

UEP 101: Environment & Society
Urban & Environmental Policy Department, Occidental College
Spring 2026

Professor Madeline Wander (she/her), mwander@oxy.edu, (323) 341-4695

Class Meeting Time: Tuesday and Thursday, 10:05-11:30am, Fowler 112

Student Hours: Tuesday, 2:00-4:00pm and Thursday, 1:30-2:30pm in Office #203 in the UEP Building (1882 Campus Rd). Sign up [here](#).

If these times do not work for you, email me to find a time.

Education in Action (EIA) Facilitator: Jasmine Smith-Hughes, smithhughes@oxy.edu

Canvas Site: <https://oxy.instructure.com/courses/7311>

Course Description

This course is an introduction to ideas and issues at the intersection of “urban” and “environment.” It is for those interested in thinking critically about these concepts and pathways toward creating more just and equitable environments and cities. In this course, we explore how issues of race, income, and inequality interact with the natural and built environments; how such interactions shape economic, social, political, and environmental outcomes; and the role of the state, policy, and movements for social change.

This course is designed for students who are considering a UEP major and provides foundational concepts that we explore in more depth through other UEP courses. This course is also intended for non-UEP majors who are interested in the topics and examining urban and environmental linkages to other disciplines. The course is an opportunity for students to interact with others interested in asking and answering complex questions about our cities and the natural world—as well as finding solutions to the critical urban and environmental challenges in our time of climate change.

Student Learning Objectives

The goals of this course are to examine the idea of “environment” and how it relates to the urban context. Through readings, films, class exercises, and discussions, students will:

1. Gain knowledge of urban and environmental issues as well as the role of government and social-movement organizing in addressing issues of inequality.
2. Develop analytic skills to make connections between the economic, political, social, and spatial aspects of cities and the environment, particularly related to income, health, housing, transportation, food, water, energy, and community and economic development.
3. Progress in active reading, critical thinking, analytical writing, and discussion skills through the synthesis of sources, including lectures, videos, and discussion in class and with peers.

Classroom Community

This course is intended to activate discussion and new understandings of the urban environment we live in. Toward this end, the course will grapple with discussions about inequality, power, race, and class. I expect our class times and discussions to be a productive space for open, honest, and thoughtful discussion that recognizes and respects differences and acknowledges the broad range of knowledge and experience that we each bring. We—the professor and the students—share the responsibility of creating the space and stimulating enthusiasm for learning.

I, the professor, am responsible for structuring and facilitating a space for learning and achieving course goals. In so doing, I strive to foster an inclusive classroom environment, consistent with College [policy on discrimination, harassment, and retaliation](#). On the first day of class, I borrow the movement practice of co-developing shared classroom agreements with students toward practicing mutual respect, which we will adjust throughout the semester if necessary. If you feel comfortable doing so, please feel free to communicate with me about any concerns, questions, or ideas.

You, the students, are responsible for attending and participating in class, completing assignments in a timely manner, being prepared to discuss readings and material in class, and contributing to a robust learning environment and community. With this goal, students are also responsible for engaging in respectful, open, and thoughtful discussion with each other and the professor.

Course Requirements & Assignments

This table summarizes course requirements and assignments. More detailed information and prompts for assignments will be provided on Canvas. Submit assignments through Canvas.

Requirement/Assignment	% of Grade	Due Date
Participation: Students are expected to complete all of the course readings for the date they are assigned and complete assignments on time. This is an intensive reading seminar and in-class discussions are key. Students' participation will be evaluated based on their contributions to discussions and class activities. Participation is not about speaking for the sake of speaking; it is about being present and engaged, which also includes active listening. Class attendance is also a critical factor in the participation grade. (For more, see the Attendance Policy below.)	15%	
Neighborhood Observation Essay: Students will write a 1,000-1,500-word analytical essay based on their observation walk in the community surrounding Occidental.	15%	Friday, February 20
Midterm Exam: The midterm is a timed, in-class assessment of students' understanding of the course material that we have covered so far. Students will take the exam by hand (i.e., on paper with a writing utensil), with the exception of specific accommodations.	15%	Thursday, March 5
Field Trip Essay: Students will write a 500-1,000-word analytical essay based on the class field trip, including images and connections to class themes.	10%	Friday, April 3
Event / Speaker Essay: Students will attend a public event or presentation broadly relevant to the course, on campus or off-campus. Then, students write a 500-1,000-word reflection essay on the event or presentation, integrating topic ideas and/or sources from class. Attending online events is permitted, but check with the professor first.	10%	Rolling; Last day to submit is Friday, April 10
Group Project: In groups, students will evaluate and generate proposals related to the design of an urban transportation project in the context of the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles. The project includes a site visit, class presentation, and a written proposal.	15%	Thursday, April 23
Final Exam: The final is a timed, in-class assessment of students' understanding of the course material. It is cumulative. Students will take the exam by hand (i.e., on paper with a writing utensil), with the exception of specific accommodations.	20%	Tuesday, May 5

