What is “critical” theory and how is it relevant to the study of the city? How can it help us understand the geographies of urbanization and social change? Urbanist Neil Brenner writes that critical urban theory “insists that another, more democratic, socially just and sustainable form of urbanization is possible” and “involves the critique of ideology and the critique of power, inequality, injustice and exploitation, at once within and among cities.” The approaches we use to do so, however, are widely debated. This reading-intensive, discussion-centered graduate seminar will expose students to a variety of critical social theories relevant to the study of cities and the social process that shape them.

In this course, we’ll reflect on how various social theories – including both foundational work by Marx and Foucault and cutting edge work by feminist, critical race, and Indigenous scholars – can inform our understanding of cities as social and material spaces produced and reshaped by flows of capital, as well as the way that such processes are mediated and governed by ‘the state’ and non-state actors, and through hegemonic conceptions of gender, race, and property. Running through much of this work are reflections on social change, how it arises, and how it can be mobilized.

As geographer Michelle Buckley reminds us, “the material production of urban built environments can depend on parallel production of complex inequalities and intersecting forms of social difference.” We’ll thus begin with some building blocks of Marxian political economy to think about how capital manifests spatially through urbanization. We’ll turn to Foucauldian understandings of power before moving on to scholarship rethinking governance.
After that, we will turn to work that demonstrates how capitalism and urbanization work through social constructions (and their lived and material manifestations) of gender, race, settler colonialism, and property. Throughout the course, we’ll be engaging with these theoretical frameworks via new and recent scholarship, primarily from geography and urban studies, but also from planning, sociology, anthropology, and ethnic studies.

By providing a foundation in the political economy of capitalist urbanization and its mediation through social difference, the course serves as a point of embarkation into the world of critical urbanism. Some of the theoretical lenses we discuss may prove particularly relevant to thesis or dissertation research addressing relationships between urban processes, (in)equity, and action. Course content is primarily of interest to urban studies, planning, geography, sociology, and anthropology graduate students, but may also be of interest to doctoral students in social work, education, and health seeking to understand the urban contexts in which they work.

**Course Texts**

Plan to read about 4 articles or chapters per week, ie, 100+ pages of dense academic prose per week. Given how reading-intensive the course is, you should read strategically (see below). In general, it will be helpful to read these in the order listed on the syllabus. We will mostly be reading journal articles and book chapters, available as PDFs or links posted on D2L.

And now an important note on reading. For this class – and throughout your academic careers! – it’s really important to read strategically. Remember that not all text is created equal. Some passages are worth skimming, while others you will want to read more than once. So unless you’re trying to learn about the particular empirical content area of the paper (e.g., post-war housing policy in Saskatoon or informal water provisioning in Paramaribo), don’t waste your time taking notes on the empirics. Instead, your goal should be to identify the authors’ key claims, the arc of their argument, and how they develop and support it. Most authors flag these things throughout, because they want their argument to be clear and concise and to remind the reader where they’ve been and where they’re going with the paper. And most articles follow a relatively formulaic organization, so you’ll quickly learn where to find the lit review, the gaps in the lit / justification for the study, the theoretical framework (what I call the “theory drop”), the methods, the empirics, and finally the analysis of empirics using the theoretical framework. Remember that while the empirics themselves may not be useful for your own work, understanding how an author uses a particular theoretical framework to interpret their empirics – and/or conversely uses these empirics to make a broader theoretical claim – may be incredibly useful to you. This is what you’re looking for—take notes on these things! And be sure to highlight, star, underline, annotate key passages, whatever, but do so sparingly, so you can go back and quickly pick out the most important bits.

In addition to identifying the central arguments/claims/hypotheses and how they support them, you should also focus on how the author is situating their work. What are the scholarly debates they’re engaging in? What gaps in the literature are they trying to fill? Whose work are they
building on? Disagreeing with? It’s also important to think about the research design and methodology. What are the key theoretical constructs or frameworks they’re employing? What kind of data are they using to support their claims and how did they collect it? What are the strengths and weaknesses of their argument and/or methodology?

