Geography 354: Geography of Cities

Fall 2015
Section 1, schedule 21647
Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30 to 1:45pm
Storm Hall 105

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Course Description

The SDSU Course Catalogue provides the following brief (and rough) description of this course: “Survey of the location, function and spread of cities; the spatial and functional arrangement of activities in cities, leading to an analysis of current urban problems: sprawl, city decline, metropolitan transportation. Field trips may be arranged.”

Our main focus in this course will be on: (1) revealing geographic and historical differences in urban forms and experiences and (2) explaining how these variations relate to broader economic, social, and political processes, including globalization, technological changes, economic restructuring, and transformations in the role of the state. In short, our main questions will be: What city? For whom? and By whom?

Organization

The course is organized in four parts. We begin with an introduction to the main themes of urban geography and its different theoretical approaches. In part two, we turn our attention to urbanization and the processes that shape the development of cities in the United States and Western Europe. In
the third part of the course, we investigate the emergence, growth and transformation of cities in the Global South. We end the course in part four by examining a variety of topics of critical importance to urban dwellers, including poverty, employment, urban renewal, crime and safety, race/ethnicity, gender, immigration, health, and environmental degradation. Throughout the course, we rely on case studies from cities around the world to illustrate differences in the organization of contemporary cities and their impacts on urban inhabitants. We also use our own city, San Diego, as a learning site in which to test ideas and theories learned in class.

**Goals and Student Learning Outcomes**

The goals of the course are to engage students in the contemporary issues of urban life, expose them to current research questions in urban geography, and provide tools to interpret complex urban problems and develop solutions from a geographic perspective.

Urban geographers have traditionally been interested in understanding the location, shape and spatial evolution of cities over time. They have asked question such as: Why did cities emerge in certain places? Why do some cities grow faster than others? What explains suburbanization, sprawl, fragmentation and neighborhood decline? What factors underlie patterns of economic activity, land value, and segregation of social groups?

While these questions remain important today, rapid urbanization and globalization have led to a dramatic transformation and diversification of urban life, leading urban geographers to turn their attention to the institutional, social, political, and cultural arrangements that shape and differentiate the experiences of urban dwellers in various places. Thus new questions are being raised regarding everyday urban life, including issues of livelihood, consumption and lifestyle, health and wellbeing, social and political exclusion, political engagement and urban governance. These themes will be discussed throughout the course.

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Recognize differences in the spatial organization of cities around the world and identify key factors underlying them.
- Contextualize the process of urbanization within the historical development of the capitalist economy and state.
- Identify the principal challenges facing cities today and discuss potential solutions.
- Describe how cities are experienced differently by their inhabitants and link these differences to broader social, economic and political processes of spatial inclusion and exclusion.

**Readings**

The readings for the course have been assembled from academic journals and books to cover a wide range of topics in urban geography. There is no required textbook and all the readings are available
on Blackboard in folders that corresponds to the dates and topics described in the schedule section below. You are required to read the assigned material **before** each class. This is extremely important because it will enhance your learning experience and promote productive class discussions. Readings with a check mark (✓) require a response to be posted on Blackboard ahead of class (see below).

### Assessment and Grading

Your grade for the course will be based on the following requirements:

1. **Reading Reflections**

   In order to ensure that you are engaging with the reading material and that you are participating in the course, there are 10 written responses due throughout the semester on dates indicated in the syllabus. Readings for which responses are requested are indicated on the schedule below by a check mark (✓). I will only take into account your best 7 responses. In other words, you are allowed to miss 3 without it negatively affecting your grade. Reading responses should be posted to Blackboard **no later than 11:30 AM** on the due date. This will give me a little bit of time to read them before class and incorporate any relevant questions into lecture. **Late submissions will not be accepted.** Responses should consist of a short paragraph (about 250 words) that directly addresses the specific question or prompt posted on Blackboard in the “Assignments” section. These should not be reading summaries or unstructured “stream of consciousness.” While these should not be very time-consuming, it is still important that your response is organized, focused, and well written. You could earn 30 points for an outstanding response, 25 points for a thoughtful and well-articulated response, 20 points for a mediocre response, and only 15 point for submitting a response that fails to meet the expectations (e.g., too short, poorly written, unfocused).

