

**URBAN STUDIES 291**  
**SUBURBIA: PEOPLE, PROBLEMS, AND POLICIES**  
**SPRING, 2016**

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**Office Hours:** T/TH 2:30-4:00 PM & By appointment  
M/W/F By appointment

**Class Meeting Times:** M 6:00–9:15 PM

**Class Meeting Location:** Old Main, 105

**COURSE OVERVIEW**

This course examines a distinctive form of contemporary life - the suburbs. The United States has become a suburban nation. Today, over half of all Americans live in suburbs. In the 1920s, only 15 percent of the nation's population lived in such neighborhoods. Since 1950, more than 90 percent of growth in U.S. metropolitan areas has occurred in the suburbs. This mass migration to the suburbs is one of the most fundamental transformations in U.S. history.

Suburbanization has not only defined a distinct physical environment, but is also inextricably linked to the construction of American culture. Critics have blamed suburbia for everything from the abandonment of the cities, to the alienation of youth, to sprawl and resulting environmental devastation. Defenders have praised suburbs for the safety of their neighborhoods, the quality of their schools, the broad expansion of the middle-class, and the "American Dream" of owning a detached, single-family home.

Throughout the semester, we will analyze and debate evolving patterns of suburbia from a variety of perspectives: history, literature, film, journalism, art, sociology, architecture, politics, and material culture. Although our focus will be the suburbs, we will not lose sight of broader metropolitan and urban contexts. We will begin by addressing why and how suburbs first formed. We will then examine the growth of American suburbs after World War II. Specifically, we will review the role and impact of public policy decisions in suburban expansion. Socioeconomic issues of race, ethnicity, class, gender, poverty, wealth, and power will be highlighted. Students will be asked to think conceptually about the role suburbs have played in the American imagination, both as a utopian ideal and a problematic reality.

Students will learn how the suburbs have been shaped by the choices people make about where they live, work, and play while understanding that suburbia itself has shaped those choices. Using Chicago and surrounding suburbs as a laboratory, we will consider the current state of suburbs and make predictions about their future. Upon completion of this course, diligent and engaged students will be able to:

- *Appreciate why suburbs originally formed and why they remain hugely popular;*

- *Outline the historical development of suburbia in the United States and explain the role of government policy in this process;*
- *Analyze the many criticisms of suburban development - aesthetic, cultural, social, economic, political, ecological - as well as defenses and approaches to reforming suburbia; and*
- *Articulate an informed argument about what the future of suburbia may look like.*

This course will be run in a seminar style, composed of a mixture of presentations by me, presentations by students, visiting experts, and films. The most important aspect of each class meeting will be our class discussions. For each of us to get the most out of the class, every student will be expected and required to participate on a regular basis. I may call on anyone at any time to comment on the readings and course concepts. Quizzes covering the assigned material may occur at any point during the semester. It is important for you to be prepared to participate at all times.

### **GENERAL EDUCATION**

This course fulfills the Elmhurst College Integrated Curriculum **Social and Political Analysis Area of Knowledge (AoK)**. Courses in this category examine the social, political, economic and cultural institutions that shape the environments of individuals and groups. Students will study how power relationships within and among these institutions affect various subgroups in the population. Paradigms, theories and methodologies used in this analysis will be examined, utilized and evaluated.

Objectives:

- *Describe social, political, economic and cultural institutions and processes, the relationships between them, and their impact on individuals and groups;*
- *Describe how differences of class, race, ethnicity and gender are related to these institutions and their outcomes;*
- *Identify, use, and evaluate the paradigms, theories and methodologies which describe and explain social, political, economic, and cultural institutions and their outcomes;*
- *Identify means through which individuals can affect change in social, political, economic or cultural institutions.*

This course additionally fulfills the Elmhurst College Integrated Curriculum **Intercultural Domestic Engagement tag**. As such, students completing this course will be able to:

- *Demonstrate an understanding of culture in the United States and the relation between individual values and dominant norms;*
- *Analyze the way that dominant cultural norms affect social and political actions;*
- *Critically examine structures and organizations that contribute to the establishment of societal norms and relationships.*

**BLACKBOARD (Bb):** This course will utilize an Elmhurst College Blackboard (Bb) site. Supplemental course readings, assignments, and copies of PowerPoint slides presented in class will be posted on this site. Please check the course blackboard site several times each week for course announcements and updates. If you have questions regarding how to access the Blackboard (Bb) site, please see me.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

- Nicolaidis, Becky and Andrew Wiese eds. 2006. *The Suburb Reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Teaford, Jon C. 2008. *The American Suburb: The Basics*. New York: Routledge.

