

Future Cities and the Environment

GEOG 280 (Spring Syllabus)

**Instructor:**

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Office hours: Tues. 3:00-4:00, Wed. 11:00-noon
311 International Center (INTC)

Prerequisite

None. There is no expectation that you have any background or prior coursework in Geography or Environmental Studies. Nor is it expected that you have international travel experience. The only prerequisite is that bring your most flexible, open-to-learning, adventurous spirit.

Why is this course important?

In early 2018, Cape Town, South Africa nearly ran out of water. It was one of the first major cities, but will not be the last, to confront this crisis. By the year 2050, more than two-thirds of the world's population will live in urban settings. Sustaining the demand for clean water, healthy air, and flourishing natural ecosystems to support these communities will be one of the great challenges of your generation. Compounding this challenge is the existential threats brought by historically unprecedented changes in climate. Notably, some parts of cities are, have been, and will continue to be more stressed than others. These inequalities in environmental condition lead directly to disparities in health. They are created by a variety of historical and contemporary actions that affect where people live, work, and play; who participates in decision-making processes; and where environmental risks are created.

How can society create and sustain thriving, equitable environments in modern cities? In this "local-global" course, we will examine the physical and social aspects to this challenge through comparative analysis of our local environment in Richmond, Virginia to two cities with some of the highest wealth and environmental inequality in the world: Cape Town and Durban, South Africa. We will consider historical explanations for existing environmental problems and learn about proposed actions for the future. We will even propose our own creative solutions to some of these challenges. Through the EnCompass Program, we will have the unique opportunity to study abroad at the forefront of several environmental crises and reflect on the connections to your life here in Richmond and your future lives in cities around the world.

We will begin our studies in the spring by focusing on our own local environment at the University of Richmond campus. We will then spend one week studying and visiting sites of environmental importance in the Richmond region before traveling to South Africa for two weeks of similar study and site visits. As we expand the scope of study from local to global, we will follow a consistent construct to learn about the history of urban development followed by themes of healthy air, clean water, accessible nature, and flourishing ecosystems. The final product of the course is a comparative analysis of a specific environmental challenge for two cities, culminating with proposed innovative solutions.

By the end of this course you will be able to...

- understand where the key natural resources that sustain your existence originate and how they are altered and transformed in urban environments
- appreciate the disparity in access to high quality natural resources and some of the explanations for how these disparities are created
- develop a better understanding of the earth's biological and cultural diversity
- conduct comparative analyses to identify commonalities and differences among local to global situations and experiences,
- contextualize and sort through information from multiple types of sources
- think creatively about possible solutions to complex problems
- communicate and share your ideas using map-based media and add a new dimension to your personal experience
- reflect on the connections between your life, those of your fellow global citizens, and the ecosystems that provide for us all

Spring course schedule:

Beginning on May 11, we will dive into the travel portion of the course. We will investigate topics such as the historical and contemporary influences on urban development, rivers and water in cities, spiritual and physical access to nature, and changes in air and climate conditions in cities. We are fortunate to live in an intellectual vibrant university, where many of these conversations will be taking place in different venues on campus during the semester. To prepare for our journey, you will participate in several. A passing grade for the course requires participation in at least five campus activities during the spring semester, followed by a three-week program of study from May 11-31st that culminates in a comparative analysis "StoryMap" of an environmental challenge and proposed solutions for two of the cities studied.

Spring assignments:

You are required to attend any five (5) events from the list below. For each event that you attend, a prompt will be provided on the Blackboard Discussion board. In most cases, the prompt will include references to relevant background reading. You should read the prompt material and any responses already submitted by your classmates to that prompt before getting started. Then, for each of the events that you attend, write a 200- to 300-word response of your own that considers the discussion that has already taken place within the thread. Responses should be submitted within one week of the event.

