

Planning Healthy Cities Syllabus – Summer 2025
University of Wisconsin - Madison

Course Information

Credit Hours: 1

Course Dates: May 27 – June 6

Meeting Time: Tuesday – Friday, 1:00-4:00pm

Location: Agricultural Hall, Room 10

Instructor Information

Name: Dr. Todd Courtenay

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Office Hours: Appointment by email

Course Description:

This two-week summer field course will explore our urban environs and city planning from a public health perspective. How do the physical form and function of our cities impact health outcomes and shape health inequality in our community? How could our cities be redesigned as a form of preventive medicine to improve health and wellbeing? This course will dive into these questions by exploring a subset of topics, primarily focusing on street design, transportation systems, parks/nature, and housing. The course will work with the City of Madison Department of Transportation, Public Health Madison Dane County (PHMDC), and the Bayview Foundation to explore different urban design and policy initiatives to improve health outcomes. *This course meets the Field Experience requirement for students in the Global Health Certificate, and counts as a Depth course for students in the Global Health Major.*

Off-Campus Site Visits

This course has been designed primarily as a field course that prioritizes interactive learning outside the classroom and collaboration with community partners. While all class periods will start in 10 Agricultural Hall, most of the time we will be traveling off site by using the Madison Metro bus system. ***All students are expected to have a bus pass***, which are available free of charge through ASM:

<https://asm.wisc.edu/buspass/>

Course Learning Outcomes:

- Develop a critical perspective on urban transportation systems, land use, and housing; and be able to articulate how these elements of urban form and function impact human health and wellbeing.
- Gain knowledge of the fields of urban planning and public health, and how these two fields intersect.
- Become familiar with how public institutions and city agencies operate and the scope of their services.
- Develop analytical thinking, critical reading, and communication skills through class readings, activities, and discussion.
- Build communication skills and practice creative research and project design skills through a final project.

Course Website:

<https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/459759>

Required Readings & Materials

All required readings are posted on the Canvas page for the course. Readings required for each class period are listed below in the course schedule.

Credit Hours

This course is 1 credit, which equates to approximately 45 hours of academic work. The expected breakdown is:

- in-class participation (~24 hours)
- required readings (~9 hours)
- final project (~12 hours)

Assignments & Grading

- 20% Attendance (2.5 points per class)
- 40% Participation & Reading (5 points per class)
- 40% Final Project & Presentation

Grade Scale

- 93-100 A
- 88-92 AB
- 82-87 B
- 78-81 BC
- 70-77 C
- 60-69 D

Final Project:

Congratulations! After reviewing many proposals on the challenge of creating a healthy city, your local municipality and planning department have selected you as the winner of a grant to remake part of the city along your vision. You are excited, as they have indicated that a project of any scale and cost could be approved and implemented if feasible. The next step of the process is to present your proposal on a specific place or landscape in the community you think should be remade or repurposed to increase the health of local residents.

They have asked you to prepare a 5-10 minute Powerpoint presentation describing the project, using whatever data, literature, maps, photos, or video footage you think will best make your case about why the current form and function is unhealthy, and how your design intervention will improve health outcomes. They have made it clear that projects both small (e.g. redesigning a specific street) and large (e.g. block rezoning and redesign) are welcome. They have also indicated that while the project can include new services and policy change suggestions, the heart of the project should be to remake part of the physical landscape of the city. They have asked that your presentation be sure to address:

- How the current landscape design works against community health
- Why the new design will improve community health
- What challenges face realizing this project

Course Schedule

Tuesday, May 27: Course Introduction

Where: The class will take place in 10 Agricultural Hall.

What: In this first class we will begin exploring how human health is impacted by the structure of our cities. As we engage in discussion about urban planning and public health, we will also focus on getting to know one another. We will watch the film 'The Human Scale', which is derived from the work of architect Jan Gehl and explores of the broad question of whether the urban landscapes we have built help or harm our health, wellness, and ability to build community.