2. **Examinations**

   There will be one midterm (10/27) and one final examination for the class (12/17). Examinations will consist of definitions (35%) as well as multiple-choice questions (65%). You are responsible for all information covered in class, including lectures, guest lectures, films and shorter videos, podcasts, and other types of presentations, as well as reading assignments. The final exam will not be cumulative. **No make-up exams will be given.** All exams will be given online via Blackboard, so **do not come to class on the day of the exam.** During the time shown on the syllabus, you will be able to log into Blackboard and take the exam at the location of your choice. Be sure that you have a good connection; use one of the student computer labs on campus if necessary. Blackboard will automatically save your work at the end of the test period and will stop the test. The exam will no longer be available after this period.

3. **San Diego Urban Labs**

   Urban geographers are passionately curious about cities and have a keen ability to “read” urban life by experiencing the pulse of cities, walking their streets, exploring nooks and crannies, and peeking at “the spaces between buildings” (Ford 2000). To encourage you to develop those unique skills, I have
designed various active learning exercises (or “urban labs”) that will ask you to integrate and apply tools and theories we learn in the classroom to gain a better understanding of San Diego. Our city will be used as a lab in which you will conduct field-based observation and test various ideas. You will need to visit any two of the proposed places listed below and complete the associated assignments, which relate to one key concept in urban geography. Each assignment will be approximately 650 words (2 pages double-spaced), not including tables, figures, notes and references. In addition to visiting the sites and collecting information by interviewing people, taking pictures, jolting notes and drawing maps, you will be asked to collect Census data about those neighborhoods. You must turn in one project at each of the two due dates indicated in the syllabus (October 13 & December 8). Details about each assignment and a grading rubric are provided on Blackboard.

a. Downtown, Market Creek Plaza or Liberty Station (Redevelopment, Governance)
b. City Heights or Barrio Logan (Immigration, Race, Ethnicity)
c. Hillcrest, North Park or other Farmers’ Market (Culture, Class, Health)
d. Balboa Park (Public Space)
e. Little Italy or East Village (Gentrification, Creative Cities)
f. Fashion Valley or UTC Mall (Spaces of consumption)

Theses places are all relatively safe, and these exercises should not present any unusual risks for you. Nonetheless, please take the following precaution to maximize your safety:

- Be aware of your surroundings and, if you feel uncomfortable, move away. Do not do your fieldwork after dark!
- Be polite and professional if people ask what you are doing. Introduce yourself and explain the assignment. You may even want to show them a copy of the instructions.
- Do not take pictures of people or interview them without their permission.
- Consider doing your fieldwork with a classmate. However, do not do this in a group; it will likely distract you and distort your experience of the city. Your pictures, interviews, data analyses and written words should all be your own.

4. Extra Credit

Throughout the semester, there may be opportunities to earn extra credit by attending up to two special events on campus (e.g., a presentation, film screening or conference related to urban issues) and submitting a written response (similar to the reading or film responses described above). I will announce these events ahead of time via Blackboard and will inform you of due dates. If you learn about a particular event that may be relevant to this course, please let me know in class or by email so I can advertise it as an extra credit opportunity. Only events announced to the entire class can count towards extra-credit. You may earn up to 60 additional points from two different events (30 points each).
The final grade will be computed as follows:

Midterm and final examination: 250 points (250 points each)
Reading Responses: 210 points (30 points each, best 7 only)
San Diego Project: 290 points (145 each)

Total: 1000 points (up to 1060 with extra credits)

The following scale will be used to assign letter grades:

A = 93.34 – 100 %
A’ = 90 – 93.33 %
B’+ = 86.67 – 89.99 %
B = 83.34 – 86.66 %
B’ = 80 – 83.33 %
C’+ = 76.67 – 79.99 %
C = 73.34 – 76.66 %
C’ = 70 – 73.33 %
D’+ = 66.67 – 69.99 %
D = 63.33 – 66.66 %
D’ = 60 – 63.33 %
F = < 60%

