Urban scholars have long sought to comprehend and explain the economic forces that give rise to cities through processes of urbanization, and impact the spatial dynamics of urban form and development. Not surprisingly, scholars have adapted these theories over time to reflect the changing circumstances facing cities, from changes to urban economic structure and function to technological shifts to changing patterns of land use and the built environment. As with any body of theory, the fundamental question is whether the new theories add explanatory power to our understanding of the “facts on the ground” in relation to existing theories.

This course is designed to introduce students to both seminal theoretical works, and contemporary debates, around these fundamental questions of urban growth and change. Although our focus is on the “economic,” our disciplinary scope will be relatively broad, encompassing scholarship in economics, geography, urban planning, and urban sociology. While this course is not an urban economics course per se, it is assumed that you have at least some rudimentary knowledge of microeconomic concepts; if not, you will likely need to backfill some of this along the way.

**COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Understand foundational theoretical concepts of urbanization, agglomeration and urban form and spatial structure;
- Critically assess contemporary debates regarding dynamics of urbanization and urban form, and their implications for urban phenomena and change; and
- Understand and critically compare how different theoretical traditions explain urban economic phenomena and change.

**TEXTS**

There are no required books for this course; the readings will be drawn from journal articles and book chapters, which will be made available via D2L.
ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Your course grade will be based on four grade items:

**Reading responses (25% of course grade):** In six weeks of your choosing over the term, you will write a response to the week’s assigned readings, and post it to a discussion board on D2L no later than 8am on the morning of class. Five of these will be brief (200-300 words), and worth three percent each, to be graded on a check plus/minus basis. One of these will be longer (1000-1500 words), worth 10 percent of your course grade. It will represent a more in-depth analysis, and you will be expected to cover at least one reading beyond those assigned to the class for that week. The purpose of these responses is not simply to summarize the key ideas or themes presented by the authors, but to add value to them in some way.

**Midterm exam (25%):** After week 5’s class, you will be given a take-home exam consisting of short essay questions on the topics of the first five weeks.

**Final exam (35%):** During the finals week, there will be a take-home exam based on the material of the full term.

**Class Participation (15%):** This class will operate as a seminar, which means that students are expected to be prepared and participate actively in the class discussion. Class participation grades will be based on the quality, not the quantity, of participation. Participation may come in the form of commenting on other students’ reading responses (before or after class), or posting additional materials on D2L discussion boards.

**LATE SUBMISSION POLICY:** Late submissions will be accepted with a 1 percent per hour penalty (based on 100-point scale). Students may request additional time without penalty to complete assignments, as long as the request is submitted at least 24 hours ahead of the deadline and accompanied by a reasonable justification (to be determined by the instructor). A good rule of thumb is: if the reason could not have anticipated more than a week away, then it is generally reasonable. Deadlines in other classes or at work generally do not meet this criterion.

**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) [https://www.pdx.edu/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. If you already have accommodations,
please contact me to make sure that I have received a faculty notification letter and discuss your accommodations.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY: It should go without saying that plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated, but I will say it anyway. “Academic dishonesty,” according to Section 577-031-0136 of the PSU Student Code of Conduct, refers to as “the act of knowingly or intentionally seeking to claim credit for the work or effort of another person or participation in such acts.” [http://www.pdx.edu/dos/codeofconduct] This encompasses both egregious acts of cheating like copying the answer to someone else’s exam, but also more mundane acts like lifting reference material from websites without attribution. Per university policy, instances of academic dishonesty may result in a zero grade for those assignment(s).

SAFE AND INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe and inclusive learning environment for my students and for the campus as a whole. We expect a culture of professionalism and mutual respect in our department and class. You may report any incident of discrimination or discriminatory harassment, including sexual harassment, to either the Office of Equity and Compliance or the Office of the Dean of Student Life.

Please be aware that as a faculty member, I have the responsibility to report any instances of sexual harassment, sexual violence and/or other forms of prohibited discrimination. If you would rather share information about sexual harassment or sexual violence to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can find a list of those individuals. For more information about Title IX, please complete the required student module Creating a Safe Campus in your D2L.

COURSE OUTLINE

NOTE: Required and supplemental readings are subject to change. Check D2L for an updated list.

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<th>Week 1 (Jan 8): Overview</th>
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<td>In this first session we will take stock of the important questions that scholars have posed about the economic foundations of urban and regional development and urban form. We will also consider how different theoretical traditions (neoclassical, Marxian, institutional) “explain.”</td>
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Readings:


Week 2 (Jan 15): Agglomeration and Urbanization

The most fundamental economic question posed by urban scholars is: why do cities exist in the first place? How is the basis for urbanization changing over time? How do economic explanations for urban growth co-exist and compare with other explanations? In this week we unpack the basis economic concept of agglomeration, and how its manifestations are changing as the economy changes.

Readings:


Week 3 (Jan 22): Globalization, Economic Restructuring and Urban Networks

How are urban regions connected to one another within the larger capitalist space- and political-economy? How are the relationships changing as the economy changes and restructures? In this week we examine theories of “global cities” and how they conceptualize the forces and processes impacting cities along the urban hierarchy.

Readings:


Week 4 (Jan 29): Urban Land and the Spatial Dynamics of Urban Growth

How do economic theories explain urban form, and how it has changed over time? In this session we engage with seminal theories of urban economics (both neoclassical and heterodox), which shine an analytical light on key aspects of the urban development process.

Readings:

Week 5 (Feb 5): Economics of Urban Growth and Sprawl

One focus of urban scholarship has been the trend toward decentralization and dispersion of economic activity away from urban centers. In this session we examine economic explanations for the phenomenon of “sprawl,” and arguments regarding changing patterns of urban morphology, both here in the United States and beyond. At the same time we take stock of the dynamic of re-centralization at work in many cities.

Readings:


Week 6 (Feb 12): Local government structure and public goods

Economic theory has sought to explain how local government is organized toward the provision of public goods in society, with Tiebout’s theory of “voting with your feet” being the most prominent among them. In this session we discuss the Tiebout model and the resulting impacts of metropolitan fragmentation on urban development patterns.

Readings:


**Week 7 (Feb 19): Housing Markets, Gentrification and Neighborhood Change**

Housing markets are fundamental to the dynamics of urban growth and change, especially in terms of neighborhoods and socioeconomic patterns of change, where individual decisions translate into processes of neighborhood disinvestment or gentrification. In this session we review basic theories of housing market dynamics, with a particular emphasis on gentrification.

Readings:


**Week 8 (Feb 26): Poverty and Inequality**

A tremendous amount of urban scholarship has focused on the plight of disadvantaged and marginalized populations, and the neighborhoods in which they live. But how should we make sense of the economic factors that play a role in producing, sustaining – or reversing – the marginalization of poor communities and communities of color? Should efforts to address inequality focus on poor places or poor people?

Readings:


**Week 9 (Mar 5): Urbanization and the Environment**

Are cities and urbanization processes good or bad for the sustainability of natural and environmental systems? As recognition of the unfolding climate crisis grows, so does scholarship aimed at understanding this intersection. In this week we will survey the urban environmental literature and how it makes sense of this dynamic, and the relationship between urbanization and natural systems more broadly.
Readings:


**Week 10 (Mar 12): Students’ choice**

In the final week I let the students pick the topic.