**Expectations**

*General classroom etiquette*

- Please be on time so we can start right at 9am.
- Please inform me ahead of time, if possible, If you are unable to come to class for any reason. Barring extenuating circumstances, you must still submit a reading response for any day you miss.
- Turn off cell-phones. Use of laptops is welcome for note taking, but please respect the rest of us by refraining from checking Facebook, email, or any other distraction. To fight temptation, turn off your Wi-Fi if you have to!
- Finally, given the various perspectives, experiences, and ways of knowing in the room, please be patient and respectful with one another if you disagree. This class may push you into unfamiliar intellectual territory… I want your brain to hurt, but that’s it!

At the graduate level, my job as a professor isn’t to lecture, but rather, to structure the course, to ask questions, and to keep us on track. Our goals each week are to critically engage with the readings, to situate them conceptually in relation to the other readings, and to think about their theoretical and methodological implications for your own research. In order for this to work, it’s essential that you come to class having read all assigned readings and prepared to discuss them thoughtfully and critically. It will be obvious if you come unprepared.

**Assignments & Grading**

*Reading Responses* (35%)

To prepare for class each week (Weeks 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10), you are responsible for writing a short reading response (RR). These should be about 400 to 500 words (ie, one single-spaced page) in which you synthesize some of the key insights you take from the ensemble of readings. You should conclude with some thoughtful provocative questions that the readings raise for you. Please use 1” margins, 12pt Times New Roman font, and single-spacing! You should upload your RR to D2L before class each week. I will grade these with a grade of 96, 88, and 80 (my numeric equivalent to a Ö+, Ö, or Ö-, respectively).

*Participation* (30%)

This is a discussion-driven seminar. You are responsible for reading the assigned materials before class and coming ready to discuss. Everyone must join in the discussion. Remember to
“share air”, i.e., If you’re shy, push yourself to talk; if you’re a talker, be conscientious not to dominate the discussion.

To help move the discussion forward, come to class each week prepared to discuss the questions that you raised in your RR. You should post at least one of these questions to the week’s Discussion Questions forum on D2L by Wednesday at 5pm. You must also thoughtfully respond to at least one question that one of your classmates has raised.

Everyone will be required to give a 10- to 15-minute presentation on the readings at least once. You should be prepared to walk us through the key concepts/arguments/theories from the week’s readings. You should also be prepared to get our discussion started (and keep it going, if necessary!) with a few questions/topics/themes of import. Look over the discussion questions posted to D2L by your peers as you organize your questions and discussion topics. Please prepare an outline/diagram/visual aid to steward us through this process. This can be a one-page handout, or you can use the blackboard.

**Final Paper (35%)**

In addition to your weekly reading responses, you are required to write a short final paper (2,500 to 3,000 words). This should be a well-structured essay that applies some of the theory we’ve covered in the course to your research area of interest. I highly recommend that you make an appointment with me at some point over the course of the term to discuss your final paper topic. Please use 1” margins and single-spaced 12-pt Times New Roman font. Upload to D2L by 12 noon on Th 12/12. Please submit your paper as a Word document (.doc or .docx) so I can insert comments that I will return to you via D2L when I post your grade.

**Grading and Academic Integrity**

My general rubric for graduate-level assignments is as follows:

- **A+ or A**: Demonstrates original thought and synthesis of ideas, sophisticated, cogent analysis, and is clearly written or presented. Excellent work.
- **A- or B+**: Presents above average analysis with appropriate evidence to support the ideas and is clearly written or presented. Good work.
- **B**: Shows a basic level of understanding, with analysis limited to the most obvious arguments. Writing is competent. Adequate work.
- **B- or below**: Misunderstands or misrepresents the material, or is so poorly written presented as to obscure the analysis. Inadequate work.

