PLA 1654H   Urban Design Research Methods
Monday 1-4, Sidney Smith 5017b

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Course Description

This course is appropriate to all students interested in understanding the built form of cities and interactions between built form and people at the scale of human experience. It does not attempt to teach design skills. Rather, the purpose of the course is to introduce students to a number of research areas broadly useful to planning/urban design practice and inquiry, and to further develop their skills for understanding and critiquing both research methods and findings. The course should help students define their own research interests and help them identify methods useful in answering their research questions. A conceptual framework will be used to help organize knowledge areas as well as facilitate understanding between different approaches. Environment-behaviour and typo-morphological approaches will be given special attention as they have the clearest links to practice, but students will also have opportunity to focus on other research approaches of their choice.

Requirements and Evaluation

Class format: The class will be run as a seminar with the focus on discussions of readings and concepts. In this regard students are expected to: (1) critically read assigned readings prior to class, and (2) actively participate in discussions, and (3) listen to and be respectful of the ideas of others.

Note that class participation is weighted heavily in the evaluation of students. Students who have a very difficult time speaking in seminar settings should consult with me. I am committed to the principles of accessibility. Please also see below for information on accessibility services.

Readings: Readings will be heavier in some weeks, lighter in others. I will try to guide students on which readings should be read closely and which can be reviewed more quickly. Readings will be available on the course blackboard site or, in some cases, on my homepage: http://faculty.geog.utoronto.ca/Hess/hess_home.html. I tend to tinker with the course syllabus, and readings may change for some weeks.

Assignments: There are two main assignments in this course. In the first, students will gather data and map urban form characteristics of different Toronto area neighbourhoods. In teams, students will describe building, lot, and street patterns. They will share the maps and data they generate and each student will individually write a comparative essay drawing on the form of several neighbourhoods.

In the second, students will propose a short, simple research project of their own choosing. This may be done individually or in small, self-organized groups. The goal of the exercise is to better understand the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges of using a particular method or set of methods. Students are encouraged to use field based methods such as recording physical traces,
using visual observations, or conducting behavioural mapping to understand the use patterns of a particular type of space or urban environment. Students may, as well, propose to use other kinds of methods for the assignment. The exercise will consist of a simplified research proposal which will be presented and discussed in class, the research exercise or experiment, a presentation and a research report. The presentation will be given in the last sessions of class.

Additionally, students are asked to form small groups and help lead a seminar. As part of the seminar they should present methods used in the research area and discuss theoretical and methodological issues. I will give more information on expectations the second week of class when I have a better idea of class size.

**Evaluation and due dates:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation/seminar prep</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Due Oct. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood mapping with</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Due Oct. 21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood comparison</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Due Nov. 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation of research proposal</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Due Nov. 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research presentation</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Due Dec 2 (with additional day scheduled if necessary.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research report</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>Due Friday, Dec 13</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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**Late submission of work:** Work that is submitted late will be deducted 10% per day, weekends counted as one day, unless there is medical reason (provide documentation).

**Office hours:** I do not maintain official office hours for this class but I am readily available for students that want to meet. You can email to set up meetings on an individual or group basis. I also have an “open door policy” and am available to listen to any student ideas and concerns related to the class. Please stop by my office anytime the door is open – which is often. If I am in the office and my door is closed, I do not want to be disturbed.

**Accessibility Needs:** If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible: disability.services@utoronto.ca or http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility

**Topics and Readings**

**WEEK 1 – Sept. 9**

**Course Introduction: Framework for Research Areas and Approaches**

Local Area Field Trip (weather permitting) – urban design, issues, questions

**WEEK 2 – Sept. 15**

**Urban Design Definitions; Catholic Approach**

Introduce Class Research Project

**Required Readings:**


Additional readings (all on blackboard)


WEEK 3 – Sept. 23

Typo-morphology Studies I: Schools of Typo-morphology

Readings:


Debate on Italian Approach (all in one file):


Additional readings

• Corsini, Maria Grazia (1997) “Residential building types in Italy before 1930: the significance of local typological processes” Urban Morphology 1: 34-48. (on blackboard)


WEEK 4 – Sept. 30

Typo-morphology Studies II: North American and Suburban Form

Local Area Field Trip (weather permitting) – Typomorphology on the street

Readings:


WEEK 5 – Oct. 7

Picturesque Studies

Readings:

  Read introduction.
  Skim Casebook section.
  In “General Studies” section read “Squares for All Taste,” “The Life of a Line,” “Legs and Wheels,” “Prairie Planning,” and two or three other sections of your own choosing.
  NA 9030 C8 1971b (3 copies in Arch, 1 copy in Robarts)

  Read Introduction and three sections on streets of your choosing.
  NA 9053 S7 J23 1993 (1 Copy Arch short term loan, 1 Copy Robarts, 1 instructor copy)


Oct 14 – THANKSGIVING – UNIVERSITY CLOSED
WEEK 6 – Oct. 21

Image Studies

Readings:

  NA 9108 L9 – Multiple copies available in Arch, Robarts, Innis and others


  Chapter 4: Residential Area and Neighborhood: Images and Values

WEEK 7 – Oct. 28

Environment-Behaviour Studies/Environmental Psychology

EB Readings:

  Chapter 1: “Three Streets in San Francisco”


EPsych Readings

  Chapter 3. “Experimentalists”


Resources for Research Exercise:

Recommended:

  Chapter 7. “Observing Physical Traces”
  Chapter 8. “Observing Environmental Behavior.”
Other E-B resources:

Journals:

*Environment and Behavior* – In Robarts and FALD and OISE also, available on-line 1995 –

*Journal of Environmental Psychology* – In Robarts stacks BF 353 J68; available on line 1995 –

Web sites:

Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA): [www.edra.org](http://www.edra.org)

Project for Public Spaces (PPS): [www.pps.org](http://www.pps.org)

Texts:


WEEK 8 – Nov. 4

Presentation of Research Proposals

William Whyte Film –

Possible Field Trip

WEEK 9 – Nov. 11

**Place Studies**

Readings:


WEEK 10 – Nov. 18

**Landscape Studies, Material Culture Studies**

Readings:


Learning about Landscapes
The Domestication of the Garage

  
  Chapt. 1: Frameworks for Cultural Landscape Study (Paul Groth)

  Chapt. 9. Urban Landscape History: The Sense of Place and the Politics of Space (Delores Hayden)

- Schlereth, Thomas, ed. (1985) *Material Culture: A research guide*. Lawrence, Kansas, University of Kansas Press
  
  Chapt. 2: Learning from Looking: Geographic and Other Writing about the American Landscape (Peirce Lewis)

  Chapt. 3: The Power of Things: Recent Studies in American Vernacular Architecture (Dell Upton)

**WEEK 11 – Nov. 25**

**Space Morphology**

**Readings:**

  
  Chapter 1: “The Problem of Space”, 26 - 71


**Nature Ecology Studies**


  or


**WEEK 12 – Dec. 2 (with additional day if necessary)**

**Student Presentations of Research Projects**