The images at left—bike lanes, rooftop farming, demolition of public housing, and an Occupy Wall Street plea for economic justice—illustrate both the hallmarks and lacunae of dominant conceptualizations of urban sustainability. In this reading-intensive, discussion-driven graduate seminar, we will examine the theory, politics, and practices shaping urban and regional sustainability initiatives. Rather than surveying a showcase of “best practices”, we will closely examine the discourses, political economy, and governance structures undergirding urban sustainability efforts throughout the Global North (primarily the US, Canada, and the UK). Drawing on recent work in geography, urban studies, and planning, we will attempt not only to make sense of sustainable development’s arguably contradictory “win-win-win” goals of economic growth, environmental integrity, and social equity, but also to identify both the potential spaces of contestation that arise from these slippages and the ways in which some existing equity efforts might be considered sustainable in their own right. In addition to the readings, we will also hear from a few practitioners in the field who are attempting to foster a more just sustainability here at home.

The course is roughly organized into three parts. During Part I (Theory), we will examine the roots of urban sustainability as an agenda, some of its utopian precursors, and the various ways in which sustainability has been (re)defined by scholars, policy makers, and planners. We will also think about how sustainability is measured, critically examining two concepts that are often central to measuring sustainability: ecological footprints and social capital. During Part II (Politics) we’ll use a lens of urban political economy to understand the relationship between urban sustainability initiatives and shifting regimes of economic growth and governance. We will pay particular attention to the role of community participation. Finally, during Part III (Practice) we will examine what “actually-existing sustainability” might look like in practice, in terms of health, housing, and economic development. We will conclude by considering what is necessary for the ongoing struggle to create cities that are both environmentally sustainable and socially just.
Course Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students should understand:

- The debates over what constitutes “urban sustainability” and the complexities in measuring it
- The contradictions inherent to mainstream conceptualizations of urban sustainability and its “best practices”
- How sustainability initiatives articulate with urban political economies and their restructuring
- The limits and possibilities of public participation in sustainability governance
- What “actually-existing sustainability” may look like in practice

Course Texts

We will mostly be reading journal articles. These will be available as links or PDFs posted on D2L. In addition, we will read the following books (available from the PSU bookstore and on reserve in Millar Library) in their (near) entireties:


We will also be reading 2 to 3 chapters from the following two books (also available at the bookstore). As these will be available in PDF form on D2L, purchasing them is optional.


In addition to walking around downtown Portland and browsing any number of PSU-related websites, you may also want to peruse a copy of the following book (on reserve at Millar Library) to get a sense of the dominant urban sustainability discourses and “best practices”:

Expectations & Assignments

Participation (10%)

This is not a lecture class or studio. Rather, it is a discussion-driven seminar. You are responsible for reading the assigned materials before class and coming ready to discuss; consider having read the assigned readings as your admission ticket to class. Given how reading-intensive the course is, you should read strategically (e.g., focus on the authors’ key claims or arguments, don’t get bogged down by specific details that you can refer back to later if needed). Everyone must join in the discussion. If you’re shy, push yourself to talk. If you’re a talker, be conscientious not to dominate the discussion.

Weekly discussion questions (15%)

Each meeting, you are responsible for crafting 2 discussion questions that critically engage with the readings. You will need to post these to the day’s Discussion Questions forum on D2L. Please post your questions by 9 am on the day of class so others have a chance to read over them before we meet. NB: You don’t need to post questions to D2L if you are leading discussion (see below).

Discussion Facilitation (10%)

Everyone will be required to lead the discussion at least twice (possibly three times, depending on enrollment) during the course. You should provide a brief summary (think 2 to 3 bullet points per reading) of the day’s readings and synthesis relating it to other readings and previous class discussions. Be sure to highlight the key claim or “take-home” of each reading. You should then get our discussion started with a few questions/topics/themes of import...and have some more on hand to keep the discussion going if it starts to flounder... which it won’t! You should look over the discussion questions posted to D2L by your peers as you organize your questions and discussion topics.

Reading Responses (30%)

Over the course of the term, you are responsible for writing a short response paper (~300 to 500 words) for any ten of the class meetings. Your response should include a short précis of each reading along with some synthesizing discussion and insights you take from the ensemble of readings. Include further questions that the readings raise (the discussion questions that you post to D2L can be extracted from your reading response that day).

Final project (35%)

Depending on your degree program, you will prepare one of two final projects:

- A research essay on a topic of interest related to urban sustainability (~8,000 words). PhD and MUS students must take this option.

- or -

- A series of three policy briefs (~2,500 words each), each on a different aspect of a particular urban sustainability issue (e.g., climate change, housing, energy, water). For example, the first brief might deal with urban emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG), the second on GHG reduction...
strategies in urban areas, and the third on municipal climate action plans. At some point in the series, you must address 1) how sustainability is defined and measured, 2) relevant policy or planning initiatives, and 3) conflicts that have arisen or may arise when these initiatives are implemented. MRED, MURP, MPA, and other practitioner-oriented master’s students may take this option.

