

Course Syllabus

A4059 Climate Change + Cities Syllabus

Spring 2019 | 11 am – 1 pm, Friday | 200 S Fayerweather

Instructor: Michael Kimmelman (mkimmelman@nytimes.com; meet by appointment)

Teaching Assistant: Ashley Louie (ashley.louie@columbia.edu)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Climate change may be the most potent and ominous force reshaping cities all around the planet, contributing to political instability, fueling unprecedented levels of migration, with some 65 million people now displaced from their homes. Their displacement is among the factors driving up the rapid growth of cities, especially coastal cities, and the decline of rural areas, exacerbating the urban-rural divide. It ought to go without saying that a healthy planet demands healthy, prosperous cities, which protect their residents and provide them with services and myriad jobs. That requires planning for climate change. But these goals are not easily reconciled.

The focus of this course will be on unpacking how climate change acts in global cities, exploring myriad strategies to counter, and ideally, even capitalize on, its consequences. What afflicts Mexico City is not the same as what threatens Guangzhou or Houston. Rotterdam may have lessons to teach but so do Jakarta and New York.

There's a lot of talk these days about what mayors do but cities aren't islands and nature pays no heed to political borders. This means we need to look at cities critically, from varied perspectives, questioning what have become some of the standard "solutions," and come up with plans that address not only environmental adaptation but also social and economic resilience.

We will meet with a range of expert guests who will present different approaches. We will adopt roles to play out scenarios. This is not a design studio. It is a course focused on discussion, writing and storytelling. The course welcomes students with perspectives – architects, planners, urban designers, students from the Earth Institute, journalists, undergraduates, others. I'm looking for people who want to think, debate and write about climate change and cities. To be an effective practitioner, whatever your field, you will need to be able to describe the social and environmental context in which your work is nested. The course is ultimately about honing those skills -- translating challenges like

climate change, which exist at the daunting scale of a city, to a manageable and effective scale. It is the task of architects, planners, journalists and climate scientists alike.

During the second half of the semester, we will have guests from The New York Times talk about photography, graphics, editing and other tools of the trade to help explain how graphic communication supplements a text-based project, and vice-versa.

There are prizes at the end! The goal, over the course of the semester, will be to produce papers that analyze specific cities, their shocks, stresses and opportunities, then propose targeted solutions. The papers should be supplemented by some visuals: drawings, graphics, photographs, videos, integrated with the texts. This will require interviewing people with first hand knowledge of the cities you're writing about and constructing a compelling narrative -- a story -- which makes your case. Your solutions can involve a planning strategy, a work of resilient infrastructure or architecture, an example of social infrastructure. Prizes will go to the best paper and two runners up.

I am a journalist and critic, not an architect or climate scientist. Journalism demands a wider-angle view. Students will be encouraged to think through the climate change era in holistic ways. My hope is that you will come out of it with both a wider sense of the issues and some of the skills you will need to lead the way forward.

READINGS

There is no textbook for this course. There will be a weekly series of readings posted on Canvas either as PDFs or as links to external content. The readings (as well as any required films or podcasts) are front loaded so we can, early on, build a foundation for thinking through these issues together. However, the material is mostly journalistic and not too onerous— so do not be daunted! You are, of course, encouraged to read more widely and suggest your own readings to the class. *Please be sure to watch the following films and listen to the podcast below by Week 2:*

- [Disruption \(Links to an external site.\)](#) / Film (2014)
- [Global Warming, What You Need to Know \(Links to an external site.\)](#)



/ Film (2017)

- [Hot in My Backyard \(Links to an external site.\)](#) / This American Life Podcast (2013)

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Participation in weekly discussions will be essential to the success of this course. It will also figure into the grade. I expect students to be present in class and actively engaged. Unexcused absences and failure to participate will result in lower grades. Over the course of the semester, each student will be assigned and expected to lead class discussions around the weekly readings and topics. We will devise a spreadsheet so students can sign up for specific weeks.

