Introduction to the course

The purpose of this seminar is to introduce graduate students to different ways of conceptualizing, theorizing, and researching urban environments and urban natures. Through close, intensive readings of a series of books and articles, we will examine several different approaches to urban ecology, including approaches grounded in systems theory, environmental history, Marxist urban political ecology, feminist theories, and actor-network theory, along with related poststructural approaches. In the process, we'll consider a wide range of substantive themes: ecosystems, nature, difference and inequality, habitat and infrastructure, food, and nonhuman urban dwellers, just to name a few. This seminar will be of potential interest to students in geography, urban studies, urban planning, architecture, anthropology, history, sociology, urban education, biological sciences, and others interested in the relationships between cities and nature or the environment.

It is important to emphasize that this is not a “practical” or “applied” course. In other words, our goal in this course is not going to be getting up to speed on state-of-the-art approaches to sustainable urban planning, management, development, or policy. Although we will take a glance at this (massive) literature, we will spend far more time delving into scholarly literature that challenges, critiques, or develops alternatives to predominate approaches to urban ecology.

This is also not a course for students who dislike social theory. Although in most weeks we will focus on case studies of various kinds, we will spend a considerable amount of time and energy grappling with often extremely difficult and abstruse theoretical texts. I enjoy that sort of thing, and I welcome students who are interested in (or at least open to) learning about current debates in urban theory. But I also understand that for students who are “allergic to theory,” this may not be your cup of tea.

The course is organized around both substantive urban environmental issues and the broad approaches listed above. One of our major goals will be to discern how these approaches differ – and what difference these differences make for our own choices in doing urban, environmental, or urban
environmental research. In most weeks, we’ll encounter a mix of theory and empirical analysis, but sometimes one or the other will dominate.

Finally, let me emphasize that the literature on cities, environments, and nature is not only diverse, but also enormous. There is no way that I can do justice to this literature in a single reading list; we will read but a sampling. However, I will encourage you to use your term paper as an opportunity to explore themes and research areas that we do not have time to read as a class.

**Required and recommended materials**

The following books are *required* for this class:


Copies are available in the bookstore, but you may also wish to search the Internet for used copies. Other required readings will be available via the class D2L site.

*Recommended (we’ll read part of it):*


The following books are *strongly recommended* for this class (and for graduate school more generally), but not required:

*Recommended resources on academic reading and writing:*


Course learning objectives and assignments

By the end of the course, you should be able to do the following:

1. Discuss and explain the basic arguments, assumptions, and premises of dominant contemporary approaches to conceptualizing, theorizing, and researching urban environments and urban natures.

2. Compare, contrast, and critically evaluate these competing approaches, both in general and in relation to a particular substantive area of research.

3. Work with others to facilitate productive discussions of approaches to urban environments and urban natures.

The components of your class grade are linked closely to these learning objectives. Your final grade will be determined by the following:

1. Regular class participation (20%) [All objectives]

This class will operate primarily as a discussion-oriented seminar. By class participation, I mean the following: showing up regularly, being prepared for every class (i.e., having carefully read the assigned readings), and participating actively in discussions. “Participating actively” does not mean talking constantly, but it requires at least speaking up in each class session. Regular attendance and participation are crucial to the success of this course.

2. Class presentation and discussion facilitation (10%) [Objective 3]

Each student will introduce and co-facilitate (with me) two assigned seminar sessions during the course of the semester. For each session for which you are a co-facilitator, you will do the following: (1) read reaction papers and discussion questions submitted to the D2L site (see below); (2) at the beginning of class, briefly (2-4 minutes, roughly) review key concepts and themes from the readings, summarize ideas from the reaction papers, and introduce discussion questions that you and others have submitted; (3) help me facilitate the flow of discussion. You are welcome to check in with me ahead of time if you have ideas for structure or format.

3. Weekly discussion questions and four outlines / reaction papers (20%) [Objectives 1 and 2]

You will be required to prepare four outlines of assigned readings and four brief “reaction papers” of 250-500 words in length. In addition, you should submit at least one discussion question each week (except the first and last). You will be responsible for distributing your outlines, papers, and questions to your instructor and your classmates via the D2L site, no later than 7:00 pm on the Sunday evening before the class session. The discussion leader for a session will be required to review the outlines, reaction papers, and questions submitted each week; we’ll use these as launching points for discussion. Everyone else should make an effort to review these as well. You will receive your assignments, along with further instructions for preparing the outlines and discussion questions, in a separate handout (also on D2L).
4. **Term paper and peer review (50%)** [Objective 2]

Your final assignment for the semester will be to prepare a term paper of 4000-5000 words in length. You will receive more information about the term paper assignment, including the peer review of a classmate’s first draft, in a separate handout.

**Timeline:**

- Working topic, question, and thesis due by 11:59 pm **Thursday, February 6** (1%)
- Working outline, bibliography, and initial draft pages due by 11:59 pm **Thursday, March 13** (4%)
- First complete draft, ready for peer review, due by 11:59 pm **Thursday, April 17** (10%)
- Peer review due by 11:59 pm on **Tuesday, April 22** (5%)
- Final draft due by 11:59 pm on **Thursday, May 15** (30%)

**University policies**

For the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee’s official policies on **disabilities, religious observances, active military duty, incompletes, discriminatory conduct, academic misconduct, complaint procedures, and grade appeal procedures**, please see the following web site: [http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/SyllabusLinks.pdf](http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/SyllabusLinks.pdf). Geography 905 adheres to all of these policies.

If you have questions or concerns about the class, please do not hesitate to contact the instructor.

**Schedule of required readings**

All readings that are not in your required books will be available on D2L as PDFs or as links to online PDFs.

NOTE: Readings are **VERY MUCH** subject to change, but I will warn you ahead of time if I make changes.

**1) Introduction—January 27**


2) Ecosystem—February 3


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3) What is the city made of?—February 10


(See D2L for links. Here is the full Internet English-language version: [http://www.bruno-latour.fr/virtual/paris/english/frames.html](http://www.bruno-latour.fr/virtual/paris/english/frames.html)).
4) Nature—February 17


5) Heterogeneity—February 24


6) Water and waste, part I—March 3


Truelove, Y. (2011). (Re-) Conceptualizing water inequality in Delhi, India through a feminist political ecology framework. *Geoforum*, 42(2), 143-152.


### 7) Water and waste, part II – March 10


### 8) Animals – March 24


Optional/recommended:

9) Trees – March 31


Jones, O., & Cloke, P. (2002). *Tree cultures: The place of trees and trees in their place*. Berg Publisher. (Selection)


10) Food—April 7


11) Human habitats – April 14


12) Lawns – April 21


13) Sustainability – April 28


Optional/recommended:


14) Experimentation – May 5


[We may also revisit an earlier reading or, if there is interest, take on a new one.]