Contemporary Urban Issues: Problems and Solutions

URST-3000 (4 Credits / 60 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
IHP Cities in the 21st Century: People, Planning, and Politics

Course Overview
Contemporary Urban Issues (CUI) explores place-based challenges currently facing the cities you are studying. In New York City, Delhi, Dakar and Buenos Aires, you will be introduced to matters of current public concern, debate or dispute. Some of these challenges are closely connected to a city’s unique history while others are more general, recurrent, or even common to cities worldwide. Students are encouraged to think comparatively of problems as well as solutions, by recognizing both shared and unique elements within and between cities. In addition to engaging in field visits, guest lectures and other activities, students will deepen their skills in “reading the city” by conducting original investigation and completing a comparative research project on an urban issue of their choice.

The guiding question for the course, framing the IHP Cities program, is: What are the forces that shape cities, and how can they be influenced to create equitable, sustainable and vibrant urban environments? You will begin addressing this question in New York City and will reconsider it in Delhi and Dakar. In the final week of the semester in Buenos Aires, you will engage in an IHP Semester Synthesis that addresses this question comparatively.

Course Objectives
- To learn to read cities through observation and direct experience, and from multiple viewpoints;
- To provide students with appropriate methods and concepts to investigate contemporary urban issues;
- To examine current urban issues and their potential responses systematically and critically;
- To draw links across places with reference to political-economic, socio-cultural and environmental contexts.

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Course Methodology
CUI is designed to take advantage of local resources, knowledge and experiences. The city is the classroom for learning, for sources of information and inspiration in your investigations. Place-based readings support experiential learning and methods are critical for the success of experiential learning. The course integrates a variety of learning methods, including discussion and lectures, individual and group research, case studies, neighborhood days, homestays, and exposure to local mainstream and independent media. Active independent learning is encouraged, and the exchange of information among peers is essential to achieving the above objectives. Student-led presentations and syntheses are key components of CUI therefore student participation in all elements of the course is critical for developing a greater awareness and understanding of comparative urban issues. Because the course is taught jointly by all faculty members, it will draw upon multiple organizational, academic, and individual perspectives.

Course Requirements

Comparative Analysis (CA) project (75%)
This independent research project requires you to learn directly from primary sources (i.e. observations, interviews and measurements that you collect) in multiple cities. Select a topic that inspires or intrigues you because you will examine it in each city we visit. Your CA project may become the subject of a future thesis, publishable article or career interest!

It is important that the topic is feasible. Some of the questions to ask yourself include: Is it observable? Are my observation sites accessible by public transportation or walking? Have I considered language barriers and how to overcome them? Attention to feasibility will ensure that your project is realistic and achievable within the constraints of the semester's schedule. You can also utilize the opportunities presented by the program's activities and resources to collect data for your project.

Each student's CA project is developed during the semester in four stages with consultation and input from the faculty at each point via conversations, meetings and Office Hours.

a) Topic Selection, New York (ungraded)
b) CA Notebook Review, Delhi (10%)
c) CA Mid-Term Review, Dakar (30%)
   CA Oral Presentation (15%)
   CA Written Summary (15%)
d) Comparative Analysis Project Conclusion, Buenos Aires (35%)
   CA Essay (20%)
   CA Poster (15%)

a) Topic Selection, New York City (ungraded)
Students will explore ideas and finally select a topic. Potential topics are everywhere: look at the syllabi of the other three courses (especially the thematic readings), the New York City County Book, pay attention to local newspapers and media, consider your hobbies, as well as your (and others) Pre-Departure Assignment(s). Feel free to discuss your ideas with faculty and coordinators.

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At the end of the second week, students submit 2-3 paragraphs that address the following:

**Topic selection and research question:** What is the topic? What is/are your preliminary research question(s) that you will investigate over the semester? What urban issue(s) are you addressing through the comparative analysis project?

