

URP 500: PLANNING THEORY AND HISTORY

Fall 2025

Instructor: Professor Kimberley Kinder (kkinder@umich.edu)

This course provides a comprehensive introduction to the theories and history that form the basis of urban planning. Focusing on essential concepts, it aims to deepen students' understanding of past urban planning approaches and the motivations behind them. This foundational knowledge sets the stage for students to think creatively about addressing emerging challenges. Throughout the course, we explore examples and case studies from diverse social perspectives, as well as from urban areas around the world, adding a practical dimension to theoretical discussions. By incorporating real-world examples into class conversations, we not only bring theory to life but also empower students to critically assess established planning theories in the context of actual urban planning challenges. The content covers both historical foundations and classical theoretical paradigms, delving into the crucial roles of planning practitioners, the practical application of planning theory, and the effectiveness of planning paradigms in addressing issues such as environmental sustainability, economic globalization, and social inequality.

Learning Goals:

By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- Analyze the evolution of urban planning theories and their historical context, tracing key paradigms from early city planning concepts to contemporary urban design principles, to develop a comprehensive understanding of the field's theoretical underpinnings.
- Evaluate the impact of socio-political, economic, and environmental factors on urban planning practices throughout history, discerning how various ideologies, policies, and technological advancements have shaped urban landscapes and communities globally.
- Synthesize critical perspectives on urban planning theories through interdisciplinary lenses, integrating insights from architecture, geography, sociology, economics, and environmental studies to foster a nuanced understanding of the complexities and challenges inherent in contemporary urban development processes.

Course Requirements:

Students are expected to review all required readings before each class session and to actively participate in in-class discussions. Grades are determined by a combination of in-class activities, writing assignments, and online quizzes. For writing assignments, students will receive assistance from a dedicated writing instructor.