

School of Architecture | Georgia Tech | Fall 2026

ARCH 6303 / CP 6834 CRN 33395: Urban Design Policy (3 Credit Hours)

Graduate Offering (MARCH, MRCP, MSUD, MRED)

Credit Hours: 3 credit hours
Classroom: 309 Arch East
Days and hours of class: Tuesday 6:30 –9:15 PM

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Course Description

What shapes our city? Who has the right to shape our city? How are we – as city dwellers and designers – meant to shape its future?

This course will challenge students to think critically about why our cities and buildings look the way they do and how we can play an active role in shaping a better future. Our discussions will explore the impact of zoning codes and other development regulations on mobility, affordability, equity and sustainability. The course will culminate in a deeper understanding of our existing rules and future roles as city-shapers in ensuring that our built places and urban environments promote design, beauty, dignity, equity and human experience.

Course Objectives

Perhaps nothing affects the design of our built environments more than codes and regulations. This course will aim to provide an overview of the many forces that shape the design of our built environments, with a heavy focus on zoning and land use regulations. The course will introduce zoning as a political and theoretical construct shaping our built environment that is available for criticism. We aim to frame zoning as a transformational tool through which communities and designers express shared values that extend well past the bounds of an individual building site. Students will develop an understanding of the context in which zoning was created and how it has been used to create the built environment we know today and examine how it can or should be changed to create the places we want to live.

The aim of this workshop is first to immerse students in understanding why zoning exists, how it has been used to create specific urban forms, and what it currently regulates. Students will learn how to effectively navigate and leverage zoning as it exists today, and explore ideas to create better outcomes. Students will also learn about other regulations and forces that shape our built environment, with a goal of understanding that cities are complex ecosystems influenced by a variety of actors. Students will participate in the ULI Urban Plan program to gain experience in these concepts. The ultimate intent of this workshop is to challenge students to think critically about why our cities and buildings look the way they do, and how they can play an active role in shaping a better future.

This type of thinking by future Architects, Urban Designers, and Planners is of paramount importance as the City of Atlanta embarks on the first update to our Zoning Ordinance in nearly 40 years, and as many cities around the country are looking to do the same. Politicians and citizens alike are recognizing the impact of zoning codes on mobility, affordability, equity and sustainability. It is critical that informed designers be a part of the conversation to ensure that design, beauty, and human experience are not forgotten.

Learning Objectives

1. History and Theory:
 - a. Understanding of the origins and fundamental structure of zoning ordinances in the United States
 - b. Understanding the political, social and physical implications of regulating the built environment through zoning in the United States
2. Zoning Literacy:
 - a. Understanding and application of common zoning terminology and performance criteria
 - b. Ability to navigate the Atlanta zoning ordinance and use Municode
 - c. Understanding the political and regulatory framework through which zoning ordinances are created, modified and administered
3. Development Regulations:
 - a. Understand the complex system of land regulation
 - b. Overview of other development regulations, including subdivision ordinances, stormwater ordinances, tree ordinances, building codes, historic preservation ordinances, etc.
 - c. Overview of non-regulatory forces that influence development, including politics and finance
4. Advocacy:
 - a. Ability to recognize and evaluate the influence and efficacy of regulations through analysis of successful and unsuccessful design outcomes in the built environment
 - b. Ability to challenge current ordinances and think critically about the role of design in current and future policy
 - c. Ability to engage and become involved with local advisory bodies such as neighborhood organizations, neighborhood planning units and municipal boards

Readings & Resources (Assignments to be Given per Class)

- Standard State Zoning Enabling Act:
 - https://planning-org-uploaded-media.s3.amazonaws.com/legacy_resources/growingsmart/pdf/SZEnablingAct1926.pdf
- Standard City Planning Enabling Act:
 - https://planning-org-uploaded-media.s3.amazonaws.com/legacy_resources/growingsmart/pdf/CPEnabling%20Act1928.pdf
- Equity in Zoning Policy Guide:
 - <https://www.planning.org/publications/document/9264386/>
- Development regulations in US versus Europe:
 - <https://youtu.be/WNe9C866I2s?si=aDvYVbWNO5ldui14>
- Rural development patterns:
 - <https://youtu.be/q7T9u53Im9E?si=IRnDzJwwKVP8aOLU>
- Suburban development patterns:
 - <https://youtu.be/jNuRpYaPLuA?si=bD0ku56guSdzWFBu>
- Segregated by Design:
 - <https://www.segregatedbydesign.com/>

