visual Research Methods*

Week 13: 11/19/2024 Theory: 15 Minute City. Technique: Universal Design Checklists and Walkability Audit

Learning objective:

Analyze the potential impacts and challenges of implementing the 15 Minute City concept in various urban contexts.

Reading:

Moreno, Carlos et al (2021) "Introducing the "15-Minute City": Sustainability, Resilience and Place Identity in Future Post-Pandemic Cities" *Smart Cities* 4(1), 93-111

Meltzer, Rachel (2024) "[The Questionable Economics of the 15-Minute City](#)"
Bloomberg

Center for Excellence in Urban Design <https://universaldesign.ie/about-universal-design/the-7-principles>

Ireland National Transport Authority, (2021) *Universal Design Walkability Audit Tool for Roads and Streets*

In-Class Activity: Group Check-in Urban Design Trend Presentation

Assignment: Place-Based Investigation 3

Week 14: 11/26/2024 Emerging Topics in Urban Design

Learning objective: Explore and critically evaluate current trends and innovations in urban design.

Reading: Determined by student groups

In Class Activity: Presentation Urban Design Trends

Week 15 12/3/2024 Summary and Final Class

Learning objective: Synthesize critical concepts and techniques learned throughout the course.

Assignment: Reflection and Peer Feedback Urban Design Trend Presentation

12/17 NO CLASS (FINAL). PLACE-BASED INVESTIGATION PORTFOLIO DUE BY 9:00 PM

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC CONDUCT AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Students and Disability Accommodations: USC welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up

with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible, as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the Financial Aid Office webpage for undergraduate- and graduate-level SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

Support Systems: Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on-call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, seven days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline consists of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely). It represents a continued commitment to those in crisis. Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on-call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-2500

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101

Information on events, programs, and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenues to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on-call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health-promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs. It includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the USC Student Handbook. All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

Academic dishonesty has a far-reaching impact and is considered a serious offense against the university. Violations will result in a grade penalty, such as a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, and disciplinary action from the university itself, such as suspension or even expulsion.

For more information about academic integrity see the student handbook or the Office of Academic Integrity's website, and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct.

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