*Additional required readings, some of which are identified in this syllabus, will be posted on the course blackboard (Bb) site.*

**METHODS OF EVALUATION**

Essay #1	20%
Essay #2	25%
Essay #3	25%
Film Paper	20%
Written/Oral Assignments, Quizzes, Attendance, Participation	10%
Extra Credit	3%

**A standard grading system will be employed:**

Percentage	Grade	Percentage	Grade
94-100%	A	77-79%	C+
90-93%	A-	74-76%	C
87-89%	B+	70-73%	C-
84-86%	B	60-69%	D
80-83%	B-	0-59%	F

**WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:** All written assignments will be evaluated on content, form, application, and comprehension of the course material. All written assignments must be word-processed (typed), double spaced, with one-inch margins and in a 12-point font. **REFERENCES MUST BE PROPERLY CITED.** At all costs avoid the appearance of plagiarism. Place quotation marks around quoted material and provide citations for any idea, major concept, or data/information from a source. Intentional plagiarism on any assignment could result in failing the course and it may jeopardize your academic standing at the college. Should you have any questions about plagiarism and how to avoid it, please see me.

**ESSAYS:** Students will write three (3) short papers/essays responding to specific questions. These essays require you to synthesize the course readings and distill effective arguments about American suburbs. Students must demonstrate understanding and familiarity with assigned readings in each essay. Essays should be three (3) pages, but no more than five (5) pages, in length. Questions and detailed descriptions will be available on the course Blackboard (Bb) site at least one week prior to the essay due date.

**FILM PAPER:** Students will submit an essay (4-5 pages) on the topic of how suburbs are portrayed in film. Students will select a film from an approved list and discuss the themes of that film as they relate to our course material. More information and a detailed description of this assignment will be discussed in class and posted on Blackboard (Bb).

**PUBLIC MEETING OBSERVATION MEMO:** During the semester, students are required to attend a local suburban government council/board meeting (e.g., city council, park district, library district, school district, zoning board). After attending the meeting, each student will submit an informational memo (2 pages) describing the suburb, the council/board, and date/purpose of the meeting. More

information and a detailed description of this assignment will be discussed in class and posted on Blackboard (Bb).

**SHORT WRITTEN/ORAL ASSIGNMENTS:** Throughout the semester students may be required to complete short written and/or oral assignments addressing and reflecting on course topics and readings. For example, students are required to give a short (5 minute) oral presentation related to a suburban artifact. Specific details regarding these assignments will be discussed in class and posted on Blackboard.

**ATTENDANCE/PARTICIPATION:** Students are expected to attend each class session. In addition to attending class, students are required to have completed the assigned readings prior to class and to effectively contribute to class discussions. If you miss a class, you are responsible for the material covered and for any changes in assignments or procedures announced in class. As attendance and participation are calculated into your final grade, students are allowed one unexcused absence per semester without penalty. However, more than one absence will impact your attendance/participation grade.

**EXTRA CREDIT:** Throughout the semester, Elmhurst College will host several events with speakers and topics relevant to our course content. As these events typically occur outside of required course meeting times, extra credit will be given to students who attend these events. Students may earn a maximum of 100 extra credit points during the semester. Details regarding eligible events and the procedure for obtaining extra credit will be posted on Blackboard.

#### **COURSE POLICIES:**

Students in this course are expected to be knowledgeable of and comply with all policies outlined in the *Elmhurst College E-Book*:

[http://issuu.com/elmhurstcollege/docs/elmhurst\\_e-book\\_2013-2014?e=1328944/4525897](http://issuu.com/elmhurstcollege/docs/elmhurst_e-book_2013-2014?e=1328944/4525897)

#### **Code of Academic Integrity**

Elmhurst College is a community of scholars. Such a community places the highest value on academic honesty and integrity. Therefore, Elmhurst College's Code of Academic Integrity is designed to ensure:

1. A fair academic environment where students are evaluated on the scholarly merits of their work.
2. An academic environment where personal integrity is fostered.
3. An understanding of standard academic practices when formulating ideas, conducting research, and documenting sources.

It is the responsibility of each student to know and understand this academic integrity policy. There are general campus-wide definitions of academic honesty as well as department guidelines. Participants are responsible for educating themselves on this matter since sanctions for academic dishonesty may be severe. Thus, Elmhurst College students should act honestly in all academic work. Please refer to the *Elmhurst College E-Book* for additional information.

#### **Statement of Disability**

The College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this course, please contact the Disability Services Provider at 630-617-3753.

