

Cities of Tomorrow (CP 2040)

School of City and Regional Planning

Georgia Institute of Technology

Fall 2026

Instructor: Gregory Randolph

Course Description

This is an urban geography course examining cities and the urbanization process through social, economic, political, and environmental lenses. We will consider core foundational theories and concepts that explain urban spatial relationships, but we will interrogate them using the following question: **How are the dynamics shaping 21st-century cities and urbanization processes different from (and similar to) those of the past?** In other words, we will examine inherited theories used to interpret and explain cities and then consider them in light of contemporary urban dynamics and challenges. To foresee the “cities of tomorrow,” we must understand how fundamental urban processes are evolving as they interact with new forces. Much of our study of 21st-century cities will be rooted in the Global South, where most contemporary urbanization is unfolding.

The course focuses on building foundational knowledge on a range of topics related to urban geography. In most class meetings, we will investigate a set of core concepts related to cities and urbanization processes and then carry them into the 21st-century—asking how they are manifest today and how they might manifest tomorrow. Our focus is on three interrelated areas: *urban transitions*; *urban political economy*; and *urban environmental and energy systems*.

The course also involves studying specific community-based models for addressing urban challenges. We will use two different learning modules that are co-designed with practitioners working in contexts facing the challenges and contradictions of 21st-century urbanization. Each module introduces students to a specific urban context, exposes them to a community-based strategy that practitioners are using to address challenges of equity and sustainability, and then invites them to consider how the strategy might apply in other contexts.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Define and explain core concepts in urban economic geography and political economy
- Relate the urban transition to demographic and mobility transitions
- Identify ways in which cities shape and are shaped by environmental and energy systems
- Analyze the similarities and differences between urban geographic processes of the past and present
- Contemplate how future cities may be shaped by the interaction of urban spatial dynamics and new challenges emerging from technological, climatic, and demographic change
- Examine strategies that communities and practitioners are developing to respond to 21st-century urban challenges, and evaluate their utility in shaping an inclusive and sustainable urban future

Assignments and Evaluation

Module Exams (450 points): Three comprehensive exams will assess student learning for each of the modules in the foundational portion of the course. These exams will involve a combination of multiple choice, short answer and essay questions. They will evaluate students' understanding of key concepts introduced through the course of the lectures, assigned materials, and in-class exercises.

Reading Quizzes (150 points): Unannounced quizzes will be given at various points during the course, worth varying amounts of course credit. Questions will be based on assigned materials (readings, videos, podcasts, etc.) and may involve multiple choice or short-response questions. These quizzes are designed to gauge whether students are adequately preparing for the class; they will not evaluate students' ability to apply and extend the information beyond the assigned materials.

Research Presentation (250 points): Students will conduct original research on a specific topic related to the course material and share their findings in a formal professional presentation in class. The assignment will require students to consider context, outcomes, and broader applicability. The student's ability to respond to questions from the instructor and their peers will determine part of the assignment grade.

Participation (100 points): Participation will be assessed through contributions during class discussions and demonstrated preparation for each class session. The course involves many opportunities for students to ask and answer questions, brainstorm and reflect, and share ideas with one another and the instructor. The participation grade will reflect the degree to which a student has harnessed these opportunities. Students cannot achieve a strong participation grade through attendance alone.

Grading Scale

Grade	Minimum Points Required
A	900
B	800
C	700
D	600

Attendance and Participation

Students are expected to attend every class, barring unforeseen circumstances. If students miss an unannounced in-class quiz, they will not be able to make it up unless they can provide appropriate documentation (e.g. a doctor's note or evidence of an Institute-approved absence). Quiz make-ups will take the form of a short analytical writing assignment. These must be turned in within one week of the absence.

Participation grades will be assigned according to the following guidelines:

<i>Excellent</i> (95-100 points)	In every or nearly every class meeting, the student verbally participates by responding to questions, asking questions, and offering comments. These contributions demonstrate an excellent level of preparedness for class. They reflect full, enthusiastic, and insightful engagement with course concepts.
<i>Superb</i> (85-95 points)	In most class meetings, the student verbally participates by responding to questions, asking questions, and offering comments. These contributions generally demonstrate a high level of preparedness for class. They reflect deep engagement with course concepts.
<i>Satisfactory</i> (75-85 points)	The student occasionally participates verbally by responding to questions, asking questions, and offering comments. These contributions sometimes demonstrate preparedness for class and intellectual engagement with course concepts.
<i>Subpar</i> (60-75 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The student's verbal participation is rare, but when they do contribute, they demonstrate a high level of preparedness for class and enthusiastic engagement with course concepts, OR;• The student occasionally participates verbally by responding to questions, asking questions, and offering comments, yet these contributions rarely demonstrate a high level of preparedness for class or reflect deep engagement with course materials.
<i>Unsatisfactory</i> (< 60 points)	The student does not regularly attend or participate meaningfully in class.

Required Materials

All required materials are available online at no cost or will be made available on our Canvas site.

Some of the assigned materials for this course are designed for general audiences and will be easy to understand (e.g. YouTube videos, podcasts). Other materials are designed for an academic audience and use a more specialized vocabulary. These materials may require more time and attention to unpack and understand; and they may require students to look up unfamiliar terms. If you find these materials challenging, keep track of your questions and points of confusion as you read, so that we can discuss them in class.

Academic Integrity

For any in-class assignments, quizzes or exams, use of any external resources is prohibited. Violations will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement

At Georgia Tech, we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. The Student-Faculty Expectations articulate some basic expectations that you can have of me and that I have of you. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and cordial interactions will help build the environment we seek. Therefore, I encourage you to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech while in this class.

Accommodations

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, contact the Office of Disability Services at (404) 894-2563 or <http://disabilityservices.gatech.edu/>, as soon as possible, to make an appointment to discuss your special needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please also email me as soon as possible in order to set up a time to discuss your learning needs.