

URBAN STUDIES STUDIO

Spring 2008 Tuesday 1010 – 1210 (HW 1640)

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Office Hours by appointment

This course is structured by a collaborative research project in which theoretical concerns will be put to use and the classroom will be extended into the city. In particular, we will work to understand in detail the social, political, historical, and economic elements of development as it is taking place in one local example – the Hudson Yards on the Far West side of Manhattan. The course will feature several departures from the classroom, allowing us to take our Urban Studies knowledge out into the city, ask it questions, and seeing how it holds up. Site-based research will allow students to exercise knowledge in a creative and tangible way, make stronger links with the world outside of school, and think more generally about the powerful links between ideas and practice. There are real issues of power and ethics at stake in both the process of development, and the way we conceptualize and represent it.

The course will be heavily based on participation, and is structured by a series of small group assignments and a final project that can be done individually or in groups. Fieldwork will be done as a class, and will be supplemented by independent research and archival work as necessary.

At this point the syllabus is intentionally sparse in terms of structure, grading, learning objectives, and the product that the class will produce. I am happy to step in a lay these things out in a very clear and tight way if that is what you want, but I would much rather that you, the advanced students of this class, take over and determine these things for yourselves. Needless to say, you must to come to class, do the all the work on time, and uphold the high standards of academic integrity that are expected in all of your other courses.

COURSE OUTLINE

Readings indicated should be read by the date under which they are listed. Some of them are long, so do not save them until the last minute.

January 29: Course Introduction - Establishing the Project - Go to the “Fate of the West Side” at the Museum of New York City tonight if you can

February 5: Planning, Politics, and Position: Engaging with a subjective context

What are going to do and how are we supposed to think about doing it?

How to Study Urban Political Power

The Urban Detective on recognizing and analyzing the clues of city life

Donna Haraway - Situated Knowledge

Selection from Les Back's The Art of Listening
Difficult Questions for Qualitative Research

What are your essential questions about the Hudson Yards Project?

February 12 – No Class – Take this time to review the plans, look over the “Railyards Blog”, look especially hard at the community feedback. Come up with three or four specific questions that really intrigue you about the development of the Hudson Yards

February 19 – We will go over the plans and the commentaries, discuss your reactions, and solidify your key questions about the development of the Hudson Yards (post them on blackboard by the Sunday before class)

February 26 – Exercise #1 – Describing the Hudson Yards

Prior to class students will read a few short passages describing a setting – The class will then spend this session at the Hudson Yards site (PREPARE FOR WEATHER. Unless it is soaking rain, we will go). Students will make observations and take notes to produce their own “Thick Description” of the setting. Think very hard about what you are (not) seeing.

March 4 – Visit with Community Board 4: 330 West 42nd Street

For each site visit you are expected to come prepared with appropriate questions for the presenters and take detailed field notes of what you learn. Needless to say, all these stakeholders are doing us a great service by taking the time to talk to us, so we need to be professional and respectful. After each visit, you are expected to write up a brief summary of what you learned for your own records, and to help you contribute to class discussions

***March 11 - Visit With Housing Conservation Coordinators/Organizers from the Westside Neighborhood Alliance**

***March 18 – Discuss reactions to Site Visits + Share descriptions of Hudson Yards**

How do we explain differences and similarities in what we wrote? How did this structured analytical excursion stack up to your expectations of the site? What are we not seeing (both in terms of what we missed and what was not there)? How do we begin to explain what we do see?

***March 25 – Review and discuss potential models Fitzgerald and the Council of Brooklyn Neighborhoods reaction to the Atlantic Yards proposal, try to come to a consensus about what we are going to produce, how, and who we want to read it.**

***April 1 – Visit with Metro Transit Authority Director for Policy and Media Relations, William Wheeler**

***April 8 – Guest Lecture by my colleague Scott Larson – “Whose City Is It Anyway? The Rehabilitation of Robert Moses, Re-Thinking Jane Jacobs and Redevelopment in New York City During the Bloomberg Administration”**

During the second half of class we will design a very brief survey interview to administer the on the next session. Think about how to approach your conversation with the city, and get at the questions you might be interested in hearing about.

***April 15 – Site Revisit, Walking tour of Chelsea/Hell’s Kitchen, administer street surveys in teams.**

April 22 – No Class, Spring Break, Earth Day – Read “Processing Qualitative Data” and “Dancing and Wrestling with Scholarship”. Then go plant a tree.

April 29 – Discussion of Street Survey Results. In Class Workshop on Final Project: We need to agree on a mode of presentation – Second Part of class time given to research

May 6 – In Class Workshop/Research Time

May 13 – Mini Conference on the State of the Hudson Yards: Students Present and Discuss Final Projects (we can invite a select public if you want)

*days are tentatively scheduled as I am still waiting for hard confirmation of specific dates with a few folks