#### **Statement Regarding the Use of Plagiarism Detection Services**

Faculty members may at any time submit a student's work for review by a plagiarism detection service.

### **Non-Discrimination/Non-Harassment Policy**

The College believes that all employees and students should be able to work and learn in an educational environment free from discrimination and harassment. Harassment includes unwelcome conduct, whether verbal, physical, written or graphic, that is based on protected group status such as race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, disability, genetic information, veteran’s status, or other protected status. Please refer to the *Elmhurst College E-Book* for additional information.

### **Student Code of Conduct**

The College attempts to establish a climate which encourages the assumption of responsibility by students for their individual and collective actions with a minimum of rules and regulations. It shall be the responsibility of each student to comply with appropriate standards of conduct and decorum befitting a member of an educational community. Please refer to the *Elmhurst College E-Book* for additional information.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE, TOPICS, AND ASSIGNED READINGS**

*Students are expected to have completed the assigned readings PRIOR to the class for which they are assigned. Supplemental readings/assignments will be posted on the course blackboard (Bb) site throughout the semester.*

***This schedule is subject to change throughout the semester.***

### **WEEK I: 2/2**

#### **Course Introduction and Overview**

Teaford: Preface

Nicolaideis/Weis: Foreword and Introduction

**Select Suburban Artifact Time Periods**

### **WEEK II: 2/9**

#### **Romantic Suburbs**

Teaford: Ch 1 (p. 1-17)

Nicolaideis/Weis: Ch 1, 3

### **WEEK III: 2/16**

#### **The Progressives & City Beautiful Movement**

Nicolaideis/Weis: Ch 4 (*Concentric Zone Theory*, p.101-103); Ch 5 (*Introduction*, p.135-136; *Building Chicago* p.147-153); Ch. 6

*The City Beautiful Movement* (Bb)

*Planning Chicago* (Bb)

**Artifact Presentations: Romantic Suburbs**

### **WEEK IV: 2/23**

**Field Trip: Elmhurst History Museum**

### **WEEK V: 3/2**

#### **Automobile Suburbs**

*Streetcar Suburbs* (Bb)

Teaford: Ch.1 (p.17-30)

**Artifact Presentations: Automobile Suburbs**

### **WEEK VI: 3/9**

**Essay #1 Due**

### **WEEK VII: 3/16**

#### **Bedroom Suburbs: Federal Policy and Life in Postwar Suburbs**

Teaford: Ch 1 (p.30-41), 9, 10

*The Political History of a Postwar Suburban Society Revisited* (Bb)

*Housing: Up from the Potato Fields* (Bb)

Review Levittown websites prior to class (Links on Bb)

**Artifact Presentations: Bedroom Suburbs**

### **WEEK VIII: 3/23**

**Spring Recess – Class will not meet**

**WEEK IX: 3/30**

**Suburban Exclusion: Housing and Race**

Teaford: Ch 2, 5

Nicolaideis/Weis: Ch. 8, 11, 15 (*Introduction*, p.439-440; *Exclusionary Zoning*, p.442-446)

*Racial Preferences for Whites: The Houses that Racism Built* (Bb)

Film: *Race: The House We Live In*

**WEEK X: 4/6**

**Suburban Exclusion: Privatopia**

Nicolaideis/Weis: Ch 15 (p.447-467)

Film: *The X-Files, Arcadia*

**WEEK XI: 4/13**

**Essay #2 Due**

**WEEK XII: 4/20**

**Suburban Sprawl**

Teaford: Ch 3, 6

Nicolaideis/Weis: Ch. 16

*Home From Nowhere* (Bb)

*The Next Slum* (Bb)

*Patio Man and the Sprawl People* (Bb)

Review New Urbanism & Smart Growth Websites prior to class (Links on Bb)

**Artifact Presentations: Present Day Suburbs**

**Public Meeting Observation Memo Due**

**WEEK XIII: 4/27**

**Metropolitan and Regional Governance**

Teaford: Ch 4

Simpson: Part VI (Bb)

*Divided We Sprawl* (Bb)

**WEEK XIV: 5/4**

**The Future of Suburbia**

Teaford: Ch 7

*A Somber Look at Suburbia's Future* (Bb)

*Retro-Fitting Suburbia* (Bb)

*Is it Time to Move to the Suburbs?* (Bb)

*Suburbia's Not Dead Yet* (Bb)

*What is the Future of Suburbia?* (Bb)

**Film Paper Due**

**WEEK XV: 5/11**

**The Future of Suburbia (continued)**

Film: *The End of Suburbia*

**WEEK XVI: 5/18**

**Essay #3 Due**