Urban Greening Lab: New York

This reading and field intensive course explores the theory and practice of urban “greening” by examining a selected urban green space in New York City. Drawing on analytical tools from the social and biophysical sciences, we will consider how New York’s historical and contemporary context shape the meaning, implementation, and social experience of its environmental spaces. We will ask, “What does it mean to green New York? What does it mean to green a city?”

Our analytical approach integrates ecosystem ecology concepts, urban design principles, and social scientific sensibilities.

Course Objectives
1. Define key theoretical concepts in urban ecology.
2. Identify and analyze key local and global processes that influence the social-ecological health of our field site in New York City.
3. Undertake field learning in social and biophysical aspects of urban ecology.

Assignments
1. Field Exercises: 5 required of seven opportunities (50%)
2. Focused Field Work (20%)
3. Midterm exam (20%)
4. Bauhaus field exchange project: field collection & final meeting (10%)

Course Commitments
- Mutual respect: careful listening and active discussion with everyone in the class. We are in this together.
- Careful and thorough engagement with course materials is the only way to get the most out of the class.
- Clear communication regarding unavoidable absences or incomplete work: If any circumstance hinders your participation in this course, please speak with me in advance. This course relies on experiential learning, so if you will not be able to attend every session, it may not be the right fit for you this semester.
- Unexcused absences will adversely affect your grade. This is in fairness to your colleagues.
- Give credit where credit is due: plagiarism is a serious offense. We check all work to be sure it is original and your own.
- No food is permitted in class unless you are sharing with everyone.
- Please be patient with e-mail. I try to respond to class e-mail within 24 hours, but this cannot always be guaranteed. Your best bet: speak to me directly just before, or just after, a class meeting.

Major Due Dates
- Midterm: October 14
- Focused Field Projects November 4, 11, 18
- December 9: Bauhaus Learning Exchange

Please note that to assure fairness in grading, late assignments are never accepted.
**Class Format:**
Class meets for a long session on Friday afternoons. This is a **field seminar**, which means that we will combine field work with lecture time, group discussions, and student facilitation. **Our field sessions on Governors Island are an essential part of the course; please plan your schedule accordingly, in advance.** The only way to reach GI is via ferry (see schedule [here](#)). If you miss the ferry, you will miss a large portion of the class, so you must be on time. You will receive a staff ID badge for your trip on the ferry. We will be meeting on site most weeks, so please plan your time accordingly. The course will be as rich as we make it: the more we contribute through thorough preparation and careful engagement with the field site and the materials, the more we will all learn. Please note that attendance and participation are mandatory for all sessions, and will require you to travel to and from our field site. There are no exceptions to this rule without prior written approval by the instructor or an approved medical absence. All other absences will significantly affect your final grade. This policy is intended to ensure fairness to all students.

**Readings**
All readings are available through Brightspace and Bobst Library. You are required to read assigned texts before class, by the day they are listed on the syllabus. Our online class site will be the most updated resource for weekly readings, assignments, and other materials. In many cases, you will be asked to read source material directly from Bobst, e-books and online journals.

**Field Exercises**
Many of our sessions on Governors Island focus on a specific dimension of ecological and landscape change. To make the most of those sessions, you will prepare a short field exercise following the class. The guidelines for each exercise are made available the week before a given class meeting, and you will have one week to complete and submit them. The sessions which include Field Exercises are indicated on the syllabus with an asterisk (*). There are seven field exercise opportunities; you are required to complete five of these. Please note that you must attend a class session in order to complete the associated field exercise.

**Focused Field Work**
In the latter half of the course, several sessions are devoted to focused field work. During these sessions we will undertake focused follow-up research related to topics presented earlier in the course. These sessions will give us an opportunity to learn more about active urban ecology research on Governors Island, and to contribute to it. You will compose a 3-5 page Field Report to conclude this work.
**Exams**
There will be a midterm examination with a format that we will discuss in the weeks leading to the exam. Questions for the midterm will draw from all syllabus and lecture material up to the date of the exam.

**Learning through Exchange**
Urban ecology is interdisciplinary, and environmental transformation is cities is a global process. As we undertake field learning on Governors Island, we will be part of an active learning exchange with students from Bauhaus University in Weimar, Germany. You will learn more about this exchange as the course unfolds. We will connect with Bauhaus students via a set of field projects and a group learning session (with a virtual connection to Bauhaus) toward the end of the semester.

**Creating community**
In this class, you will spend a significant amount of time outside investigating the world around you. During this course, let’s be open and honest about inclusion and diversity in ecology, and in our learning communities. Let’s work together to be good listeners, respecting others for all that they have to teach us from their perspectives, knowledge, and experience. True communication is an intentional practice, and it’s not easy. Let’s be forgiving with one another when we make mistakes, and accountable to one another as members in a shared learning process.