Attendance Policy

Attending class is critical to understanding of the course material, as lectures and discussions draw on yet go beyond readings. I take attendance. However, if there is a medical issue or an emergency, please communicate with me; I recognize that life issues can arise unexpectedly. If you must miss class due to an official Oxy event, or due to [reasons of faith or conscience](#), please communicate this to me as early as possible.

Electronic Devices Policy

In Lecture, students will not be allowed to use laptops, tablets, or phones—with the exception of specific accommodations. There is well-established research that shows how note-taking on laptops and other electronic devices impedes learning. Such devices also distract us during class, making it difficult to develop and sustain a community of inquiry and mutual respect. Please come to class prepared to take notes by hand. This means bringing a notepad and a writing utensil to each class. Lecture slides will be available on Canvas to supplement note-taking.

Late Assignment Policy

Late assignments will be marked down one letter grade (e.g., from A to A-) for each 24-hour period that they are late. If you are unable to submit an assignment on time, please communicate with me.

Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) Policy for Assignments

A.I. tools like ChatGPT may not be used to complete any course requirement or assignment. The use of such tools hinders, rather than enhances, the student learning objectives of this course, which center around developing one's critical thinking and analytical and writing skills. I also encourage you to educate yourself about [the harm of AI on the environment](#), if you haven't already.

Grade Percentages

A	94-100	B-	80-82	D+	67-69
A-	90-93	C+	77-79	D	63-66
B+	87-89	C	73-76	F	0-62
B	83-86	C-	70-72		

Mid-Semester Progress Reports

Mid-semester progress reports are not intended to be used as determinative or predictive of the final grade in a course, but to provide an opportunity for faculty to communicate an approximate estimation of progress by the students in the course by the midpoint of the current semester. Spring 2026 mid-semester progress reports submission window is March 2-22.

Credit Hour Policy

UEP 101 is a 4-unit course. On average, you should expect to spend at least twelve (12) hours a week (including in-class time) on this course.

Core Program Requirements

UEP 101 fulfills the [U.S. Diversity \(CPUD\) requirement](#).

College Policies

See the [UEP101 Canvas site](#) for information on the following college policies: Shared Academic Integrity Commitment; Civil Rights & Title IX; Special Accommodations/Learning Differences; and Accommodations for Reasons of Faith and Conscience.

Course Schedule: Topics and Readings

NOTE: Readings are posted on Canvas under Modules.

Theories of the Environment, Nature, and Society

Tuesday, January 20: Introduction to the Course and Each Other

Thursday, January 22: Nature and Society

Reading: Price, Jenny. 2006a. "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in LA: Part I." *Believer Magazine*, April 1.

Price, Jenny. 2006b. "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in LA: Part II." *Believer Magazine*, May 1.

Cunningham, Hilary, and Stephen Bede Scharper. 2014. "Futures: Lifeform, Livelihood, and Lifeway." Pp. 486–97 in *A Companion to Urban Anthropology*, edited by D. M. Nonini. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Tuesday, January 27: Cultural Foundations of the Environment

Reading: Taylor, Dorceta E. 2016. "Key Concepts Informing Early Conservation Thought." Pp. 9–31 in *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement: Power, Privilege, and Environmental Protection*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Hopkins, Hop. 2020. "Racism Is Killing the Planet." *Sierra: The Magazine of the Sierra Club*, June 8.

Thursday, January 29: Power, Privilege, and the Environment

Reading: Boyce, James K. 2018. "How Economic Inequality Harms the Environment." *Scientific American*, November 1, 72–77.

Pulido, Laura. 2000. "Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90(1):12–40.