Required Readings:

- Jackson, R. (2011) 'Preface' in Dannenburg, A. et al *Making Healthy Places: Designing and Building for Health, Well-being, and Sustainability* pp. xv-xxii

Review/Scan:

- World Health Organization (2020) *Healthy Cities: Effective Approach to a Rapidly Changing World*

Additional Readings/Resources:

- [Public Health Madison Dane County \(2023\) Community Health Assessment Report](#)
- [Healthy Dane](#)
- [Wisconsin Department of Health Services](#)
- [County Health Rankings and Roadmaps](#)
- [Dane County Interactive Map](#)
- [City of Madison Map Applications](#)

Wednesday, May 28: Urban Planning and Public Health

Where: The class will begin in 10 Agricultural Hall, with a field activity taking place on campus.

What: We will explore how the fields of urban planning and public health have intersected in recent U.S. history, review how our modern urban landscape in America evolved, and continue our discussion of how the form on our cities and transportation systems impact our health. During this class we will engage in a public space mapping and observation activity.

Required Readings:

- Botchwey, N. et al (2022) 'Physical Activity and the Built Environment' in Botchwey, N. et al *Making Healthy Places* pp.34-51
- Frumkin, H. et al (2004) *Urban Sprawl and Public Health: Designing, Planning, and Building for Healthy Communities* [Selected chapters]

Additional Readings/Resources:

- Corburn, J. (2009) *Toward the Healthy City: People, Places, and the Politics of Urban Planning* [Chapter 2]

Thursday, May 29: Healthy Street Design

Where: The class will begin in 10 Agricultural Hall, and then travel via van to three neighborhoods in the Madison and Middleton area.

What: We will look and how street design and urban planning can shape health behaviors by either promoting or discouraging pedestrian/bicycle travel. Drawing on the work of architects from the 'New Urbanism' school, we will examine specific design interventions to make our cities more walkable, healthier, and better able to foster community.

Required Readings:

- Speck, J. (2018) *Walkable City Rules: 101 Steps to Making Better Places* [Selected excerpts]

Review:

- [Walk Score](#)

Additional Readings/Resources:

- [Speck, J. & TED \(2017\) '4 ways to make a city more walkable' YouTube](#)
- [Speck, J. & TED \(2013\) 'Jeff Speck: The walkable City' YouTube](#)
- [National Center for Safe Routes to School](#)
- [Congress for the New Urbanism](#)

Friday, May 30: Parks, Nature, and Mental Health

Where: The class will begin in 10 Agricultural Hall, with field activities in Muir Woods, Picnic Point, Allen Centennial Gardens, and the Lakeshore Path. Students are encouraged to bring a bicycle to class if able.

What: We will explore the importance of access to green space and nature, and discuss connections to wellness and mental health after participating in a reflective field activity.

Required Readings:

- Frumkin, H. (2022) "Contact with Nature" in Botchwey, N. et al *Making Healthy Places* pp.281-299
- Li, Q. (2016) "Forest Bathing in Japan" in Barton, J et al. *Green Exercise: Linking Nature, Health, and Well-being* pp.79-88

Review:

- [ParkScore](#)

Additional Readings/Resources:

- [Children in Nature Network](#)
- [Green Cities: Good Health](#)
- [Healthy Parks, Healthy People](#)

Tuesday, June 3: Pedestrian/Bicycle Safety and Injury Prevention

Where: The class will start in 10 Agricultural Hall, and travel via bus to the City of Madison Department of Transportation.

What: We will learn about Madison's Vision Zero Initiative, and participate in a street design lab with staff from the City of Madison Department of Transportation.

Required Readings:

- Schmitt, A. (2020) *Right of Way: Race, Class and the Silent Epidemic of Pedestrian Deaths in America*, pp. 1-31
- [BicycleDutch \(2017\) "Systematic Safety: The Principles Behind Vision Zero" YouTube](#)

Review:

- [City of Madison Department of Transportation Vision Zero Initiative](#)
- [Community Maps Traffic Safety Map](#)

Additional Readings/Resources:

- [Freakonomics Radio Podcast #548: Why Is the U.S. So Good at Killing Pedestrians? July 5, 2023](#)
- Sleet, D. et al (2011) "Injuries and the Built Environment" in Dannenburg, A. et al *Making Healthy Places* pp.77-90

Wednesday, June 4: Healthy, Accessible, and Affordable Housing (Part 1)

Where: The class will take place in room 10 Agricultural Hall, and travel via van to the University Park Development on Madison's west side.