**Observation:** In every city, you will need to do a sustained observation of the topic you have chosen. This should last for at least one hour. Where will you observe this topic in every city?

**Conversation/Interview:** In every city, you will need to have at least one conversation with someone about the topic. Who will you speak with and what are 3 questions you will ask?

**Other research methods:** Different topics may require different research methods and tools. What additional methods or tools will you use (if any)?

**Your own interest:** Why are you interested in this topic for investigation? Why do you feel it is important?

b) **CA Notebook Review, Delhi (10%)**

The CA Notebook is an important part of the experiential learning process as well as the Comparative Analysis project. Notebooks are the primary place to document your research process, which includes tracking, analyzing and synthesizing your experiences. Take note of images and observations, reflect on articles/site visits/lectures, make drawings, and record conversations you have pertaining to your Comparative Analysis project. Your Notebook will be actively used as a method of communication between you and the faculty during the sixteen weeks of the program.

In the Delhi CA Notebook Review, we will assess these four components:

i. **Observations:** Observe your topic for at least one hour. Write/diagram the following: a) description of your observation; b) interpretation of what you have observed; and c) reflection on the process and topic. Also note the date, time and place of the observation.

ii. **Conversation:** Have at least one conversation about your CA topic. Write a description of the person with whom you conversed, your questions, notes from the conversation, direct quotations when possible, and your reflection on the conversation.

iii. **Reflection:** Reflect on your topic in context by relating it to readings/guest lecturers/site visits/faculty sessions as relevant.

iv. **Analysis:** Begin analyzing what you have learned in thinking about your topic through observation, conversation, comparison, and context.

c) **CA Mid-Term Review, Dakar (30%)**

In the Mid-Term Review, you have the opportunity to present your analysis and findings of the topic that you have been researching for eight weeks. Comparative analysis requires you to carefully examine your findings for different aspects of your particular topic or issue, both within the local context and in terms of differences and similarities within and across cities. Your research findings need to be distilled into a clear and concise oral presentation and written summary that address the evaluation criteria below.

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CA Oral Presentation (15%)
In a format of your choosing, present your Comparative Analysis project to the class. You will have 3 minutes (strictly timed!), and will be filmed with a video recorder. Include evidence from Delhi and Dakar (and New York City if relevant).

CA Written Summary (15%)
Restate your research question (or state the new version if it has evolved over the last eight weeks). Present your emerging analysis and summarize your findings to date. (750 words)

d) Comparative Analysis Project Conclusion, Buenos Aires (35%)
Use your Delhi and Dakar research and findings on Buenos Aires, as well as supporting materials on each city (Notebook entries, photographs newspaper cuttings, maps, etc.), to prepare a final essay and poster during the last weeks of the program in Buenos Aires.

CA Essay (20%)
Develop an essay that presents your major findings by comparing and analyzing your topic in each city we have visited. You will also need to present an argument for your analysis that addresses your research question and is based on the insights you have gained over the semester. Include the following: cover page, introduction, research question and methodology, analysis, conclusion, references. (2000 words)

CA Poster (15%)
Posters are one way of conveying information on research projects at conferences and workshops. Create a poster on your Comparative Analysis topic, drawing on information and materials you have gathered in each of the cities we have visited, comparing issues, impacts and responses across cities. Be as creative as you can in designing and developing your poster, using various media, including text, photographs, magazine and newspaper articles, headlines, etc. to convey the information in the best possible way. The poster will be used to share the information you have gathered and your findings and insights with the group as a whole. Include: a title, your name, introduction and major findings, comparative analysis across cities, references/ acknowledgments.

Criteria used for evaluation of mid-semester review and individual project conclusion:
- Clear research question/focus and the effectiveness of the paper in answering this question/focus
- Effective use of program materials and a range of primary sources
- Thorough and pertinent comparisons
- Well supported analysis and argument
- Well constructed text, using clear, concise prose
- Appropriate academic tone and referencing

Further information will be provided during each phase of the research.