Final Project Deadlines:

- Please meet with me as soon as possible to discuss your topic (see my contact info below).
- A working title, abstract (~250 to 500 words), and bibliography are due on M 10/22.
- Final papers are due in my box by 5pm on F 12/7.

General classroom etiquette

- Please be on time so we can start right at 4:40.
- Please inform me ahead of time, if possible, if you are unable to come to class for any reason. If you miss a class, you should submit a reading response (see above) for the day you missed.
- 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.

Academic Integrity

You are graduate students so I don’t need to elaborate on this. I take this seriously, as I expect you to.

Academic Accommodations

If you are a student with a documented disability and are registered with the Disability Resource Center (DRC), please contact me immediately to facilitate arranging academic accommodations. Students who believe they are eligible for accommodations but who have not yet obtained approval through the DRC should contact the DRC immediately at 503-725-4150.

Contact Information

Nathan McClintock, PhD
Assistant Professor
Toulan School of Urban Studies & Planning
Portland State University
Office: 350-E Urban Center
Office Hours: M and W 3:30 – 4:30
Email: n.mcclintock@pdx.edu
Tel. 503-725-4064
Course Outline & Readings

I. Theory

The Rise (and Fall?) of Urban Sustainability


Utopian Visions

- Wheeler and Beatley (Ch. 46: Excerpt from Ernest Callanbach’s Ecotopia, pp. 379-384)

Defining Sustainability


Planning Sustainability

Also, peruse the Portland Plan (http://www.portlandonline.com/portlandplan/) and one or two other municipal sustainability planning sites (eg, San Francisco, Chicago, Montreal, London) to get a sense of the language used (eg, how do they define “sustainability”?), areas of focus (eg, climate, jobs, water, energy, transportation), where sustainability initiatives are housed within the city (eg, public works, environment, economic development), and anything else that strikes you.

Measuring Sustainability


Also peruse the sustainability indicators used by a city of your choice and jot these down for discussion.

Guest Speaker: Michael Armstrong, Portland Bureau of Planning & Sustainability

Carrying Capacity and its Limits


Social Capital and its Limits

Just Sustainability


II. Politics

The Neoliberal City


Sustainability Fixes

- Hackworth (Chs. 5 & 6, pp. 77 – 122)

Redevelopment or Gentrification?

- Hackworth (Chs. 7 & 8, pp. 123 – 171)

Guest Speaker: Maxine Fitzpatrick, Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives, Inc.
Rescaling Governance


(Post-Political?) Participation


III. Practice

Actually-Existing Sustainabilities


Multiple Storylines


Social Sustainability


**Health & Food**


Also, peruse a food systems action plan from a city of your choice (some are linked via D2L, but feel free to find another).

Guest Speaker: Ben Duncan, Multnomah Co. Environmental Health/OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon

**Economic Development**


Choose one:


And select 2 of following:


Also, explore the following websites: LAANE website (www.laane.org); LIUNA Local 483 (http://www.liuna483.org/); Jobs with Justice (http://www.jwjpdx.org/)

**Possible Urban Worlds**

- Harvey (Ch. 12: The Insurgent Architect at Work, pp. 233-255)
- Hackworth (Ch. 10, pp. 188 – 204)
## Meeting Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date Mon</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Date Wed</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9/24</td>
<td>The Rise (and Fall?) of Urban Sustainability</td>
<td>9/26</td>
<td>Utopian Visions</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10/1</td>
<td>Defining Sustainability</td>
<td>10/3</td>
<td>Planning Sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10/8</td>
<td>Measuring Sustainability</td>
<td>10/10</td>
<td>Carrying Capacity and its Limits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10/15</td>
<td>Social Capital and its Limits</td>
<td>10/17</td>
<td>Just Sustainability</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10/22</td>
<td>The Neoliberal City</td>
<td>10/24</td>
<td>Sustainability Fixes</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>10/29</td>
<td>Redevelopment or Gentrification?</td>
<td>10/31</td>
<td>Rescaling Governance</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>11/5</td>
<td>(Post-Political?) Participation</td>
<td>11/7</td>
<td>Actually-Existing Sustainabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>11/12</td>
<td>NO CLASS – Veteran’s Day</td>
<td>11/14</td>
<td>Multiple Storylines</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>11/19</td>
<td>Social Sustainability</td>
<td>11/21</td>
<td>NO CLASS - Thanksgiving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>11/26</td>
<td>Health &amp; Food</td>
<td>11/28</td>
<td>Economic Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>12/3</td>
<td>Possible Urban Worlds</td>
<td><strong>FINAL PAPERS DUE by Friday 12/7 @ 5PM</strong> (hard copy to me in my office or box)</td>
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