You are graduate students and adults so I don’t need to elaborate on plagiarism and related issues of academic integrity as outlined in the Student Code of Conduct. I take this seriously, as I expect you to. Please see me if you have any questions about proper citation practices.
Office hours: Th 1 – 3 pm (or by appointment) in 350E URBN. Please contact me ahead of time to reserve a time slot. My email is n.mcclintock@pdx.edu. Please include “USP 689” in the subject heading if you email me for any issue related to this course.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: If you have feedback on Diversity, Equity or Inclusion (DEI) at the Toulan School, we welcome kudos, ideas, and concerns, related to this particular class or other issues in the Toulan School. Students are welcome to submit anonymous feedback via the following online form (https://tinyurl.com/TSUSP-DEI) and/or communicate the DEI committee directly (https://www.pdx.edu/usp/diversity-and-equity-committee).

Access and Inclusion for Students with Disabilities: PSU values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to fostering mutual respect and full participation for all students. My goal is to create a learning environment that is equitable, useable, inclusive, and welcoming. If any aspects of instruction or course design result in barriers to your inclusion or learning, please notify me. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) provides reasonable accommodations for students who encounter barriers in the learning environment. If you have, or think you may have, a disability that may affect your work in this class and feel you need accommodations, contact the Disability Resource Center to schedule an appointment and initiate a conversation about reasonable accommodations. The DRC is located in 116 Smith Memorial Student Union (503-725 4150, drc@pdx.edu, https://www.pdx.edu/drc). If you already have accommodations, please contact me to make sure that I have received a faculty notification letter and discuss your accommodations. Students who need accommodations for tests and quizzes are expected to schedule their tests to overlap with the time the class is taking the test. For information about emergency preparedness, please visit the Fire and Life Safety website (https://www.pdx.edu/environmental-health-safety/fire-and-life-safety).

Title IX: Portland State is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of prohibited discrimination and sexual harassment (sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, and gender or sex-based harassment and stalking). If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or sexual harassment, know that help and support are available. Information about PSU’s support services on campus, including confidential services and reporting options, can be found on PSU’s Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response website (http://www.pdx.edu/sexual-assault/get-help) or you may call a confidential IPV Advocate at 503-725-5672 or schedule online at https://psuwrc.youcanbook.me. You may report any incident of discrimination or discriminatory harassment, including sexual harassment, to:

- PSU’s Title IX Coordinator: Julie Caron by calling 503-725-4410, via email at titleixcoordinator@pdx.edu or in person at Richard and Maureen Neuberger Center (RMNC), 1600 SW 4th Ave, Suite 830
- Deputy Title IX Coordinator: Yesenia Gutierrez by calling 503-725-4413, via email at yesenia.gutierrez.gdi@pdx.edu or in person at RMNC, 1600 SW 4th Ave, Suite 830
• Deputy Title IX Coordinator: Dana Walton-Macaulay by calling 503-725-5651, via email at dana26@pdx.edu or in person at Smith Memorial Union, Suite, 1825 SW Broadway, Suite 433

Please be aware that all PSU faculty members and instructors are required to report information of an incident that may constitute prohibited discrimination, including sexual harassment and sexual violence. This means that if you tell me about a situation of sexual harassment or sexual violence that may have violated university policy or student code of conduct, I have to share the information with my supervisor, the University’s Title IX Coordinator or the Office of the Dean of Student Life. However, the Title IX Coordinators will keep the information confidential and refer you to a confidential advocate. For more information about Title IX please complete the required student module Creating a Safe Campus in your D2L.

Other campus resources

The PSU Food Pantry offers supplemental food items to currently enrolled PSU students. The pantry is located in SMSU 325. For more information, you can email foodhelp@pdx.edu. For more information on food, housing, financial, utility, and childcare assistance for students, visit http://www.pdx.edu/studentaffairs/CISFS.

The Learning Center (Millar Library 245) mission is to foster the learning process by empowering PSU students to accomplish their academic and personal goals. In addition to helping with current coursework, academic support services can assist in developing effective learning strategies. See http://www.pdx.edu/tutoring/ for more info.