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Participation (25%)
The Participation grade for CUI is made up of two components: a student’s overall engagement in CUI activities (20%) and their involvement and engagement with the Group Reflection on Learning during the IHP Semester Synthesis in Buenos Aires (5%).

a) CUI Activities (20%)
Assessment of participation in CUI activities is based on attendance and engagement in program activities in each city, as described below. Students are encouraged to be an active part of the learning community by listening, asking questions and contributing ideas to the intellectual growth of the class. We expect that students will improve their ability to do these things over the course of the semester. Each co-faculty member will contribute to the assessment of student engagement and contribution to group learning.

Pre-departure Assignment: An exercise on urban issues, introducing the concept of reading a city through the study of a contemporary controversy and visions for urban change. The assignment is not graded (although you will receive feedback from faculty) but it is factored into your course participation.

Readings: City-specific required “Orientation Readings” will be distributed to each student in the CUI course reader. These readings (a) provide background information on the city, (b) cover topics of current importance in each city, and (c) serve as reference material for guest lectures. Additional recommended “Thematic Readings” cover a wide range of issues of interest in each city. They are intended to serve as a traveling reference library, used on a flexible basis to provide background information on a comparative analysis topic, a site visit, case study, etc. Recommended readings are digitized and available upon request.

Neighborhood Days: Neighborhood days involve trips by small groups of students to different parts of the city. Students spend a half to full day investigating a particular neighborhood in each city using a variety of formal and informal methods based on direct observation as well as engagement with local communities. Findings and experiences are shared through group presentations. Neighborhood days are not graded but are factored into course participation.

Guest Lectures: All guest lectures and panel discussions by participants in the Cities program are critical inputs for the learning process. They will bring a range of perspectives, including civil society, government, and academia, that will contribute to your understanding of place-specific urban issues and your comparative analysis project.

Faculty Sessions: CUI faculty sessions will be devoted to: (a) exploring different research, analytical and communication methods and tools; (b) work-shopping the research process for students’ Comparative Analysis projects; and (c) reflection and discussion of urban challenges and issues raised through experiencing the city.

Case Studies: A case study is an in-depth look at a particular topic or area of interest over a few days that culminates in a presentation. It includes research into the facts of the subject and an analysis of those facts to understand the
dynamics of a given situation, and the underlying reasons for observed conditions. Case Studies begin with a briefing where students are given background information on the case study options and to form into research groups. The next two to three days of fieldwork, research and reflection is followed by student presentations. In each city, your analysis and presentation will adopt a different disciplinary lens: P&D in Delhi, UP&SE in Dakar and C&S in Buenos Aires. Case Studies contribute toward the participation grade in CUI and toward presentation grades in the other three courses. Case Studies are graded by all faculty. In addition, students will provide peer feedback.

b) Group Reflection on Learning (5%)
This activity, occurring at the end of the program, is an opportunity for students to reflect on their personal and academic journey through the entire semester. It builds on the Personal Reflections on Learning that occur in New York City, Delhi, Dakar and Buenos Aires. Students will determine collectively how they will organize this activity.

Summary Table of Assignments for CUI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New York City</th>
<th>Delhi</th>
<th>Dakar</th>
<th>Buenos Aires</th>
<th>Throughout Semester</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Pre-departure assignment</td>
<td>1. CA Notebook Review (10%)</td>
<td>1. CA Oral Presentation (15%)</td>
<td>1. CA Poster (20%)</td>
<td>1. CUI Activity Participation (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Comparative Analysis (CA) topic selection</td>
<td>2. CA Written Summary (15%)</td>
<td>2. CA Essay (15%)</td>
<td>3. Group Reflection on Learning (5%)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Grading
Faculty will give grades in the form of points and will return assignments with written comments. Faculty will describe the range of points received for the assignment so that a student will know how his/her work compares with the rest of the class. At the end of the semester, your cumulative point score will be calculated in order to determine the final letter grade for the course. Point grades on individual assignments are not directly correlated to letter grades. The final letter grades will be determined on the basis of cumulative points on assignments completed across countries.