Class Schedule

Part I: Introduction

• August 25: Introduction to the course
  Course Syllabus

• August 27: Key Themes and Questions in Urban Geography

• September 1: Approaches in Urban Geography: Towards a Critical Perspective

Part I: Urbanization in the United States and Western Europe

• September 3: The Birth of Urbanism
• September 8: The American Urban System


• September 10: Urban Transformations: Suburbanization and Urban Decline


• September 15: Urban Decline and Shrinking Cities: Film & Discussion

• September 17: The New Economy and the Post-Industrial City


Part III: Urbanization and Cities in the Global South

• September 22: Colonial Cities


• September 24: Globalization and Global Cities


• September 29: Slums: Film & Discussion


Part IV: Key Topics in Urban Geography

• October 1: Gentrification in the US

• **October 6:** Gentrification: Film & Discussion

• **October 8:** Gentrification in the Global South


• **October 13:** Urban Lifestyles: Spaces of Consumption


SAN DIEGO LAB PROJECT #1 DUE

• **October 15:** Urban Infrastructure: Water


• **October 20:** Urban Infrastructure: Transportation and Sustainability


• **October 22:** Urban Infrastructure: Mega-projects


• **October 27:** MIDTERM EXAMINATION – ONLINE – DO NOT COME TO CLASS

• **October 29:** Urban Governance: Neoliberal Urbanism


• **November 3:** Poverty, Race and the Urban “Underclass”


• **November 5:** Violence, Militarization and Social Exclusion

• **November 12: Living and Working in the City**


• **November 17: Homelessness**


• **November 19: Immigration and Transnational Urbanism**


• **November 24: Difference and Identity in the City**


• **November 26: Thanksgiving: NO CLASS**

• **December 1: Cities and Climate Change**


• **December 3: Urban Political Ecology and Environmental Racism**


• **December 8: “Liveability” and Urban Geographies of Health**


SAN DIEGO LAB PROJECT #2 DUE

• **December 10: Alternative Urban Spaces: Resistance**

Course Policy

Attendance

As noted above, attendance is critical to the success of the course and a positive learning experience. I expect you to come to class prepared and on time. In addition, the tests will cover material from lectures that is not in the readings. Be sure to turn cell-phones and other electronic devices on silent mode during class to minimize disruptions. Do not come to class if you plan to engage in unrelated activities such as texting, chatting with other students, surfing the net or sleeping. If you need to miss class, please notify me by email.

Readings

Lectures and discussions will be based on the assigned readings. I expect you to come to class prepared and ready to participate actively in discussions by asking questions, providing examples, and sharing your thoughts. The online reading responses are set up to encourage you and help you prepare for class. Some of the readings will be more challenging than others; I do not expect you to understand everything the first time. However, I hope that you will come to class with questions and informed criticism.

Due dates

All assignments and exams are due by the dates and times indicated in the schedule via Blackboard. I do not accept any late assignments. Please, be sure to turn in your assignment in time to avoid grade penalties. Similarly, be ready to take the online exam at the time and date specified above. It is your responsibility to ensure that you have a good internet connection.

Help

I want you to succeed in this class, take advantage of my office hours if you need help (or make an appointment). You should also feel free to email me with any questions. But, please, do not wait until after the test to communicate with me. At that point, it is usually too late for me to help you.

You may also ask for help at the SDSU Writing Center (http://writingcenter.sdsu.edu) and, in some cases, from Student Disability Services (http://go.sdsu.edu/student_affairs/sds/).

Special Accommodation

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the
receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that I cannot provide accommodations based upon disability until I have received an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.

**Academic Integrity and Plagiarism**

When you were admitted to SDSU, you signed a statement of academic honesty committing to be honest in all academic work and understanding that failure to comply with this commitment will result in disciplinary action. This is a reminder to uphold your obligation as a student at SDSU and to be honest in all work submitted and exams taken in this class.

Any form of cheating will result in an "F" and a referral to the Dean for further action (see [http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/srr/academics1.html](http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/srr/academics1.html)). Plagiarism is considered cheating and is a serious form of academic dishonesty. According to the SDSU library, plagiarism is defined as “the act of using someone else’s words, sentences, or ideas and passing them off as your own without giving credit by citing the original source” (see [http://infotutor.sdsu.edu/plagiarism/index.cfm](http://infotutor.sdsu.edu/plagiarism/index.cfm)).

You might be plagiarizing if you:

- Submit someone else’s work as your own.
- Buy a paper written by someone else.
- Copy sentences, phrases, paragraphs, or ideas from someone else’s work, published or unpublished, without giving the original author credit.
- Replace select words from a passage without giving the original author credit.
- Copy any type of multimedia (graphics, audio, video, internet streams), computer programs, music compositions, graphs, or charts from someone else’s work without giving the original author credit.
- Piece together phrases, ideas, and sentences from a variety of sources to write an essay.
- Build on someone else’s idea or phrase to write your paper without giving the original author credit.
- Submit your own paper in more than one course.

**This syllabus and schedule are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances. Any changes will be announced on Blackboard. If you are absent from class, it is your responsibility to check on announcements made while you were absent.**