What: We will explore the importance of housing as a social determinate of health, and discuss both housing quality and access to affordable housing as a key challenges in Madison and across the U.S.

Required Readings:

- Jacobs, D. and Reddy, A. (2022) 'Healthy Homes' in Botchwey, N. et al *Making Healthy Places* pp.202-221
- [Garfield, A. \(2023\) 'Why Madison rents are rising so fast and won't slow down' The Cap Times May 17, 2023](#)
- [University Park Development](#)

Review/Scan:

- [City of Madison Comprehensive Plan](#)

Additional Readings/Resources:

- [Dane County Housing Initiative \(2019\) Dane County Housing Needs Assessment](#)

Thursday, June 5: Healthy, Accessible, and Affordable Housing (Part 2)

Where: The class will begin in room 10 Agricultural Hall, and travel via bus to the Bayview neighborhood in Madison.

What: We will explore housing as a key social determinant of health with staff from Public Health Madison Dane County and the Bayview Foundation, and learn about Bayview's recent community-based design and redevelopment.

Required Readings:

- [Here and Now, PBS Wisconsin \(2022\) Redeveloping Madison's Bayview Community with Design Justice September 22, 2022](#)
- [Human Impact Partners & Community Advocates \(2020\) Home is Where Our Health Is: Policies to Improve the Health of Renters in Milwaukee and Beyond](#)
 - Read pages 3, 6-12, 40-45, 50-53, 68-70

Review:

- <https://bayviewfoundation.org/>

Additional Readings/Resources:

- <https://evictionlab.org>
- [Sims, R. et al \(2016\) Evicted in Dane County, Wisconsin](#)

Friday, June 7: Final Project Presentations & Course Conclusion

Where: The class will take place in room 10 Agricultural Hall.

What: The class will primarily consist of student presentations, as each student shares their final project with the group. Presentations will be approximately 5-10 minutes, with 5 minutes for Q&A.

Required Readings:

- No assigned readings for final class.

Course Policies:

Attendance:

Attendance is mandatory for all eight class sessions and there are no excused absences. Students missing class will lose attendance and participation points. Students must contact the instructor if something unforeseen occurs that prevents them from attending class.

Participation:

Participation is a vital component of this small course, and all students are expected to come to class prepared and ready to participate in activities and engage in discussion. This course will largely be a seminar format where we will discuss the assigned readings and learn collectively from each other. It is vital that all students read the assigned material before class and come prepared to critically discuss the readings. To facilitate this, sample discussion questions will be distributed in advance.

Late Policy:

Outside of attendance and participation, the only graded assignment for this class is a final presentation on the last day class. There is no ability to present your final project after the class ends on June 7.

Classroom Conduct:

Students are expected to be respectful and engaged citizens in the classroom. In general, this means thoughtful engagement with course materials, active listening, allowing space for peers to participate, and making efforts to use inclusive language. Use of cell phones is not permitted during class.

Accommodations:

The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform instructors of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the first week, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Instructors will work either directly with the student or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations.

Academic Integrity:

By virtue of enrollment, each student agrees to uphold the high academic standards of the University of Wisconsin-Madison; academic misconduct is behavior that negatively impacts the integrity of the institution. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these previously listed acts are examples of misconduct which may result in disciplinary action. Examples of disciplinary action include, but is not limited to, failure on the assignment/course, written reprimand, disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion. <https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/syllabus-statement/>

Diversity & Inclusion:

Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. We fulfill this public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background.

<https://diversity.wisc.edu/>

Course Evaluations:

Students will be provided with an opportunity to evaluate this course and your learning experience. Student participation is an integral component of this course, and your confidential feedback is important to me. I strongly encourage you to participate in the course evaluation.