A good written response will be free of grammatical and spelling errors, have a clear thesis statement articulating an original idea or claim stimulated by the event and Blackboard prompt. Your argument should be supported by evidence from the event and related sources. It should end with a clear conclusion. The writing style should be formal, and these assignments should be treated as mini-papers. The purpose is to provide an initial exposure to the course concepts by hearing from experts right here on campus. A secondary goal is to practice generating and articulating new ideas in writing. This exercise will help develop higher level analytical, critical thinking, and communication skills. These skills will be required for the final StoryMap assignment at the end of the course. By reading your classmates posts, it will also help you to get to know each other.

Events: * Mandatory orientation meeting – Thurs, January 30, 7:00-8:00 pm, Int Ed Office

Monday, January 20, 1:00-2:00 pm: [Lauranett Lee](#), “A New Day Has Come: What Are We Learning About our Past,” Wilton Center Multifaith Room.

Friday, January 24, 12:30-1:25 pm: [Maritza Pechin](#), “A City for All of Our Residents: Richmond's Guide for Growth,” Tyler Haynes Commons, Room 305

Wednesday, January 29, 7:30-10:00 pm: [Allison Miller & Tic Toc Boom](#), “In Our Veins: Rivers and Social Change,” Camp Concert Hall. Get tickets [here](#).

Wednesday, February 5, 10:30-11:50 am: [Vivian Leung](#), “The Largest Dam Removal in the World: The Elwha Dam Restoration Project,” Business School, Room 225

Wednesday, February 5, 7:00-8:30 pm: [Mona Hanna-Attisha](#), “One Book, One Richmond Keynote: What the Eyes Don’t See,” Camp Concert Hall. Get tickets [here](#)

Friday, February 7, 12:30-1:25 pm: [Sarah Sanford](#), “Meet the East Coast Greenway: Connecting People to Place,” Wilton Center, Multi-faith Room

Thursday, February 13, 5:00-6:00 pm: [Kai Bosworth](#), “'This Land is our Land': Private Property, Settler Colonialism, and the Affective Territories of Populism in Pipeline Opposition Movements,” Weinstein Hall, Brown-Alley Room

Thursday, February 20, 7:00-8:00 pm: [Fred Bahnson](#), “Contemplative Ecology: Cultivating a Spirituality for the Climate Crisis,” Tyler Haynes Commons, Alice Haynes Room

Friday, April 3, 3:00-5:00 pm: Earth Day – Art Build, create an original sculpture with recyclable and recovered materials in celebration of Earth Day (counts as two events)

Tuesday, April 14, 10:00-11:00 am: [Sustainable Ground](#), “Gambles Mill Eco-Corridor Grand Opening,” Gambles Mill Eco-Corridor.

Friday, April 17, 2:00-3:00 pm: [Student Research Symposium](#), Select Presentations related to the past and future of urban environments.

* I understand that you are all incredibly busy people. I plan to be at all events, but you are only required to attend a minimum of five. Choose those that most interest you; I tried to select a

diverse array of topics and presentation styles. As a second consideration, choose those that best fit your schedule. If you cannot make it to at least five events, let me know by the end of January at the latest and we can find alternatives for you.

Preview of May assignments:

As we will learn, the City of Richmond is working on a new Master Plan that will determine the direction of development for the next 20 years. A Thriving Environment is one of the five-stated goals of the plan, which is defined as follows: “Richmond is a sustainable and resilient city with healthy air, clean water, and a flourishing ecosystem. The City is positively adapting to the effects of a changing climate, with a built environment that enhances and protects natural assets, including the James River. All residents have equitable access to nature and a healthy community.”

By spring break, you will be assigned to one of four groups. Each group will be tasked with choosing a theme related to the statement above. The group will then be responsible for leading our discussion about that theme, first in Richmond and then in our second and third weeks in South Africa. The final assignment for the course is to create a StoryMap, that describes an environmental challenge and proposes solutions for two of the cities that we visit. More information on this assignment will follow. Most of you have probably not created StoryMaps in the past. To help you prepare for this assignment, each group will be required to meet with our GIS Operations Manager Beth Zizzamia <bzizzami@richmond.edu> during the spring semester. Once groups have been assigned and you have selected your topic of interest, you will be responsible for setting up this meeting on your own.