Speaking of learning and community, this site from Cornell contains helpful resources, including recent publications about facilitating an inclusive environment for individuals undertaking fieldwork, and a link to a recording of a really engaging and important webinar. I encourage you to check them out if you have a chance.
**Honor Code**
All written work in this course must be original and composed exclusively by you, the author. You must acknowledge in writing any assistance you receive from the literature, other students, textbooks, internet, or any other source. Plagiarism is a serious offense and will be immediately referred to the Dean’s office. **All students must adhere to the academic integrity policies of NYU.**

**Accommodation**
Academic accommodations are available to any student with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or who is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should please register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980 [http://www.nyu.edu/csd](http://www.nyu.edu/csd).

**Safety**
Remember to adhere to the most recent guidelines for protection against Covid 19 (NYU’s vaccination policy, social distancing, indoor masking). Please contact me directly if this is of concern.

**Required Books and Materials**
A paper field notebook for use on all field trips. We will usually take field notes in the traditional fashion in order to avoid distracting our guest guides and speakers. I recommend that you purchase one Rite-in-the Rain or similar waterproof notebook (you can decide if you want the spiral bound or the looseleaf type). As many of our activities will be outside, I recommend that you acquire field (rubber-soled) boots, poncho/raingear, old pants, hats, bug spray, sunblock, gloves, an old backpack, etc. Please note that we will be traveling to field sites (which may be remote or wet or during inclement weather), so I advise you to seek out a secure location where you can store valuables (computers, ipads, etc.) while we are in the field (or do not bring them with you to class).

I am grateful to Professor Kara Schlichting, Queens College, for suggesting many of the readings that appear in the early sessions of this syllabus. Where guest experts lecture, I am grateful to each for selecting the readings for that session.
Lecture and Reading Schedule

**September 2: Introduction to Governors Island: What Makes this Island Unique?**

Required reading in advance of our session:


- Klinenberg, E. *The Seas are Rising*

Highly suggested (and fun!) but not required listening to prepare for the course: *The Bowery Boys podcasts*:

#266 Land of the Lenape
#83 Henry Hudson and the European Discovery of Mannahatta
#272 Life in New Amsterdam
#273 Peter Stuyvesant and the Fall of New Amsterdam
#266 New York City During the Revolutionary War
#185 Adventures in Governors Island (1807 Castle Williams Constructed)
Sept 9: Governors Island: Restoration, Repair, Surprise...and the Future*

Meet at Governors Island  
*Field exercise  
*Weimar Learning Exchange Activity: An Island and its River


Schlicting, K. New York’s Post-industrial waterfront.

Sept 16: The Past in the Present*

Historian Judy Mann  
Meet at Governors Island  
*Field exercise

1996. Governors Island Historic District Report. Read pp. 5-30 and skim the building sites throughout the document.

The Center for Climate Solutions Request for Proposals


This recent article on Governors Island + this one too

For interest (but not required): Reagan, Gorbachev, and Bush at Governors Island (on
Brightspace) and the following books, which are in Bobst but only as hard copy books:


**Sept 23: Making a Resilient Landscape: The Hills***

Gardens from the Horticulture Department of Governors Island
*Meet at Governors Island*

Read:
This chapter in May Joseph’s *Fluid New York*

this article "Governors Island Park and Public Space New York’s Most Unconventional and Resilient Hills" on the park design

this article from *Places* "The New Public Landscapes of Governors Island"


**Sept 30: The Life Beneath Our Feet: Past, Present, and Future NYC Soils***

Dr. Rich Shaw, NRCS State Soil Scientist and Expert on NYC Soils
*Meet at Governors Island*
*Field Exercise*

Read:
Shaw, R. “Soil Science in New York City.”

Riddle, et. al. Soils in Urban and Built Environments.

NYC Soil Types 2022


**October 7: The Island’s Hudson Home: Sailing the Hudson River***
Meet at South Street Seaport Museum  
*Field Exercise  

This week you should prepare for the midterm, which will take place next week during the first part of class. No new readings, but there is a field exercise.

**October 14: Midterm**

**October 21: Restoring the Harbor: The Billion Oyster Project***

Shinara Sunderlal, Environmental Educator, Billion Oyster Project  
*Meet at Governors Island  
*Field Exercise

Readings TBA

**October 28: Sound Ecologies***

Dr. Tae Hong Park, Music Technologist, Composer, FFIR, Sound Researcher  
*Meet at Governors Island  
*Field Exercise

Readings TBA

**November 4: Focused Field Projects**

**November 11: Focused Field Projects**

**November 18: Focused Field Projects**

**December 2: Urban Greening Lab Synthesis**

Meet in our NYU Classroom

**December 9: Bauhaus Learning Exchange Session**

Meet in our NYU Classroom