Course Schedule

- Week 1 (8/25) // Lecture: Introduction to Zoning
- Week 2 (9/1) // Lecture: Zoning in Atlanta; Using Zoning Today
- Week 3 (9/8) // Walking Tour: Midtown as Case Study
- Week 4 (9/15) // Design Exercise: Zoning Stress Test
- Week 5 (9/22) // Lecture: Other Development Regulations & Non-Regulatory Influences
- Week 6 (9/29) // Lecture: Zoning & Finance
- Week 7 (10/6) // Fall Break (No Class)
- Week 8 (10/13) // Guest Lecture Panel
- Week 9 (10/20) // Lecture: Zoning Trends
- Week 10 (10/27) // Field Trip
- Week 11 (11/3) // Urban Plan Week 1
- Week 12 (11/10) // Urban Plan Week 2
- Week 13 (11/17) // Urban Plan Week 3 (Facilitation)
- Week 14 (11/24) // Urban Plan Week 4 (Final Review Week for Arch Students)
- Week 15 (12/1) // Seminar: Urban Plan Recap + Where We Go From Here
- Week 16 (12/8) // Final Presentations
- Week 17 (12/15) // Exam Week (No Class)

In-Class Activities and Assignments

Walking Tour: we will take a walking tour of Midtown, rain or shine. Dress appropriately.

Design Exercise: An in-class assignment will consist of students developing a concept site plan using City of Atlanta Zoning maps and Ordinance for a given site and program. The following materials are recommended for this exercise, but not required: Architectural Scale, Tape Measure, Trace Paper, Sketching Supplies (Recommended, none of these are required).

Urban Plan Group Projects: students will be divided into teams, assigned roles within the development process, and will create a mock development proposal. The project will consist of 4 in-class sessions and one final group presentation.

Grading

The grade scale for all individual components of the course as well as for completion of the final course grade will be as follows:

Points	Grade	Description
90 – 100	A	Excellent
80 – 89	B	Good
70 – 79	C	Satisfactory
60 – 69	D	Poor
0 – 59	F	Failure

Active Participation/Attendance

Active Participation at all class meetings is mandatory and crucial to successful completion of the class. Absences will be excused only for medical or family emergencies or for Institute-approved events and religious holidays documented in writing. (According to a new policy, you must notify your instructor in writing during the first two weeks of the semester about any anticipated absences for religious holidays.) Late arrivals will be counted as absences. **Attendance and active participation are required for each class. Absences and lack of participation in group discussions will result in grade reduction. Missing 3 classes will result in an automatic letter grade reduction.**

NOTE: Absences due to special and/or unforeseen circumstances must be discussed with the Instructor as early as practically possible.

Extensions, Late Assignments, & Re-Scheduled/Missed Exams

Missed classes or late assignments may be discussed on an as-needed basis. Opportunities for make-up assignments to be discussed on an individual basis.

Archiving

At the end of the semester, all students are required to submit physical examples of their work and/or digital examples no later than one week after the end of term, to their instructors or administration for the SoA Archive. By enrolling, each student grants a license to reproduce and display his or her work. This is a chance for students to have their work shown online and potentially featured in forthcoming publications and public exhibitions.

Professional Standards Addressed

NAAB Conditions for Accreditation

For Professional Degree Programs in Architecture (2014)

The accredited degree program must demonstrate that each graduate possesses the knowledge and skills defined by the criteria below. The knowledge and skills defined here represent those required to prepare graduates for the path to internship, examination, and licensure and to engage in related fields. The program must provide student work as evidence that its graduates have satisfied each criterion.

The criteria encompass two levels of accomplishment:

- *Understanding*—The capacity to classify, compare, summarize, explain, and/or interpret information.
- *Ability*—Proficiency in using specific information to accomplish a task, correctly selecting the appropriate information, and accurately applying it to the solution of a specific problem, while also distinguishing the effects of its implementation.

