

Urban Infrastructure: Vancouver, July 2016

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Classroom: TBD
Time: Monday-Friday, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm
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Office hours, meetings, and e-mail: I expect to be in or near my office most afternoons. If you want to make sure I am there when you come, please e-mail or speak to me ahead of time. I am also a faculty member in residence, living in South Village 301, and so your visiting me in the evening is also reasonable. It's fine to come by any time you see my door open either in the Academic Building or at home. Weekends are more variable, but I don't object to seeing you then.

I do the best I can to be ready and on time for appointments, so scheduling a time with me is an excellent way to make sure you get my attention. However, you, too, must be on time and ready for appointments we have. If you are late, don't be surprised if I cancel our meeting and suggest a time that's a little ways into the future.

I also respond to all my e-mails, and I will make every effort to respond to e-mails from students I am teaching within 24 hours on days when I am at my computer. Please make questions sent by e-mail as specific as you can manage so that I can be as helpful as possible.

A Bit about this Course

This class will focus on why and how cities are built the way they are, and we'll focus almost exclusively on Vancouver. Our first week will cover urban planning history and theory as well as how urban planning has been done in Vancouver. Our second will focus on civil engineering because, after all, there's substantial thought that goes into actually building the infrastructure that urban planners choose. Students will have a substantial influence on the topics discussed during two days of the third week, which will end with a discussion of the extent to which we can learn about a society's values through its infrastructure. The course will end with a design challenge.

The success of this course is dependent on student engagement. Its major assignments are fairly open-ended, and thus the student who wishes merely to finish them should be able to do so while the student who finds them truly fascinating should be able to spend countless hours going into substantial detail. This is done with the intent of allowing students many opportunities to go to much greater depth than is required. In this way, this course should be rather tunable to the specific interests of each student. Yes, all students will have a strong commonality to their experience, but they will also have some choice regarding where they can devote substantial amounts of energy.

Scheduling Oddities

Field trips and guest speakers will be an important part of this course. Therefore, on several days of the block, class will occur at times other than 9 am to 12 pm. This schedule will be disseminated in advance of the start of the course.

Course Topics, Assignments, and Calendar

The following course plan gives an idea of the weekly topics that we will study during this block. A detailed schedule will be provided in an updated syllabus near the start of the course. We will do our best to stick to this schedule, but it may be modified if the group (i.e., the instructor and the class) reaches a consensus to do so. Deadlines for assignments will be available on the course website. The URL for this website will be provided at the beginning of the course.

week	dates	topics
1	4-8 July	history of urban planning and architecture history of Vancouver and architecture in Vancouver contemporary planning challenges
2	11-15 July	bridges and transportation in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia
3	18-22 July	proposal writing Squamish affordable housing
4	25-27 July	water supply and wastewater treatment student-directed field trip (topic TBD) values of Vancouver final design project

Reading

Fairly extensive reading will be assigned through this course. Students may wish to buy this book:

- Levy, J. *Contemporary Urban Planning, 10th Edition*. Prentice Hall, 2005. ISBN-10: 0131930680; ISBN-13: 978-0131930681.

Course Requirements and Grading

This course will ask you to complete nine homework assignments (which are subject to change), which are listed below along with the contribution of each grade to the final grade for the course:

1.	map test	5%
2.	urban planning short essays	15%
3.	field trip recap 1	5%
4.	proposal	15%
5.	field trip recap 2	5%
6A	bridge designs	15%
6B	transit designs	15%
7.	Vancouver values	15%
8.	field trip recap 3	5%
9.	final design project	10%
10.	professionalism	10%

Please note that, in all assignments, your presentation matters. You will be graded on both the content of your answers as well as the writing and the presentation of those answers.

I value your intellectual approach to this course. I am looking for a healthy amount of two traits: respect and courage. This is my fancy version of a participation grade. Students must respect the material that we are studying because we'll be moving at a fast pace and the content will be advanced. Students with too little respect for the rigor of this course will make the mistake of being flippant or nonchalant, and they will find that they are subscribing to a good bit of late-night stress, a low grade, or both. Students with too much respect for the difficulty of the material, however, will not be sufficiently ambitious and will reduce their learning through an insufficient willingness to take on problems. While these students have too much respect, they lack courage. They must be willing to take on challenging work, even if they sometimes feel overwhelmed, confused, or stuck. If you encounter a problem that you have not seen before, don't panic -- just think through it one step at a time. Your attitude and your way of thinking about difficult problems will be an important part of your grade for this course.

Your classroom and field trip behavior is highly important as well and is also fair game for this portion of your grade. Show respect for our learning environment at all times. Show courage also -- come to class prepared, volunteer your thoughts during discussions, lectures, and activities, and ask me and your fellow students for details and edification outside of class. This is inherently subjective, but I don't think it will be too hard for you to figure out what I'm after. The basic idea is that I want you to work really hard and do everything you can to get the most out of this course. If you're confused, just ask. Beware that we are not in high school anymore -- I will not usually tell you when I have made a note to alter your courage-respect grade. Just because I don't always comment when you selflessly help others to learn (a good thing!) or look at Facebook during class (a bad thing!) doesn't mean I don't notice! Finally, realize that the most important days of the course are the ones immediately after you turn in assignments. On these days, I'm eager to hear what you have created; do not make the mistake of being in a mental or emotional state that is not conducive to fruitful discussion.

