



Harvard
Undergraduate Urban
Sustainability Lab

Website: huusl.org Instagram: [@huurbansustainabilitylab](https://www.instagram.com/huurbansustainabilitylab)

Harvard Undergraduate Urban Sustainability Lab Urban Studies Course Guide **Spring 2025**



This document lists courses related to urban planning, cities, and transportation available to undergraduates at Harvard College. Due to early registration dates, the guide currently only includes classes offered at the College. Please note that some Q Guide, Syllabus, and/or Course Site links are not yet available.

Harvard undergraduates can also [cross-register](#) for many [courses](#) within the MIT [Department of Urban Studies and Planning](#) and the MIT [Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering](#), as well as classes at the Harvard graduate schools. We encourage interested undergrads to look through these course listings once they are released, particularly the Graduate School of Design and the Harvard Kennedy School.

We welcome submissions! Email team@huusl.org to add a course to this list.

Harvard Undergraduate Urban Sustainability Lab is Harvard's undergraduate urban studies club, engaging students with the future of cities. Fill out this [interest form](#) to join our mailing list and Slack!

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AFVS 173F/ROM-STD 145: Design and Ecology

Laura Frahm, Bruno Carvalho

Seminar | Th | 12:00pm - 2:45pm

This course focuses on how ecological concepts have shaped—and continue to shape—artistic practices, architectural projects, urban design, and built environments in the 20th and 21st centuries. Each week, we will explore different topics ranging from sustainable urbanism and plant architectures to environmental art and eco-media. Combining class discussions of interdisciplinary texts with archival visits, film screenings, exhibition projects, and class excursions, our course takes a multidimensional approach to exploring the dynamic exchanges between—and future possibilities of—design and ecology.

Class Notes: To take this limited-enrollment course, please consult the Canvas course site for information about the enrollment process and procedures.

As AFVS 173F:

[Q Guide Syllabus Website](#)

As ROM-STD 145:

[Q Guide Syllabus Website](#)

AFRAMER 143Y/DES 3514: African Landscape Architecture: Alternative Futures for the Field

Gareth Doherty

Seminar | TBD

A central aim of this seminar is to reveal the plurality of ways landscapes are shaped across the African continent and how they help mitigate the impacts of changing climates and social injustice now and in the future. Africa is a continent rich in landscape projects and practices but only eight out of fifty-four African nations have professional associations of landscape architects. The course is framed around three central questions: 1.) How is landscape architecture currently practiced in African countries? (2.) What lessons can we learn from landscape practices in various African societies that can help mitigate the impacts of climate change and social inequities? (3.) As landscape architecture unfolds across the continent in the next 50–200 years, how can it continue assert its agency in the fight against changing climates and social inequity and claim a central space in the shaping of African cities of the future? Each week we will focus on a different country including South Africa, Botswana, Tanzania, Rwanda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Nigeria. In collaboration with several landscape architecture university programs across Africa and including

practitioners and academics from across the continent, this seminar will explore what it means to practice and teach landscape architecture in societies in which the profession is nascent or non-existent and speculate on the future of the shaping of landscapes in the Global South.

As AFRAMER 143Y:

[Q Guide Syllabus Website](#)

As DES 3514:

[Q Guide Syllabus Website](#)

ANTHRO 1913: Ethnographies of Cities and the Urban

Elisa Tamburo

Seminar | M | 3:00pm - 5:45pm

The course aims at introducing students to the ethnographic study of cities and the urban environment. The course is divided into two parts: the first will introduce theoretical approaches, derived from sociology and philosophy, that have been foundational for the study of the urban in anthropology. These include the early sociological studies of the Chicago School of Symbolic Interactionism, phenomenological approaches to the study of space and place, as well as works in the tradition of urban critical theory. The second part of the course delves into topics which have been object of study for contemporary anthropologist engaging with cities through their urban ethnographies. We will focus on specific themes starting from planning and dwelling in the city to understand urban phenomena such as segregation, gentrification, and displacement; we will consider the issue of migration and diversity in the city, and the role of urban infrastructure in shaping citizenship and differentiated belonging to the city; we will talk about mobilization vis à vis the state, and lastly reflect on the relationship between the urban environment and climate change.