There will be two brief papers at the start of the semester: a one-page summary of climate change, and a short, first-hand, reported description of a branch library in the city. These are intended as writing exercises as well as primers for issues to be discussed in class.

The main assignment is the final project. We will set up milestones to put the project together over the course of the semester -- milestones for selecting the topic, presenting early stages of research, for drawings and visual elements, for the writing and for the final paper. The projects will be multifaceted and involve mixed media. The goal is to communicate and weave an argument through this combination of techniques and resources. The exact form that argument takes can be personalized; it may end up being more visual; more text-based. I am flexible about the form. But not the overall multimedia concept. The semester will lead, like a studio, toward an integrated presentation in class before your fellow students

Take a look at my series of articles for The Times called "[Changing Climate, Changing Cities \(Links to an external site.\)](#)." Your presentations should have something of the same aspiration: to tackle a specific place, using various forms of media. It should make a clear argument about resilience, but also propose some specific solution, employing the aforementioned combination of graphics, videos, photographs, drawings, diagrams -- whatever best serves your argument and complements your text.

SCHEDULE

Week 1 | Introduction 1/25/2019

This class will be an introduction to the course and to me. In turn, I'd like to hear from each of you: why you're here and what you hope to get out of the course.

No discussion questions this week.

Week 2 | New York: Superstorms and Flooding 2/1/2019

Jeremy Siegel, Associate, BIG

We will meet with one of the architects from BIG and discuss BIG's project to redo and reinforce the Lower Manhattan riverfront, starting on the Lower East Side. The project, called the "Big U," won the Rebuild By Design competition launched by the US Department of Housing Urban Development (and partners) after Superstorm Sandy battered the eastern seaboard in 2012. The NYT and New Yorker pieces assigned this week provide additional examples of efforts to deal with coastal flooding and storm surges, and explore the question of how to build support for such efforts.

Readings and Video-watching Due:

- In preparation, please familiarize yourself with HUD's [Rebuild By Design \(Links to an external site.\)](#) competition. Skim the report about "[lessons learned \(Links to an external site.\)](#)." Next, take a look at the [BIG U winning project design \(Links to an external site.\)](#), and check out this [Guardian \(Links to an external site.\)](#) and this [Curbed article \(Links to an external site.\)](#) on the BIG U, aka the "Dry Line."
- Kimmelman, Michael. "[Going With the Flow \(Links to an external site.\)](#)." *The New York Times*. (February 13, 2013).
- [Disruption \(Links to an external site.\)](#) / Film (2014)
- [Global Warming, What You Need to Know \(Links to an external site.\)](#)



/ Film (2017)

- [Hot in My Backyard \(Links to an external site.\)](#) / This American Life Podcast (2013)

Assignment due this week:

- One page synopsis of climate change, its definition and history, that can be understood by any high school student. The emphasis is on clarity, concision and lively writing.

Week 3 | Environmental Justice and Social Resilience 2/8/2019

Visitors:

Henk Ovink, Dutch Ambassador for Water and former head of Rebuild by Design

Eric Klinenberg, Professor of Sociology, Public Policy, and Media, Culture, and Communications at New York University

Readings Due:

- Ovink, Henk & Joe Boeijenga. TOO BIG: Rebuild By Design: A Transformative Approach to Climate Change. (selected excerpts)
- Klinenberg, Eric. Excerpts from *Palaces for the People* (2019) -- pp. 1-81 (introduction and Chapters 1 and 2)
- Klinenberg, Eric. "[Adaptation \(Links to an external site.\)](#)." *The New Yorker*. (December 19, 2016).
- Klinenberg, Eric. 2015. "[Is New York Ready for Another Sandy \(Links to an external site.\)?](#)" *The New Yorker*. (October 27, 2015).

Assignment due this week:

- Brief (three or four pages) description of a branch library in the city -- you choose which one -- that focuses on its layout, architecture, functions, how it is being used, its "resilience" or lack thereof, its physical and social role in the neighborhood. This requires first-hand reporting, interviews, a little research and careful observation.