Some additional policies:

Communication. Because we are not meeting together regularly, it is critical that you read all course materials carefully. This includes all email correspondences from me. I maintain a 24-hr email policy; if you send me an email requiring a response, you should expect to get that response within 24 hrs (or 48 hrs on the weekend). Except in unusual circumstances, I expect a similar attentiveness from the students in classes with me. Oftentimes, meeting in person can be a more efficient way of communicating than email (it also helps us to get to know each other). If you would like to meet in person, but my office hour times do not work for you, we can always find alternative times to get together.

Deadlines. Your Blackboard posts are due one week after the events. These deadlines are firm, but extensions can sometimes be granted if requested ahead of time. If you cannot make it to at least five of the events, let me know as soon as possible (end of January at the latest). You are responsible for setting up a group meeting on your own with Beth Zizzamia to learn about how to create StoryMaps. She will track who has met with her. There will also be one additional meeting later in the semester to prepare for our May travel.

Academic honesty. The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. I take violations of the honor code, including plagiarism, very seriously. If you have any questions about what is permissible and what is not, please do not hesitate to come talk with me.

If you experience difficulties in this course, do not hesitate to consult with me. There are also other resources that can support you in your efforts to meet course requirements.

Academic Skills Center (<http://asc.richmond.edu>, 289-8626 or 289-8956): Assists students in assessing their academic strengths and weaknesses; honing their academic skills through teaching effective test preparation, critical reading and thinking, information conceptualization, concentration, and related techniques; working on specific subject areas (e.g., calculus, chemistry, accounting, etc.); and encouraging campus and community involvement. Hours at the Center are: **Sunday through Wednesday 3:00-9:00 p.m. and Thursday 3:00-7:00 p.m. On-call tutors are also available.**

Boatwright Library Research Librarians (<http://library.richmond.edu/help/ask/> or 289-8876): Research librarians assist students with identifying and locating resources for class assignments, research papers and other course projects. Librarians also provide research support for students and can respond to questions about evaluating and citing sources. Students can email, text or IM or schedule a personal research appointment to meet with a librarian in his/her office on the first floor Research and Collaborative Study area.

Career Services (<http://careerservices.richmond.edu/> or 289-8547): Can assist you in exploring your interests and abilities, choosing a major or course of study, connecting with internships and jobs, and investigating graduate and professional school options. We encourage you to schedule an appointment with a career advisor early in your time at UR.

Counseling and Psychological Services (<http://wellness.richmond.edu/offices/caps/> or 289-8119): Assists currently enrolled, full-time, degree-seeking students in improving their mental health and well-being, and in handling challenges that may impede their growth and development. Services include brief consultations, short-term counseling and psychotherapy, skills-building classes, crisis intervention, psychiatric consultation, and related services.

Disability Services (<https://disability.richmond.edu/students/index.html> or 289.8032) The Office of Disability Services works to ensure that qualified students with a disability (whether incoming or current) are provided with reasonable accommodations that enable that student to participate fully in activities, programs, services and benefits provided to all students. Please let your professors know as soon as possible if you have an accommodation that requires academic coordination and planning.

Speech Center (<http://speech.richmond.edu> or 289-6409): Assists with preparation and practice in the pursuit of excellence in public expression. Recording, playback, coaching and critique sessions offered by teams of student consultants trained to assist in developing ideas, arranging key points for more effective organization, improving style and delivery, and handling multimedia aids for individual and group presentations.

Writing Center (<http://writing.richmond.edu> or 289-8263): Assists writers at all levels of experience, across all majors. Students can schedule appointments with trained writing consultants who offer friendly critiques of written work.