[Q Guide Syllabus Website](#)

CHNSHIS 146: The Modern History of Rural China

Michael Szonyi

Lecture | M W | 10:30am - 11:45am

It's only in the last twenty years that China has become known as a place of cities and factories. Before then, the majority of Chinese people lived not in cities but in villages in the countryside, and made their living from agriculture. This lecture/discussion course, intended mainly for undergraduates, will introduce you to the modern history of rural China. We'll approach that history chronologically, thematically, and historiographically. No background knowledge of China is required, but the course might interest you even if you have some previous background,

because it will show you the People’s Republic of China from a very different angle than what you’ve likely encountered before: that of its villages and the people who live in them. You’ll come to appreciate their perspective better through taking their role in two interactive games. You’ll also learn why the fate of China’s countryside matters to the future not only of China but also the whole world.

[Q Guide](#) [Syllabus](#) [Website](#)

COMPLIT 290/ROM-STD 290/ENGLISH 290MH: Migration and the Humanities

Mariano Siskind, Homi Bhabha

Seminar | Th | 3:00pm - 5:45pm

By focusing on literary narratives, cultural representations, and critical theories, this course explores ways in which issues related to migration create rich and complex interdisciplinary conversations. How do humanistic disciplines address these issues—human rights, cultural translation, global justice, security, citizenship, social discrimination, biopolitics—and what contributions do they make to the “home” disciplines of migration studies such as law, political science, and sociology? How do migration narratives compel us to revise our concepts of culture, polity, neighborliness, and community? We will explore diverse aspects of migration from existential, ethical, and philosophical perspectives while engaging with specific regional and political histories.

As COMPLIT 290:

[Q Guide](#) [Syllabus](#) [Website](#)

As ENGLISH 290MH:

[Q Guide](#) [Syllabus](#) [Website](#)

As ROM-STD 290:

[Q Guide](#) [Syllabus](#) [Website](#)

ECON 1333: Economics of Mental Health and Homelessness

Matthew Basilico

Lecture | M | 3:45pm - 5:45pm

How does society influence mental health? How does mental health influence the economy? How do economic theory and econometrics illuminate, and obfuscate, the challenges of mental illness? Mental health has quickly become one of the most important topics in global policymaking. Yet the links between influential fields of social science – especially economics – and behavioral medicine remain underdeveloped. This course will first explore the frontier of concepts in psychopathology, including perspectives from rational choice theory which are both

limiting and illuminating in the ongoing quest to characterize mental health and mental illness. The course will then turn to the social and economic drivers of mental health. From deaths of despair and the U.S. opioid epidemic, conspicuous consumption and income-wellbeing relationship, social media and American teen distress, and our general state of misery despite unprecedented material affluence, this course will systematically investigate the influences of society on mental health. Unlike most courses on mental health in other departments or medical schools, the syllabus will uncover unique empirical insights produced by the field of economics, and review in detail the econometric techniques used in these studies. Third, we will turn to the influences of mental health on society. We will consider extreme outcomes in housing markets such as homelessness and its relationship to severe mental illness. We examine classical approaches in economics to the housing market and homelessness, including new insights from behavioral health and transnational perspectives. Finally, we will turn to the roll of interventions. From pharmacotherapy, new interventional techniques (ECT, rTMS, ketamine), therapy, nutrition, and health system organization, ACT teams, supportive housing, we will consider potential and limitations in current societal responses to mental illness, using cross-national comparisons to illuminate the important differences in outcomes. We end with a consideration of the goals of economic policy, and examine how a focus on enhancing human mental wellbeing may offer unique opportunities in climate change and growth policy.

Prerequisites: Introductory Micro (Ec 10a), Statistics (Stat 100/104/110 or equivalent) and Calculus (Math 19a, 21a or equivalent)

[Q Guide](#) [Syllabus](#) [Website](#)

ECON 1800: The Economics of Cities

Denise DiPasquale, Edward Glaeser

Tutorial | Tu Th | 10:30am - 11:45am

Why are some cities so much more successful than others? What policies can turn places of poverty into places of opportunity? In this course, we explore our urban world using the tools of economics. Topics include firm and household location decisions, land use regulation, housing markets, transportation and entrepreneurship and innovation. We particularly focus on issues related to high housing costs, poverty, crime, the transformational role of cities in the developing world, and the future of cities in the age of Zoom and climate change.

Recommended prep: Social Analysis 10 and Statistics 100.

