

Department: Geography

Course No: 130

Credits: 3

Title: The City in Western Tradition

Contact: Alexander Vias

Content Area: CA1-Arts and Humanities

Catalog Copy: GEOG 130. The City in the Western Tradition
(Also offered as URBN 130.) Either semester. Three credits.

A broad discussion of the role and structure of the city in the western tradition from the Classical period to contemporary America. Special emphasis will be placed on the mechanisms by which cities and ideas about them have been diffused from one place to another and on the changing forces that have shaped the western city.

Course Information: a. This course presents an overview of the geography and history of Western Civilization by examining the physical form and function of both typical and exemplary cities through history. The primary objective of the course is to provide students with a historical and geographic comparative frame of reference with which to consider the role of the built environment in their own lives.

b. Currently, readings for topics the first 2/3 of the course are based upon a text prepared by Professors Halvorson and E. Cromley of the Geography Department. Readings for the last 1/3 of the course are based on "The Crisis of the American City" by Bartlett. The course is regularly taught to sections of at least 100 students in a traditional lecture format. Grades are determined by 4 short-essay exams.

c. The first 2/3 of the semester focuses on the following specific time periods: Classical Greece, the Roman Empire, Byzantium, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Baroque, and the United States. The final 1/3 of the semester focuses on the following two topics: 1) An introduction to significant issues facing the contemporary American City (concentrated urban poverty, racial/ethnic segregation, sprawl, etc.) and 2) a comparison of American cities with selected contemporary cities in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe.

Primary Topics:

--The City in the Western Tradition

--Urban Origins

--The City-States of Classical Greece

--Rome and the Cities of the Roman Empire

- Byzantium and the Dark Ages
- The Medieval City
- Cities of the European Nation-State
- American Cities before 1830
- American Cities from 1830 to 1870
- American Cities from 1870 to 1920
- American Cities from 1920 to Present
- Contemporary American Cities: Suburbanization, Sprawl, Smart Growth, and New Urbanism
- Contemporary American Cities: Segregation and Urban Poverty
- Movie: We Built this City: New York City, London and Paris --Comparative Urbanization: The Western European City --Comparative Urbanization: The Socialist City

Meets Goals of Gen Ed: Geography 130 primarily meets the following requirements: 1) "Acquire intellectual breadth and versatility" and 2) "Acquire awareness of their era and society". A primary goal of the course is to make the students aware of the powerful role that the built environment plays in their own immediate lives. Through a consideration of the various forms that cities have taken over time and how the form of cities has been connected to specific cultures, technologies, and economies it is expected that students will become more critically aware of the social construction of the built environment. More specifically, students will gain a wider perspective from which to view issues concerning the contemporary city.

CA1 Criteria: 1) "Investigations and historical/critical analyses of human experience" and 2) "Investigations into the modes of symbolic representation". As numerous Urbanists have argued (from Mumford through Lefebvre) the city is the primary means for the production and reproduction of society. To quote Mumford: "The city is the magnet, crucible, and container of civilization." Thus, the city is arguably the most important of all "modes of symbolic representation". This course is aimed toward making students aware of how cultural values, political discourse, and technology shape, and in turn are shaped, by urban space.

Role of Grad Students: M.A. and Ph.D. students will serve as teaching assistants with the responsibilities of supervised grading, office hours, and administrative support. In special cases, graduate students will teach the course with full responsibilities after serving as a TA in the course and taking the Department's required teacher-preparation course.

Supplemental Information: GEOG 130 is currently in the general education curriculum for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences: Group 5: Culture and Modern Society (Western Cultures).

Geography cross-lists this course as URBN 130. Department assumes that approval of Geography 130 will apply to URBN 130.