Student Performance Criteria (SPC): The NAAB establishes SPC to help accredited degree programs prepare students for the profession while encouraging education practices suited to the individual degree program. The SPC are organized into realms to more easily understand the relationships between each criterion.

For the purpose of accreditation, while this course will cover more criteria than the ones listed below, the following will be actively covered:

A.1 Professional Communication Skills: Ability to write and speak effectively and use representational media appropriate for both within the profession and with the general public.

A.3 Investigative Skills: Ability to gather, assess, record, and comparatively evaluate relevant information and performance in order to support conclusions related to a specific project or assignment.

A.7 History and Global Culture: Understanding of the parallel and divergent histories of architecture and the cultural norms of a variety of indigenous, vernacular, local, and regional settings in terms of their political, economic, social, ecological, and technological factors.

A.8 Cultural Diversity and Social Equity: Understanding of the diverse needs, values, behavioral norms, physical abilities, and social and spatial patterns that characterize different cultures and individuals and the responsibility of the architect to ensure equity of access to sites, buildings, and structures.

Academic Integrity and Conduct

Georgia Tech aims to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. Students are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards. All Georgia Tech students should familiarize themselves with and abide by the Georgia Tech Honor Code: <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/18/>. Any student suspected of cheating on a quiz or exam or caught plagiarizing will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity.

For expectations of student and instructor conduct more generally, consult section 19 of the catalog listed above, entitled "Code of Conduct," <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/19/>, and section 22, entitled "Student-Faculty Expectations," at <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/22/>.

All persons in the classroom are expected to behave with courtesy towards others and in a way that does not interfere

with the regular conduct of the class. Cell phones are to be turned off when students enter the classroom and should remain off for the duration of class; laptop computers are to be used only for taking notes; and students should not engage in private conversations while the instructor or other students are speaking. Anyone who does not adhere to these basic courtesies will be asked to leave.

Accommodations for Students With Disabilities

Any student with a disability, that may require accommodation, should contact Office of Disability Services at 404-894-2563 or visit <http://disabilityservices.gatech.edu> to make an appointment to discuss his or her special needs and obtain an accommodations letter. He or she should also schedule an appointment to speak with the course instructor.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The College of Design community of faculty, staff, and students aspires to create and nurture an environment that is supportive of all backgrounds where different views and ideas are respected and encouraged. In all our pursuits, we commit to justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion with regard to race, national origin, language, age, sexual orientation, gender, religion, and ability. Moreover, we will encourage intellectual inquiry and respectful exchange that cements our dedication to these principles.

Modified Operations Policies:

With developments and improvements to digital instruction over the past few years, the Institute has developed policies to leverage digital learning as much as reasonably possible. The policy sets forth requirements, procedures, and responsibilities related to the scheduling of digital instruction and/or make-up classes due to the modification of campus operations, closing of campus, or the necessary closing of instructional spaces for any reason (including but not limited to emergencies, such as inclement weather, power outages, or other infrastructure failures). Students should await communications from their instructors regarding the delivery of their classes during that period based upon the Digital Learning Days for Modified Campus Operations Policy. Students should follow guidance and/or directions provided by the Office of the Vice President for Student Engagement and Well-Being regarding student activities, events, programs, and services.

Emergencies

In case of emergency (e.g., fire, accident, or criminal act), please call the Georgia Tech Police at 404-894-2500. Please note that Perry Minyard, IT Support Administrator for the College of Architecture, is also a firefighter and an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) certified in performing CPR.

Ownership

Physical copies of student work submitted to the school to satisfy course requirements—including, but not limited to digital files, papers, drawings, and models—become the property of the school. It is assumed as no obligation to safeguard such materials and may, at its discretion, retain them, return them to the student, or discard them.

College of Design Facility Rules and Guidelines

Please consult the Georgia Tech Student Handbook regarding the use of facilities and all Institute policies. Aerosol sprays of any kind are strictly banned from the studio and surrounding areas. A new spray painting booth is now in operation in the College of Design shop, on the ground floor of the East Architecture Building.