

The University of Montana Department of Geography  
Geog 432- The Human Role in Environmental  
Change

“HUMANS, NATURE, AND THE CITY”

Spring Semester 2007

Tuesday and Thursday 11:10–12:30- Room 254 Social Science

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### **Humans, Nature and the City – What is this course about?**

Geographers have long been involved in studying the relationship between humans and the environment. In this course, rather than focus on a broad “worldview” of man’s activities and how they effect the earth’s natural processes, we will instead focus on one facet of this complex matrix—the relationship between urban areas and their “natural” surroundings. We will attempt to further expose the fragility of this relationship using a number of diverse case studies. First, we investigate how man alters the physical environment in an attempt to “harness” the power of nature. Here, we use the City of New Orleans as an example of how attempts to control natural processes can lead to both natural and social disasters. Next, we turn our attention to the automobile, a modern useful tool of contemporary human society, yet a prime mover in degrading nearly every aspect of our natural environment—soil, water, vegetation and air. Where do we find a happy medium? The impact of the auto in the formation of our cities, and in defining the norms of our society, has far reaching implications on how we view nature. From the building of freeways that provide access out of the city to newly created parks and recreational areas, to the urban smog that leads to numerous health problems—the automobile has drastically changed the human/nature relationship. In addition, our technological advancement in transportation during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century led to the creation of the suburb in America, where the interface between the city and the country is easily identifiable. The continued popularity of the suburb threatens to undermine our perception of the “pristine countryside,” while at the same time, evokes the possibility of the “American Dream”—the dream of home ownership and the opportunity to live closer to nature. We will investigate the geographic concept of the “new urbanism” and the ideas for more eco-friendly, sustainable, urban development. Lastly, we look to progressive urban areas, some in countries other than America which have successfully embraced the philosophy of conservation and sustainability. These cities provide us with examples of hope, places where there may someday exist a balance between nature and the city.

## Course Structure

This course is based on a lecture/discussion format. It is designed as a combination of lectures—including guest speakers, field trips, and films based on topics as brought forth through the required reading assignments. Hopefully, this format will provide ample opportunity for class discussion.

## Course Assignments and Grading

### I. Midterm and Final Examination (30 points total):

Each of the exams will consist primarily of short answer and essay questions. These exams will test your knowledge of the readings and the material covered in the lectures. The midterm and final are worth 15 points each and the final is NOT a comprehensive examination—meaning it is not a test over the material from the entire semester, only from the midterm on.

The rules for the examinations are as follows:

1. You will take each exam as scheduled. Make-up exams are not allowed—except as listed in the Make-up exam policy below.
2. Material for the exam will be from the required textbook readings and all lecture material. Attendance for each lecture is recommended in order that you take notes for each exam. I will not provide my lecture notes if you miss class. You must find notes from someone else in the course.
3. **Make-up Exam Policy:**
  - All Students must take the final exam as scheduled. Conflicts must be settled with the Dean. This is University Policy and there are no exceptions.
  - All Students must take each exam as scheduled. If an exam is missed, the student will receive a zero (0) on the exam.
  - These are the only exceptions that will warrant a make-up exam:
    - University events – such as sporting or music events.
    - Military obligations.
    - Religious holidays.
    - Serious family emergency.
    - Medical emergencies or serious illness.
    - Court-imposed legal obligations such as subpoenas or jury duty.
    - Serious weather conditions.
    - Special curricular requirements such as judging trips or field trips.
  - Any student requiring an exception under this policy must do so **prior** to the scheduled exam—unless in the case of an actual emergency (sudden hospitalization). A student must provide official documentation of the reason for absence **in advance**.
  - If a make-up exam is approved. It must be completed within one week of the original exam and scheduled with the Teaching Assistant.

## **II. Presentation (30 points)**

By the third week of class, I will assign groups (3 – 4 students) who will be required to deliver a lecture (presentation) on a topic of their choice. This topic must fit within the parameters of that particular subject being covered in the lectures. Each group will have an opportunity to present their topic and choose a lecture time when they choose to do so. More information as to the concept, content and methods used for this presentation will be presented within the first few weeks of class.

## **III. Writing Assignment (30 points total):**

There is a final paper due at the end of the semester. This paper is based on a topic of your choice related to the material that we cover throughout the course. It should be based on the topic you worked out for your presentation, although if a student wishes to write on a different topic, this may be acceptable but only after my approval. This paper is to be between 8 and 10 pages in length and is graded based on content, creativity, organization and grammar.

I will not accept late papers!

## **IV. Class Participation and Attendance (10 points total):**

Each student will be evaluated on their level of participation in class discussions as well as regular attendance to the lectures. It is expected that everyone complete the required reading assignments, attend all lectures and field trips, and participate in class discussions.

## **V. Course Grading**

There is a total of 100 points available for the course. The midterm and final exam = 30 points; the presentation = 30 points; the final paper = 30 points; and attendance and participation = 10 points. All assignments and examinations, as well as the final grade, are based on the following scale:

A = 90 – 100%

B = 80 – 89.99%

C = 70 – 79.99%

D = 60 – 69.99%

F = 59.99% and below

Please note that in order to be fair to all students, I will not round up a grade. For example, if you receive a 79.99%, you will receive a 'C' in the course.

