

B.A. in Liberal Studies: Sample Urban Community and Environment (UCE) Courses

ENG 326 Urban Adventures: Re-Writing Los Angeles

3 units

In this class students immerse themselves in the art of creative non-fiction as a means to rigorously explore and investigate the city of Los Angeles. Through in-class and at-home writing exercises, text- experiments, and urban investigations, students generate writing about Los Angeles, imaginatively mapping both their own neighborhoods and communities, as well as communities not their own. The emphasis is on creating alternative cartographies and new visions of LA for the 21st century, and in the process coming up with a vibrant re-thinking of the very notion of community, city, and the urban self.

ENV 309/PHI 309 Urban Environmental Crisis and Ethics

3 units

This course explores a variety of moral, political, and legal concerns regarding the relationship between human beings and the natural environment, including forms of economic development, social structures, and ideological traditions. Dimensions of the human approach to the natural environment include land-use patterns, utilization of resources, impact of various practices on the biosphere, relations to non-human species, and the role of population growth in testing the carrying capacity of the Earth. The focus on modernity addresses the realm of the contemporary urban crisis. The impact of recent natural catastrophes (tsunamis, hurricanes, floods, fires, etc.) is explored as they interact with social, economic, political, and ecological concerns. The course concludes with an extensive discussion of strategic issues – economic, cultural, and political – regarding a possible shift toward green sensibilities, practices, and institutions that many critics view as essential to staving off ecological catastrophe.

ENV 390B Urban Wilderness Conservation

1 unit

It is easy to define what is urban. It is not so easy to define wilderness. The concept of urban wilderness further complicates the process. A day spent in a complex urban wilderness ecosystem provides experience, insight, and understanding of the complex arguments for and against conservation of urban wilderness. The class meets in one of the state parks in the Santa Monica Mountains to look at the interactions of the wild and the urban. Students review and discuss the range of perspectives as to what constitutes wilderness, what is nature, and what is not. Students examine the natural processes at work in living biotic communities while looking at the political forces that advocate for the preservation, development and restoration of the landscapes in which these communities are situated.

HIS 301/SOC 301 Introduction to Urban Communities

3 Units

This course traces the history of modern cities and the modern urban experience through a rich variety of materials. Cities included in the course fall broadly into three categories: the ancient cities of Jericho and Ur; the industrial cities of the nineteenth century—Manchester and Chicago; and the current world cities of New York, London, and Tokyo. Los Angeles is featured primarily in the later half of the course as an example of a global city. To help us understand the development of cities the course readings are organized around Edward Soja's Postmetropolis. Professor Soja will also be a featured speaker in the course. We will be equally interested in how Los Angeles has been seen and imagined in modern culture, particularly through film. Finally, since a major theme in the course involves learning to see cities, we will also take a field walk through downtown Los Angeles to try out what we are learning. The themes of the course focus primarily on the physical situation of the cities: living conditions, urban planning, architecture, and sanitation, although it will also consider such issues as the political and economic basis of urban life. It will also investigate the overall importance of cities and their relationship with the surrounding countryside.

HIS 332/POL 332 The Immigration Debate in Historical Perspective

3 Units

The United States had an essentially open border at the turn of the twentieth century, so why has increased border control become one of the top concerns of many Americans at the start of the twenty-first? When, how, and why did the “illegal immigrant” become a category of personhood, and what are the implications? What has been the role of corporations and the government in creating particular immigrant flows, from and to certain places? To what extent do anxieties about immigration reflect concerns with race, class, and culture? The current, often volatile and certainly emotional debates about immigration raise questions about not only the reform of immigration policy, but also the meanings of American citizenship and the futures of the nation. This course will analyze the contemporary immigration controversies through a close examination of their historical roots. Course topics will include the history of immigration policy in the United States; analysis of the relationships between the cultural, political, and economic dimensions of immigration, past and present; engagement with contemporary community groups that take different perspectives on immigration, including the Minuteman Project, Save Our State, and Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights Los Angeles, among others; analysis of the current proposals for immigration reform by the House of Representatives, U.S. Senate, and individual political representatives; and critical comparisons with immigration policies used by other countries.

HUM 390AN Urban Zapatismo in Los Angeles

1 unit

This workshop focuses on the transnational networks of Zapatismo, particularly the local work that some Los Angeles-based collectives are doing, “committed to the belief that all people and all communities have the right to self-governance and self-determination, and that they possess within their own communities all the knowledge and power to make this a reality” (from the Eastside Café mission statement). The first part of the workshop will be at Antioch and will be devoted to a discussion on the theoretical premises of this autonomous movement (prior reading materials required). The latter part of the day will focus on the observation of the work of these communities on-site.

SCI 322 Physics of Urban Systems

3 units

This course is designed to develop students’ conceptual understanding of the principles of physical laws that regulate and influence the functioning of urban systems. The major topics explored include energy transformation and flow, work and energy, forces, how motion is measured and changed, heat, and systems. Utilizing an investigative approach, the course evokes and develops the personal experience of students in the class as participant-observers in an urban system. This basis of understanding allows students to critically analyze issues that confront urban systems on a daily basis, and to become advocates for productive solutions to those issues.

SOC 312/URB 312 Los Angeles: Problems, Politics, and Policy

3 units

Los Angeles is in the midst of a major economic and social transformation. This is reflected in deepening economic inequalities, racial polarization, and social unrest. This course focuses on the political, economic, and social forces that shape the city: urban social problems, including poverty, housing, transportation, crime and violence, pollution, racism, and neighborhood change. Problems of urban sprawl, loss of open space, water and energy resources as they play out in the Los Angeles scene are also investigated. The course examines the city’s political forces including the role of business, citizens’ groups, community organizations, the media, the Mayor’s Office, and other sectors in addressing these problems and shaping the city’s future.

URB 311/SCI 311 Urban Ecology

3 units

This course examines the Los Angeles bioregion as an urban ecosystem. Urban ecosystem science is the primary lens through which students conduct an examination of natural energy flows and human-altered energy flows and their effects on the diverse ecosystem types found in the Greater Los Angeles area. Social geography, mapping, and metrics will serve as additional tools and lenses students will deploy in the calculation of an “ecological footprint” of Los Angeles and other major urban centers throughout the world.