[Q Guide](#) [Syllabus](#) [Website](#)

EMR 172: Space, Place, Belonging: (Re)Locating the Asian/American Experience

TBD

Seminar | Th | 9:00am - 11:45am

Work on Asian/Americans' racial positioning in the United States across the 20th and 21st centuries have explored their experiences on the margins, in the mainstream, and more recently, within those spaces in between. In doing so, scholars, writers, and artists have attempted to define and locate the Asian/American experience. In this course, we will study a range of secondary, primary historical, and cultural sources to address the following questions, and more: Where is Asian/America; how does it differ across locations, generations, and ethnicities? How are Asian/Americans disrupting borders dividing the margins and the mainstream to generate third spaces of belonging and community? How have Asian/Americans employed memories, emotions, and imagination to engage in placemaking in the transnational and diasporic landscape? What are the alternative ways of thinking about space/place that move beyond the physical here and now? Situated at the intersection of Asian American Studies, Ethnic Studies, Transnational Feminism, and Cultural Geography, course topics move through urban/suburban landscapes; transnational sites of placemaking and displacement; sites of political organization and solidarity; archives and oral histories as a memory field; affective spaces and emotional geographies; cyberspace; and the otherworldly, fantastical, and outer space. Students can expect to become more familiar with interdisciplinary scholarship, develop original arguments in their writing, engage in close-readings of secondary and primary sources, and conduct their own research for a final project.

[Q Guide](#) [Syllabus](#) [Website](#)

FYSEMR 73U: Reading the History of Boston

Jason Ur

Seminar | M | 3:00pm - 5:45pm

Why do Boston, Cambridge, and the towns in the Greater Boston region look the way they do? How did this urban landscape evolve, from the seasonal home of mobile Indigenous communities to a sprawling metropolis? There are clues everywhere, if you know how to look for them. This seminar introduces first-year Harvard College students to the deep history of the (now-) urban landscape in which they now find themselves. The geographic focus will be on Cambridge, but the course will consider greater Boston. We'll be thinking about Native impacts, initial European colonization, mortuary landscapes, the expansion of agriculture and animal husbandry, new forms of transportation like canals and railroads, the rise and decline of industry, and of course the origins and growth of Harvard College itself. We'll take the perspective of landscape archaeology, with an emphasis on the physical remains of the past four hundred years. What survives and what doesn't, and why? Most importantly, we'll experience these past landscapes firsthand, via trips throughout the region.

Note: Trips will be included. Students will get to know Greater Boston by getting out of the classroom and getting off campus. First-Year Seminars are available only to first-year students.

You may apply to both Fall 2024 and Spring 2025 First-Year Seminars via the FYS lottery between July 15 and August 19, 2024 at 11 a.m.

[Q Guide](#) [Syllabus](#) [Website](#)

HAA 187K: Architecture, Urbanism, and Design in a Global South Asia: 18th century to the present

Vishal Khandelwal

Seminar | M | 3:00pm - 5:45pm

This seminar explores architecture, urbanism, and design in colonial and postcolonial South Asia through the region's interactions and exchanges with other parts of the world. Extending from early European presence in the subcontinent to the formalization of the British empire and its subsequent end that eventually led to the formation of current-day South Asian nation-states, the seminar analyzes urban, rural, and architectural spaces including the bungalow, the single-family apartment, and the village dwelling alongside other buildings and environments of residence, education, governance, and entertainment. Topics include: indigenous and foreign building technologies; the aesthetic and intellectual contexts of architectural representations; Gandhian ideals and their architectural expression; architecture, urbanism, and colonial and postcolonial identity; and architecture and the archive. The seminar emphasizes multiple artistic and architectural media employed within diverse approaches to writing architectural and urban histories of the region. And with a keen eye informed by recent methodologies in global art and architectural history, it encourages the questioning of a global approach towards refining the same for students' research and learning interests. Open to graduate and advanced undergraduate students.

Note: Please submit a paragraph with your petition expressing your interest in the seminar by November 12, 2024.

[Q Guide](#) [Syllabus](#) [Website](#)

HIST 16T: Urban Myths: Cities and Citizenship in the Twentieth-Century Global South

Lena Nasrallah

Seminar | Tu | 3:00pm - 5:00pm

Why did so many newly independent countries turn to the promise of urbanism in the twentieth century? Boulevards, sewers, slums, monuments and more became the contested backdrop for debates about nationalism, modernity and belonging. From Brasilia to Luanda to Singapore, governments mobilized the production and destruction of urban space to construct new patterns of intimate, daily life. People in turn resisted and reshaped infrastructures imposed “from above.” This seminar covers the major themes and historiographical debates within the field of global urban history, with particular attention paid to the post-colonial. Each week, we will focus on a different city to examine the histories of imperialism, nationalism, racial capitalism, gender, migration and informality. We will read widely and critically from architects, urban planners, anthropologists, geographers, economic planners, novelists and others as we ask who is a city built by, and who is it built for?