Late Assignments

Sometimes assignments must be turned in late, due either to personal conflicts with classwork or to confusion with the material. I understand that this is necessary on occasion, but my sincere hope is that every student will make every effort to turn assignments in on time. If you think you will need to turn in an assignment late, please contact me as soon as you can so we can work together.

Late assignments create a situation with both philosophical and practical implications. In a philosophical sense, the goal of the course is to maximize learning. We'll be discussing each assignment immediately after it is due, and thus students who have not completed an assignment on time will affect their learning because they will probably receive their answers in class. Maybe this just avoids the learning that would have occurred had the student completed the assignment outside of class, or maybe it adds to learning by giving a helping hand. In this second case, though, a practical problem occurs – the student who turns in an assignment late has an

unfair advantage over others. There must be some response to this problem, and thus I have a rather complicated late policy.

If you turn in an assignment late, your grade will be reduced such that your *maximum* score will be one point less than the fourth-highest score of those who turned in their assignment on time *or* 10 percentage points lower than the maximum of those students, whichever is lower. Any assignment that is not turned in by 5:00 pm on Wednesday, 2 March will receive a grade of 0%, since that time represents the end of the block. I will grant no extensions after this time. There is no tolerance for late versions of the final design project, which is due at the end of the block.

Academic Integrity*

Academic integrity is a delicate issue to discuss, since it is one that is both obvious and subtle. A priori, the issue is straightforward: do not cheat. It should be clear why, since cheating is fundamentally an act of dishonesty. In reality, however, many of us have been done the disservice (myself included) of being raised in a system of education where the purpose of our classes and coursework has been to move through the system. In such a system, the act of learning is subordinate to meeting the pre-set markers of achievement established by the system, be they the silly linear model of letter grades, pieces of paper promising certain levels of employability, or the much more subtle snaring of the human drive to garner praise and avoid criticism from others in the system. Trained to focus on these signs of “success,” many of us end up regarding “academic performance” as the same as “successful system management.” Viewed in this way, cheating is just one of many strategies that one can adopt to successfully navigate the system. Yes, there is a penalty (sometimes severe, like expulsion and a permanent black mark) if one is caught, but to the extent that one can avoid detection, cheating is simply a tactic for working the system and earning the labels of success promised therein.

I contend, however, that the view of education merely as a system leads to some very serious breakdowns. People who are accustomed to viewing their life as moving from one system to the next (school to college to job to house to retirement to death) often never find satisfaction. There is always the “next step” in the system that occupies their attention and distracts them from asking the simple question, “Am I interested in what I am doing now, and if not, what am I interested in?” Truth be told, if you are interested in what you are doing for its own sake, then cheating would not even occur as something to do. It is like, if you enjoy something you are eating, why would you try to hide it in your napkin to show others that you have finished eating it already? People cheat when they are not interested in the thing they are doing for its own sake, but instead because they are trying to achieve a status inside of the system. They want other people to regard them in a certain way, such as a professor thinking a student is an “A” student, or as a community viewing a person as a “college graduate.”

Do not misinterpret me, systems are needed whenever we try to coordinate our actions together. Without systems we would not have the kinds of opportunities we have today, like the chance to be at this university (which itself is a system). A system is not bad, it is neutral. The bad habit people get into is treating systems like they are more important than one’s own interests. The thing that is different about Quest is that here, we attempt to make the act of learning for you more important than anything else in the system. That is why you come up with your own questions rather than being told what questions are important for you to get a degree. It is not

perfect, but this subtle difference is the difference between true satisfaction – the enjoyment of doing something for its own sake – and the angst and disquiet that accompany one’s thoughtless passage from one system to the next (a.k.a. “selling out”).

When students choose to cheat, one chooses to acknowledge their role in the system as more important than their own interests and development. They choose to enter into a world of deceit, where their preoccupation with their reputation supersedes their desire to improve themselves as a thinker and a human being. Moreover, whether “caught” or not, students who cheat significantly injure their self-esteem; after all, you admit you couldn’t really do it, whatever it was, on your own. Therefore, when I say “Do not cheat,” it is not because I want you to follow a rule in the system; it is because I do not want you to bind yourself to the markers of a system that will rob you of the real value and point of being in a classroom.

Here is the deal: just don’t cheat. If you do, I will see that you have made the choice to regard passing through the system as more important than my class and your own development and learning, and will respond appropriately. That is, I will treat you as a part of the system, using the rules of the system. In my class, the rules about cheating are severe: any act of blatant academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, will result in a grade of zero for an assignment. A second infraction brings about failure from the course and immediate reporting to the Chief Academic Officer. Be aware that plagiarism can consist of a failure to cite sources properly, *even when you are not using direct quotations*.

