Course Syllabus

Jump to Today

Students in this seminar will explore concepts of risk, resilience, adaptation, disaster prevention, and disaster recovery through the lens of urban design. Through weekly lectures, readings, short writing assignments and class discussion, this seminar will allow students to explore the practices and ethics of planning and urban design in a world that is increasingly defined by instability and uncertainty.

Urban designers and planners work at multiple scales, from intergovernmental agreements, national policies and regional planning to the design of individual projects. We will take as a premise that the scale of the neighborhood is particularly useful for understanding interaction of natural, social and economic forces that shape the physical environment. It is also the scale at which communities begin to organize and have agency in restructuring their environment. Each student in the seminar will choose a neighborhood which is experiencing environmental, social or economic stresses. We will examine how these stresses are likely to affect the neighborhood over time and how they shape the way we plan and build. We will also investigate how these stresses lead to sudden shocks and how well the neighborhood is prepared to manage these shocks. Students will then consider how to address the underlying vulnerabilities in their chosen neighborhood using scenario planning. Scenarios help us ask the right questions: who has the power to act, what resources are needed, when do decisions need to be made, where do we begin?

Changing the status quo is hard work. One of the greatest challenges is building consensus and a mandate to act. This requires the ability to communicate across disciplines and historic socio-economic divisions. It is essential that urban designers and planners be able to communicate clearly and concisely through both writing and visualization. We will work collectively to develop these communication skills through regular short assignments.

As students develop their own research on their neighborhood through the semester, we will collectively investigate how some of New York City's neighborhoods--East Harlem, Red Hook, Edgemere, Broad Channel--have begun to address crises in the physical environment such as the shortage of affordable housing, exposure to flooding and extreme heat, and aging infrastructure.

Part One: Crisis

1/19: Introductions, course overview.

1/26: Urban Hazards: We will discuss how the underlying geography of a place creates unique hazards and how those hazards affect settlement patterns. We will use Los Angeles (as described in Mike Davis's Ecology of Fear) and New York City (as described in Eric Sanderson's Mannahatta) as case studies. Eric will join us for part of our discussion.

First assignment due: a one page proposal that describes a specific geography on which to focus during the semester (see sample in course files). All writing assignments through the term will be less than 150 words on one sheet of paper.

2/2: Mapping Risk: Methods for representing risk at various scales. Students will conduct a neighborhood vulnerability assessment for their selected community, considering a number of factors including hazards, demographics, housing stock and affordability, infrastructure, social resilience and economic activity.

2/9: CLASS CANCELED - SNOW

Part Two: Disaster Recovery

2/16: Disaster Response: Students will meet with Hurricane Sandy victims in Red Hook, Brooklyn to examine the hurricane's impact on housing, infrastructure and commerce. Students will research and describe the current default recovery strategies for their selected community.

2/23: Scenario Planning: Students will visit New York City Office of Emergency Management to learn how municipal governments prepare for disasters and employ scenario based planning to increase the preparedness of the population and city agencies to respond to disaster. Students will prepare a narrative disaster scenario for their selected community.

3/2: Scenario Planning: Class discussion on Disaster Scenarios.

3/9: Measuring Recovery: Amy Peterson, the director of Build it Back will discuss the work of that program and difficulties in assessing the effectiveness of disaster recovery programs. Students refine their disaster scenarios and vet them with a neighborhood representative.

3/16: Spring Break

3/23: Measuring Resilience. Sandy Lessons Learned and sea level Rise projections. Report Back on disaster timeline refinement. Students will set short and long term goals based for a recovery program.

Part Three: Adaptation

3/30: Implementation: Economic, political, legal and design challenges of disaster mitigation projects, using the East Side Coastal Resilience project as a case study. Guest Speakers: Carrie Grassi of ORRR and Amy Chester of RBD.

4/6: Decision Making: How decisions are made recovery. Students will investigate organizational structures and models of leadership in these projects.

4/13: Adaptation: working with communities for a long term resilience plan.

4/20: Final Presentations

4/27: Final Presentations

Course Summary:

Date	Details