Week 4 | Miami and Houston: Risky Building 2/15/2019

Visitor: Alan Rubin, Principal with Blank Rome Government Relations

Readings Due:

- Burton, Paul. "[How climate challenges cast a glare on issuers. \(Links to an external site.\)](#)" *The Bond Buyer*. (Feb 01, 2019.)
- Kolbert, Elizabeth. "[The Siege of Miami \(Links to an external site.\)](#)." *The New Yorker*: December 21 & 28 Issue, 2015.
- Kimmelman, Michael. "[Lesson from Hurricane Harvey: Houston's Struggle is American's Tale \(Links to an external site.\)](#)." *New York Times*. (Nov 11, 2017.)

Recommended Readings Due:

- Check out ProPublica's [collaboration \(Links to an external site.\)](#) with the Texas Tribune on Houston flooding. Spend most of your time with the interactive [Hell and High Water \(Links to an external site.\)](#) and read about a potential [coastal barrier \(Links to an external site.\)](#).
- For the first part of class, we will discuss lawns and drought, and think about why it is so hard to change preferences— even when they have substantial social costs. Listen to this [podcast \(Links to an external site.\)](#). Skim the following articles:
 - Cvijanovic et al. "[Future loss of Arctic sea-ice cover could drive a substantial decrease in California's rainfall \(Links to an external site.\)](#)." *Nature*. (2017)
 - Carrol, Rory. "[Sod It \(Links to an external site.\)](#)." *The Guardian*. (Nov 2, 2017)
 - CA [state policy \(Links to an external site.\)](#) on lawns.

Assignment due this week:

- Select topic for final project with brief description of thesis argument.

Week 5 | No class. 2/22/2019

In lieu of class this week, we will set up appointments for the following week (Feb 27) to have one-on-one discussions of the projects.

One-on-one Project Discussions: WEDNESDAY, 2/27/2019

- Please be prepared with a topic thesis, and research documentation to discuss your project. Also consider who you might interview, and how you plan to go about reporting. Take a first pass at a draft project outline (the general project outline will be due Friday, 3/8/2019).

Week 6 | Role-Play Negotiation #1: Flooding 3/1/2019

Students will be assigned roles to prepare for an in-class Role-Play Negotiation on Flooding. It is essential that you come prepared with your assigned readings and take an active role in participating in discussion per your role.

Readings Due:

- Rumore, Danya, Susskind, Lawrence, and Schenk, Todd. "[Role-play Simulation for Climate Change, Adaptation Education, and Engagement \(Links to an external site.\)](#)." *Nature Climate Change*. (2017)

Week 7 | 100 Resilient Cities 3/8/2019

Visitor: Michael Berkowitz, President 100 Resilient Cities

Readings Due:

- "[Institutionalizing Urban Resilience: A Midterm Monitoring and Evaluation Report of 100 Resilient Cities. \(Links to an external site.\)](#)" Urban Institute. (December 2018.) First 12 pages mandatory; highly recommended to review the remainder of the report.

Assignment due this week:

- General Project Outline: historical, digital imagery, who to interview, strategy for how to go about reporting

Week 8 | Climate Change and Communications 3/15/2019

Visitor: Seth Solomonow, Media and Transportation Communication, Bloomberg Associates

Readings Due:

- “How to Take Back Public Discourse.” In: George Lakoff (2014) *Don't Think of An Elephant*.
- Matthew Shaer. “[Not Quite Copenhagen \(Links to an external site.\)](#).” *NY Magazine*. (March 20, 2011.)
- Janette Sadik-Khan. “[The Bike Wars Are over, and the Bikes Won \(Links to an external site.\)](#).” *NY Magazine*. (March 8, 2016.)
- “[The Case Against the Media \(Links to an external site.\)](#).” *NY Magazine*. (June 25, 2016.)