[Q Guide Syllabus Website](#)

HIST 1933/ROM-STD 138: Literature and Urban History: Views from Brazil and the United States

Sidney Chalhoub, Bruno Carvalho

Conference Course | W | 12:45pm - 2:45pm

In this seminar we will focus on novels about urban experience, paying particular attention to how they represent what subordinate peoples do with what is done to them (the enslaved and their descendants, migrants, dependents, women, workers). We will study major authors and works of late 19th- and early 20th-century fiction in Brazil and the United States, attentive to points of contact between cities in both countries during a period of intensive urbanization. Questions of class, gender and identity-formation in the general context of defining and setting new limits of citizenship rights will be emphasized.

Note: This course is also offered through the Romance Languages and Literatures Department as ROM-STD 138. Credit may be earned for either ROM-STD 138, or History 1933, but only one. This is a limited enrollment course. See course website for information about how to enroll. (Enrollment form due November 12th at 5 pm)

As HIST 1933:

[Q Guide Syllabus Website](#)

As ROM-STD 138:

[Q Guide Syllabus Website](#)

HIST 1973: Re-Wilding Harvard

Joyce Chaplin

Conference Course | Tu | 12:45pm - 2:45pm

This class uses history to make a difference in the natural world. Rewilding returns a habitat to an earlier form to promote biodiversity; urban rewilding does this within urban spaces. In this class, we will research historical and cultural definitions of wilderness and landscape, identify what precolonialist habitats were like in New England, survey how such places might be restored, and then contribute to a ten-year urban rewilding plan for Harvard, including an outdoor exhibit for the Harvard Museums of Science and Culture and a GIS reconstruction of Harvard's landscape history. The class is open to both graduate students and undergraduates in a broad and relevant range of disciplines and will fulfill conference course credit in the History Department.

[Q Guide Syllabus Website](#)

HIST 2492B: Warren Center Seminar: Alternative Ecologies

Tiya Miles, Walter Johnson

Seminar | Th | 12:45pm - 2:45pm

This seminar will convene scholars, public-facing intellectuals, writers, and practitioners whose work falls under the broad umbrella of ecological study and care rooted in Black, and/or Indigenous, and/or feminist, and/or community-minded thought, culture, and history. This flexible thematic has been chosen to inspire new questions, highlight key issues, structure constructive dialogue, spark fresh ideas, and support works in progress in the academic arenas loosely deemed "black ecologies" and "racial ecologies."

Alternative Ecologies grows out of the ecological turn in African American and Afro-diasporic studies, as well as ethnic studies, critical geography, Black and Indigenous feminist studies, and American studies, while recognizing that the field of Indigenous and Native American studies has always centered relationship with land, water, and multiple beings. The intellectual and political roots of the seminar stem from the notion of "Black Ecology," a phrase introduced by the sociologist and founding editor of *The Black Scholar*, Nathan Hare, in 1970. In recent years, scholars in Black studies have revived the term and applied it to an exploration of Black experience, Black environmental history, and Black thought that proposes a long and radical relationship to "nature" in the context of environmental racism and struggles for environmental (inclusive of climate) justice. The currency and urgency of "Black ecologies" is evidenced by a burst of scholarship across institutions and platforms, and here at Harvard, by the keynote address given by the Columbia humanities scholar Farah Jasmine Griffin at the African American

and African Studies Department's 40th Anniversary Conference in February 2020. In her lecture, Professor Griffin highlighted "Black ecologies" as a future direction in Black studies writ large. A related and equally useful emergent term, "racial ecologies," entwines our inquiries with ethnic studies and the histories of marginalized, racialized, and colonized populations studied in relation to place and environment. The seminar will open outward from a "Black ecologies" starting point to broader engagement with the histories of various peoples and the landscapes they have inhabited and shaped.

Notes: Students must complete both terms of this course (Part A & B) in the same academic year to receive credit. This component is Part B. Also, this course meets every other week.