As I see it, there are three types of plagiarism. First, a writer can paraphrase the work of another closely without providing a citation, essentially taking another’s ideas as his/her own. Second, a writer can quote directly without using quotation marks and use only a citation as though the writing were paraphrased, not quoted directly. When another’s wording is used, there must be quotation marks. Third, a writer can offer no citation of another’s thinking or writing and pass it off entirely as his/her own. The problem here is obvious, and this third case is blatant academic dishonesty. The first two do not necessarily represent a malicious desire to cheat, but they still represent extreme sloppiness that is unacceptable in even informal writing. Thus, while the consequences of blatant academic dishonesty are described above, I also reserve the right to reduce a student’s score on an assignment by 50% for plagiarism of the first and second types described in this paragraph.

You are encouraged to work in groups, but you should strive to bring your own thinking to your group work. Do not arrive to a group study session with nothing to contribute, hoping to get ideas for free and then write them up in your own words. There may be times that you work with someone else and perhaps have the same calculations as someone else – that is fine. What must not be done is copying of the writing and explanation of another’s work. The rule is that you cannot put your name on something someone else originally wrote. A good rule of thumb is this: talk to people about the assignment, but don’t look at the material that they plan to turn in. If you’re discussing concepts, you’ll still have to express them (quantitatively or qualitatively) in your own way, and thus you are not cheating. If you look at the work someone else will turn in, it can be very tempting to do a calculation the way that person did it and essentially copy not only written work but also original thought.

On the other hand, you may use the work of another...if you reference it appropriately. You should know the formatting of references by now (if not, please ask); the basic idea is that enough information must be available so that I can look up the information myself. Abbreviated references should appear in the text of your writing and full citations should appear at the end of your document. If your work consists entirely of references to others with no thought of your own, expect neither an accusation of plagiarism nor a high grade; use references to support your points, not make them.

This course presents a particular temptation in that there are resources online that you are forbidden to use in a couple assignments. Unless you are told that you may *not* use online resources, you may (with appropriate citations); assignments in which your resources are meant to be restricted delineate this clearly. Violation of this policy for these assignments will be considered to be cheating and will be met with the same consequences as described above: a 0% grade for an assignment in which blatant academic dishonesty has occurred and a 50% penalty for borderline cases that involve some version of extreme sloppiness.

For more details, please talk to me or see the Quest honour constitution.

* Except for the passages that concern group work and referencing, the content of this section is taken with permission from the syllabus for Calculus II, taught by Ryan Derby-Talbot in block 3, fall 2009.

Conversion of Numerical Grades to Letters

The above policies will yield a numerical percentage grade for each student, yet I must submit a letter grade to the registrar. I reserve the right to be flexible in this regard as a way of helping adapt to each individual group of students and to the modifications I make each time I teach this course.

To link a numerical grade to a letter grade is to engage in a philosophical exercise that connects quantitative performance on a series of assignments to a qualitative feeling about a student's aptitude in a course. Thus, I will explain to you what letter grades mean to me.

D or F students had serious issues with their grasp of the material and execution of the assignments.

I believe that a grade of C indicates that a student has functioned passably in a course. That student can explain most of the big concepts of the course to a non-specialist. A C- student had serious gaps in his/her functionality, while a C+ student functioned well all the time.

Students with B grades meet the criteria for C students and also leave the course confident in the basic principles of urban planning and civil engineering that we discuss. They wouldn't have trouble grasping other new topics in these fields, and they can carry on an informative and functional conversation with other Quest students about what happened in this course. B+ students and B- students are better or worse versions of the B student. A flavor of a B grade is a good grade in this course.

Students with A grades meet the criteria for B students and exceed those criteria by showing such a command of the material and the modes of thinking of this class that they appear ready to make a substantial contribution when collaborating with specialists in this field.

When I have the final percentage grade for all students in the course, I order them from highest to lowest. Then, I ask myself whether the students at the top of the list are A students by the above definitions. If they are, I find the number that would be required to bring the lowest of these students to a numerical grade of 90%, and then I add this value to the numerical grade of *every* student in the class. Then, I assign letter grades the same way as was done for me in high school: 94.0-100% = A; 90.0-93.9% = A-; 87.0-89.9% = B+; 83.0-86.9% = B; 80.0-82.9% = B-; 77.0-79.9% = C+; 73.0-76.9% = C; 70.0-72.9% = C-; 60.0-69.9% = D; 0-59.9% = F. Finally, I check the students who have grades below A to make sure their results are consistent with my philosophy above. If not, I might increase *everyone's* numerical score by another percentage point or two.

This system is designed to be insurance against my making the course too challenging. Thus, I will never decide that the initial numerical calculation leads to too many A students and subtract from everyone's score. I will only leave it unchanged or add to it to bring students up in the letter scale.