The Writing Center (Cramer 188) will help you with all varieties of projects, including class assignments, resumes, application essays, presentations, and creative writing. It aims to help writers at any stage of the writing process, from brainstorming to the final draft. You can schedule an appointment online: http://www.writingcenter.pdx.edu/. Their website also contains resource pages that suggest ideas and strategies for completing writing projects.

The Office of Diversity & Multicultural Student Services (Smith Memorial Union 425) provides structured, academic support service, advising, referrals, and advocacy for first-generation college students, low-income and others facing special challenges. Visit http://www.pdx.edu/dmss/ for info.

The Cultural Resource Centers (Multicultural Student Center, La Casa Latina Student Center, Native American Student & Community Center, Pan African Commons, and Pacific Islander, Asian, Asian American Student Center and the Middle Eastern, North African, South Asian Initiative) provide students with employment, volunteer, and leadership opportunities. Along with extensive programming, the centers offer resources such as computer labs, lounge areas, and study spaces. All are welcome! See www.pdx.edu/cultural-resource-centers for info.
Course Outline & Readings

**Week 1: Introduction**

What is critical urban theory? How do we understand the city, the urban, and urbanization? What is lost when a particular theory comes to dominate?


**Week 2: Capital**

What is ‘capital’ and why must it continue to grow/remain in motion? How is urbanization linked to cycles of and forms of capitalist accumulation?

  - Ch. 1: The Visualization of Capital as Value in Motion (pp. 1-23)
  - Ch. 2: The Urban Process under Capitalism: A Framework for Analysis (59-89)
  - Ch. 1: Emergences (24-51)

Key concepts: labor power, means of production, socially necessary labor time, surplus value, fixed capital, overaccumulation, circuits of capital, circuit switching, class struggle, financialization, entrepreneurialism, cognitive capital

**Week 3: Power**

What is power? Where does it come from? How and why does power depend on the formation of a particular kind of ‘subject’? How do states/governments exert their power?

  - Introduction: Power, Freedom & Subjectivity (1-9)
  - Ch. 1: Foucault’s theory of power (13-26)
  - Ch. 2: Disciplinary power (27-39)
  - Ch. 3: Biopower (41-54)

Key concepts: power, freedom, genealogy, disciplinary power, subjectivity, subject formation, governmentality, sovereign power, biopower

**Week 4:** Governance

What is governance? How does the state govern everyday life? What is everyday governance? Who ultimately governs urban space?

  o Ch. 4: City Bureaucrats and Village Elders: The Dysfunctional Dance of Local Governance (78-105)
  o Ch1: Governing Disposability (27-59)

Key concepts: the prosaic state, everyday governance

**Week 5:** Gender / Social Reproduction

What is social reproduction? What is embodiment? How does capital accumulation depend on gendered difference? How is it dialectically related to social reproduction? How can using a lens of gender help us better understand the City?

  o Introduction: New Frontier’s in Life’s Work (1-18)


**Week 6: Race / Space**

*How are race and space mutually constituted? Racialization and urbanization?*


**Week 7: Racial Capitalism**

*How does the accumulation of capital depend on racialization? How is the relationship dialectical, that is, how does capitalism also contribute to racial formation? And how does racial capitalism also lead to ‘Blues geographies’ / the Black radical tradition? How are these processes spatial? How do they help us better understand urbanization and the urban?*


Also listen to:


**Week 8: Settling / Unsettling**

*What is settler colonialism? What is the relationship to land? How does it depend on racialization or Othering? On erasure? What makes a settler colonial city and how might a city be ‘unsettled’ or ‘decolonized’?*

  - Conclusion: Lessons from Idle No More (151-179)

**Week 9: NO CLASS**

**Week 10: Property**

*What is property? How is it connected to land? To capital? To personhood?*

  - Ch. 1: Welcome to the Hotel California (1-28)
  - Ch. 1: Introduction: Property, Law, and Race in the Colony (1-32)
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