## Required Texts:

Colten, Craig 2005. *An Unnatural Metropolis: Wrestling New Orleans from Nature*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

Kay, Jane Holtz 1998. *Asphalt Nation: How the Automobile Took Over America and How We Can Take It Back*. Berkeley: The University of California Press.

Duany, Andres, Plater-Zyberk, Elizabeth and Speck, Jeff 2001. *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*. New York: North Point Press.

McKibben, Bill 1997. *Hope, Human and Wild: True Stories of Living Lightly on the Earth*. Ruminator Books: Minneapolis (Milkweed: Minneapolis).

## COURSE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Week #	Dates	Topic
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### INTRODUCTION

We will first outline the goals of the course and how geographers, in general, have studied the impact of humans on the environment. Historically, geographers, with their focus on spatial aspects of the earth, were some the first to realize the impacts on nature from man's activities. Their work eventually led to the modern environmental movement.

1	22 - 26 Jan	<b>Introduction</b>  <b>Human/Environment Relationships in Geography</b>
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Reading(s) for next week: *An Unnatural Metropolis* (Chap 1 - 2)

Article: TBA

## **PART I – NATURE AND THE CITY**

First we look at how “western” societies, particularly at the onset of the industrial revolution, placed an emphasis on the taming of nature and excessive use of natural resources. Particularly in 20<sup>th</sup> century America, a large number of mega-structures were built for the purpose of providing irrigation, electricity and flood control for our major cities. We investigate how this came about, and look to the location, development and evolution of cities, especially those that grew up in precarious locations. Evidence of how humans modify nature in order to safeguard our cities was most recently exacerbated when Hurricane Katrina landed on New Orleans in 2005.

**2                    29 Jan – 2 Feb                    What is Nature?**

Reading(s) for next week:     *An Unnatural Metropolis* (Chap 3 - 4)

**3                    5 - 9 Feb                    The Invention of the City**

Reading(s) for next week:     *An Unnatural Metropolis* (Chap 4 - 6)

**4                    12 and 16 Feb                    When Nature and City Collide**

Reading(s) for next week:     *Asphalt Nation* (Intro – Chap 7)

## **PART II – THE AUTOMOBILE**

In this section of the course, we will discuss the impact that the automobile has had on American society. We will explore this form of transportation, the advantages and disadvantages of its immense growth, and the viable transportation alternatives that exist in our future. Importantly, we investigate how the automobile has changed the way we live our lives and the impact it has on nearly all aspects of our environment.

**5                    19 - 23 Feb                    The History of the Automobile**

Reading(s) for next week:     *Asphalt Nation* (Chap 8 - 13)

**6                    26 Feb – 2 Mar                    Autos and the Environment**

Reading(s) for next week:     *Asphalt Nation* (Chap 14 - 18)

7                    5 - 9 Mar                    **Alternatives in Transportation**

Reading(s) for next week:     *Suburban Nation* (Intro – Chap 4)

### **PART III – PLANNING THE CITY WITH NATURE IN MIND**

Obviously, one of the more recent 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomena occurring in this country is the development of the suburb. This development really began in earnest following World War II. We investigate how suburban life has modified the environment, with emphasis on its relationship with the automobile. We also look at alternative methods for housing development, where the impact on the environment can be minimized.

8                    12 - 16 Mar                    **The Beginnings of Urban Planning**

Reading(s) for next week:     *Suburban Nation* (Chap 5 - 7)

9                    19 - 23 Mar                    **Commuters**

Reading(s) for next week:     *Suburban Nation* (8 - 11)

### **MIDTERM EXAMINATION on THURSDAY MARCH 22<sup>ND</sup>**

10                   26 - 30 Mar                    **SPRING BREAK**

11                   2 and 6 April                   **The New Urbanism**

Reading(s) for next week:     *Hope, Human and Wild* (Intro – Chap 1)

## **PART IV – URBAN ALTERNATIVES and THE FUTURE CITY**

Here we look at various cities around the world whose general populous realizes the benefits of achieving a balance between economic viability and environmental preservation. Although a seemingly insurmountable task, these small examples may serve as a pilot project for all cities.

<b>12</b>	<b>9 - 13 April</b>	<b>The Third World City</b>
	Reading(s) for next week:	<i>Hope, Human and Wild</i> (Chap 2)
<b>13</b>	<b>16 - 20 April</b>	<b>AAG CONFERENCE NO CLASS!</b>
	Reading(s) for next week:	<i>Hope, Human and Wild</i> (Chap 3)
<b>14</b>	<b>23 - 27 April</b>	<b>Buying into Eco-friendly Cities</b>
	Reading(s) for next week:	<i>Hope, Human and Wild</i> (Chap 4)
<b>15</b>	<b>30 April – 4 May</b>	<b>Final Review and Comments</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>14 thru 18 May</b>	<b>FINAL EXAMINATION WEEK</b>

**FINAL EXAMINATION: Wednesday, May 9, 2007: 8 – 10 AM**

**FINAL PAPER DUE ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 9, PRIOR TO FINAL EXAMINATION!**