For final grades in IHP Cities courses it is useful for students to think of letter grades in the following way. An "A" represents truly outstanding work that exemplifies thorough analysis, superior insight, and crystal clear presentation. A "B" signifies highly competent work that accomplishes the task at hand very well, through considerable thought, reasonable analysis, and an organized presentation. A "C" represents adequate work that meets basic requirements but demonstrates no distinction in terms of analytical insight or organization. A "D" is characterized by poorly or partially completed work that reflects a lack of initiative, inconsistent analysis, and/or erratic

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presentation. Plus and minus indicates relatively better or less-good work within each category. There is no A+.

**Course Policies**

*Attendance and Participation:* All students are expected to be present at every class session, with the only exceptions being illness (written note required from a non-IHP adult, e.g. homestay parent, or preferably, health care professional). Unexcused absences and habitual lateness will result in penalties reflected in your participation grade. Please inform the instructor if tardiness is anticipated. **All students are expected to come to class on time.**

*Late work:* In keeping with IHP policy, papers handed in late will drop one point per day, unless permission is granted otherwise. Course assignments are due at the beginning of the day.  

*Plagiarism:* All students are responsible for having read the IHP statement on plagiarism, which is available in the IHP Student Handbook. Students are advised that the penalty on IHP for plagiarism may be “…expulsion from the program or such other penalty as may be recommended by the Program Director, subject to approval by the Executive Director.”

Refer to the Student Handbook for IHP policies regarding academic integrity, academic warning and probation, diversity, disability, harassment protocols, and the academic appeals process.

**COURSE CHRONOLOGY**

Topics covered in each module will draw on site visits, guest lectures, and other activities, in addition to the assigned readings. The order of the modules may be rearranged to respond to activities or opportunities presented in each Country Program.

**NEW YORK CITY, USA**

23 January – 3 February 2012

**Required Readings**


**Reference Readings**


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• UNDP. United States Human Development Indicators. Available at: http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/USA.html

Thematic Readings

Reflection on the Term “City”
• Scientific American – Special issue on Cities: http://www.scientificamerican.com/cities/

Infrastructure
• New York City Department of Transportation. 2009. “Sustainable Streets 2009 Progress Report.”

Connections to Senegal

Globalization and the Global City
• Marcuse, Peter. 2008. “Globalization and the Forms of Cities,” in Jenks, Mike, Daniel Kozak and Pattaranon Takkanon (eds.), World Cities: Polycentric,
Delhi, India

4 February – 10 March 2012

Required Readings

- Basic Information, India from www.india.gov.in
- From Ancient History to Independence from www.india.gov.in
- Basic Information, Delhi from www.india.gov.in
- [Some] Key statistics on urban India from www.india.gov.in
- UNDP, Human Development Indicators, India. Available at: http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/IND.html

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Thematic Readings

Society


Infrastructure, Water, Waste

- McDonogh, Gary, Cindy Isenhour, Melissa Checker 2011 'Introduction: Sustainability in the City: Ethnographic Approaches’ *City & Society* 23(2): 113-116

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Housing, Resettlement, Informality


Media


Rural and Urban, Tensions and Connections


Urbanisation and its Discontents


DAKAR, SENEGAL 11 March – 6 April 2012

Required Readings

- Selected articles from the media.

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Thematic Readings

Urbanization

Infrastructure

Economy

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**Environment**

**Culture**

**BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA 15 April – 19 May 2012**

**Required Readings**
- Ambasz, Emilio. n.d. “Anthology for a Spatial Buenos Aires.” (10 pages)

**Thematic Readings**

**Reference and Historical Context**

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**Public Space**

**Globalization and Urbanization**

**Social Movements**