SPRING BREAK 3/22/2019

Week 9 | Student Presentations for Final Project Topics 3/29/2019

Readings Due:

- Kimmelman, Michael. “[Mexico City, Parched and Sinking \(Links to an external site.\)](#).” *New York Times*. (Feb 17, 2017).

Assignment due this week:

- Sketches and first drafts of visual content that will support your written argument (this may include but is not limited to drawings, diagrams, maps, photography, videos, animations, collage, etc.)

Week 10 | Visual Graphics and Photography Workshop @ NY Times 4/5/2019

Guest Speakers: David Furst, Jeremy White, Alica Desantis

Presentation and open discussion with professionals who create digital and visual graphics that supplement and anchor written articles. Workshop with students on how to improve visual language that supports narrative and argument in final projects.

Readings Due:

- Kimmelman, Michael, "[Hudson Yards is Manhattan's Biggest, Newest, Slickest Gated Community. Is This the Neighborhood New York Deserves? \(Links to an external site.\)](#)." *New York Times*. (March 14, 2019.)
- Kimmelman, Michael, "[Have You Seen That New Building Along The High Line? \(Links to an external site.\)](#)" *New York Times*. (August 13, 2017.)
- Furst, David, <https://www.nytimes.com/by/david-furst> (Links to an external site.).
- White, Jeremy, [blueshirt \(Links to an external site.\)](#).

Recommended Readings Due:

- Kimmelman, Michael, "[The Dutch Have Solutions to Rising Seas \(Links to an external site.\)](#)." *New York Times*. (June 15, 2017.)
- Shorto, Russell 2014. "[How to Think Like the Dutch in a Post-Sandy World \(Links to an external site.\)](#)." *New York Times Magazine*. (April 9, 2014.)
- Bakker (SOMO), Kishimoto (TNI), Nooy (Both ENDS). "[Social Justice At Bay \(Links to an external site.\)](#)." (April 2017) Read all of pp. 23-45, but focus on the critiques outlined in Chapter 5.

Week 11 | Comparing Global Cities 4/12/2019

Discussion on climate change challenges compared across various cities.

Readings Due:

- Bakker (SOMO), Kishimoto (TNI), Nooy (Both ENDS). "[Social Justice At Bay \(Links to an external site.\)](#)." (April 2017) Read remaining chapters: 1,2,6,7.
- Kimmelman, Michael. "[Jakarta is Sinking So Fast, It Could End Up Under Water \(Links to an external site.\)](#)." *New York Times*. (Dec 21, 2018.)
- Price, Larry C. and Price, Debbie M. "[The Death of the Citarum River: Indonesia's Most Toxic Waterway \(Links to an external site.\)](#)." *Pulitzer Center*. (March 13, 2018).
- Wallace-Wells, Benjamin. "[The Uninhabitable Earth \(Links to an external site.\)](#)." *NY Magazine*. (July 9, 2017)

Assignment due this week:

- Sketches and first drafts of visual content that will support your written argument (this may include but is not limited to drawings, diagrams, maps, photography, videos, animations, collage, etc.), include a written explanation for the visuals

Week 12 | Shenzhen, Guangzhou, and the Peral River Delta, China 4/19/2019

Visitor: Yunjing Li, PhD student in GSAPP

Provide time at the end of class to check in on project progress.

Readings Due:

- Kimmelman, Michael, "[Rising Waters Threaten China's Rising Cities \(Links to an external site.\)](#)." *New York Times*. (April 7, 2017)
- TBA

Week 13 | Role-playing Negotiation Game #2: Urban Heat Island 4/26/2019

Provide time at the end of class to check in on project progress.

Week 14 | ****No Class**** 5/3/2019

Michael will be available for office hours (upon request) to discuss final presentations.

Final Presentations and Papers Due 5/10/2019

10am - 1pm @ FAY 200N, TBC

Presentations in class and final papers due (up to 2000 words).