[Q Guide](#) [Syllabus](#) [Website](#)

HIST-LIT 90HB: Indigenous Economies and Environments

Mandy Izadi

Seminar | W | 12:45pm - 2:45pm

The course surveys histories of economies built by Indigenous Americans on their own lands. It also examines economies—local and global—that settler colonists built from stolen lands and natural resources of Indigenous Americans. Spanning centuries, and extending to the present, this course is organized conceptually into three principal sections on Land, Energy, and Gaming. Moving chronologically from places as varied as wetlands and oilfields to casinos, we will examine subjects relating to land loss, resource extraction, and Indigenous struggles for economic sovereignty. More broadly, we will study intersections of colonialism and capitalism; race-based violence; colonial legal systems; conceptions of hierarchy and harmony in human-nature relationships; cultural and spiritual underpinnings of Indigenous and non-Indigenous economies; environmental justice; human rights and the rights of nature. Special attention will be paid to Indigenous sciences, including traditional ecological knowledge that has sustained life here for millennia for the continent's first peoples and eventually, Euro-Americans.

This class prioritizes perspectives, voices, knowledge systems of Indigenous Americans. It draws from the arts, humanities, and sciences. Film and literature—classic, celebrated, problematic—brings depth to our interdisciplinary readings. The academic scholarship we consult draws from Native history; Environmental Sciences; global Capitalism; the Law; Native Studies, and more.

Notes: Interested students should petition to enroll on my.harvard. In your petition, say a few words about your interest in the course (including concentrations you are considering if you are undeclared), any requirement the course may satisfy, and whether you have taken any other History & Literature seminars. Please contact the instructor if you have any questions.

[Q Guide Syllabus Website](#)

GOV 1009: Advanced Geographical Information Systems Workshop

Kanglin Chen

Lecture | M | 12:00pm - 2:00pm

This course is a workshop for students who have taken the introductory Geographic Information Systems course and want to explore detailed applications.

[Q Guide Syllabus Website](#)

GOV 1013: GIS Analysis of Hazard Vulnerability

Kanglin Chen

Lecture | Th | 3:00pm - 5:00pm

Students will learn fundamental concepts and widely-used methodologies for assessing hazard, social vulnerability, and community resilience using geospatial analysis techniques. The course covers topics such as natural hazards, COVID-19, and multi-hazard analysis. Students will benefit from assignments primarily using ArcGIS Pro. The course goes beyond a simple hazard-by-hazard approach and integrates perspectives from the physical and social sciences to identify and describe risk and vulnerability using real-world data and examples. This course provides critical training for students interested in hazard geography, GIS, urban planning, emergency management, and related fields. Prerequisites include a basic knowledge of and hands-on experience with GIS.

[Q Guide Syllabus Website](#)

SOC-STD 68LS: Land, Space, and Politics

Benjamin Mueser

Seminar | W | 9:45am - 11:45am

After the Civil War, formerly enslaved and free black people maintained that their freedom required land of their own, an idea embodied in the Reconstruction era promise of '40 acres and mule.' Beginning in the 1950s, an American 'back-to-the-land' movement formed, insisting that restoring democracy required returning to agrarian lives. In November 1969, a group of Indigenous activists occupied Alcatraz Island, claiming that a 1851 treaty required retired federal lands to be returned to Indigenous peoples. Since early colonization and to the present, Americans have practiced 'squatting' to claim lands and spaces as their own, even without legal title. These are very different events, but they share a common theme. Each prompt us to consider the central importance of spatial belonging and situatedness to political life. What did the land mean to these people? What does it mean to us? What is it, exactly, that we are demanding when we demand a space for our own?

This class will address these questions with interdisciplinary readings on the relationships we form toward the land. Our goal is to not isolate abstract scholarship, but instead to examine the connections between theory and praxis, and to highlight how we can apply the theories we discuss in class. Toward that end, the class will be organized around 5 modules, foregrounding present-day and historical movements, following by theoretical reflections. Our guiding principle will be that practice has more to teach theory than the other way around, and good applied theory takes a critical approach to each.

Note: This course will be lotteried and is capped at 12 students.

[Q Guide Syllabus Website](#)

SOC-STD 98RT: Right to the City

Xinyu Guan

Tutorial | M | 12:45pm - 2:45pm

What does it mean to belong in a city? To have rights and to participate in urban life? The seminar explores how different urban communities – racialized minorities, diasporas, queer bodies, informal settlement residents – struggle for space, rights, and belonging in cities. The cities covered include New York, Los Angeles, Istanbul and Hong Kong. We will read ethnographies, watch films and discuss social theories. Students will write about an urban community of their own choosing for the final project.

Note: This course will be lotteried and is open to non-concentrators if space permits.

[Q Guide Syllabus Website](#)