Taylor, Dorceta E. 2016. "Wealthy People and the City: An Ambivalent Relationship." Pp. 32–48 in *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement: Power, Privilege, and Environmental Protection*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Urbanization and the Right to the City

Tuesday, February 3: Urban Framing

- Reading: Jacobs, Jane. 1958. "Downtown Is for People." Pp. 140–68 in *The Exploding Metropolis*, edited by W. H. Whyte. University of California Press.
- Davis, Mike. 1992. "Fortress LA." Pp. 223–63 in *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*. New York: Random House.
- Harvey, David. 2008. "The Right to the City." *New Left Review* (53):23–40.

Thursday, February 5: Urban Growth and Gentrification

- Reading: Smith, Neil. 1986. "Gentrification, the Frontier, and the Restructuring of Urban Space." Pp. 15–34 in *Gentrification of the City*, edited by N. Smith and P. Williams. Winchester: Allen & Unwin Inc.
- Watch "Episode 1: Gentrification and Displacement"
(<https://www.pbsocal.org/shows/city-rising/episodes/city-rising-gentrification-and-displacement>) from: Baghdadi, Rita, and Jeremiah Hammerling, dirs. 2017. *City Rising*. KCET.
- Lin, Jan. 2019. "The Stages of Neighborhood Transition." Pp. 56–91 in *Taking Back the Boulevard: Art, Activism, and Gentrification in Los Angeles*. New York: NYU Press.

Tuesday, February 10: Reading the Urban and Environmental Landscape

- Reading: Rojas, James T. 1993. "The Enacted Environment of East Los Angeles." *Places: A Quarterly Journal of Environmental Design* 8(3):43–53.
- Hunter, Marcus Anthony, Mary Pattillo, Zandria F. Robinson, and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor. 2016. "Black Placemaking: Celebration, Play, and Poetry." *Theory, Culture & Society* 33(7–8):31–56.

Thursday, February 12: NEIGHBORHOOD WALK EXERCISE – Meet walking partner(s) in classroom to check in; see prompt for route options and instructions; meet back in classroom for check out (no later than 11:30am)

- Reading: Mathuria, Sunjay. 2019. "Place & Privilege: Telling Stories about Places That Aren't Yours." <https://progressivecity.net/place-privilege-telling-stories-about-places-that-arent-yours/>.

Pulido, Laura, Laura R. Barraclough, and Wendy Cheng. 2012. "An Introduction to A People's Guide to Los Angeles." Pp. 1–13 in *A People's Guide to Los Angeles*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Pulido, Laura, Laura R. Barraclough, and Wendy Cheng. 2012. "An Introduction to the Greater Eastside and San Gabriel Valley." Pp. 76–77 in *A People's Guide to Los Angeles*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Racial Capitalism and Environmental Justice

Tuesday, February 17: Racial Capitalism

Reading: Melamed, Jodi. 2015. "Racial Capitalism." *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1(1):76–85.

Freshour, Carrie. 2020. "Poultry and Prisons: Toward a General Strike for Abolition." *Monthly Review* 32–47.

Thursday, February 19: Environmental Racism & Racial Capitalism

Reading: Pulido, Laura. 2017. "Geographies of Race and Ethnicity II: Environmental Racism, Racial Capitalism and State-Sanctioned Violence." *Progress in Human Geography* 41(4):524–33.

Seamster, Louise, and Danielle Purifoy. 2021. "What Is Environmental Racism for? Place-Based Harm and Relational Development." *Environmental Sociology* 7(2):110–21.

Assignment Reminder: Neighborhood Observation Walk Essay DUE on Friday, February 20

Tuesday, February 24: Movements for Environmental Justice

Reading: Cole, Luke W., and Sheila R. Foster. 2001. "A History of the Environmental Justice Movement." Pp. 19–33 in *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement*. New York: NYU Press.

Pellow, David N. 2016. "Toward a Critical Environmental Justice Studies: Black Lives Matter as an Environmental Justice Challenge." *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 13(2):221–36.

Gilio-Whitaker, Dina. 2019. "Environmental Justice Theory and Its Limitations for Indigenous Peoples." Pp. 15–34 in *As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Thursday, February 26: A Case Study of Environmental Racism: Farmworker Health and Safety

- Reading: Méndez, Michael, Genevieve Flores-Haro, and Lucas Zucker. 2020. "The (in)Visible Victims of Disaster: Understanding the Vulnerability of Undocumented Latino/a and Indigenous Immigrants." *Geoforum* 116:50–62.
- Guthman, Julie, and Sandy Brown. 2016. "Whose Life Counts: Biopolitics and the 'Bright Line' of Chloropicrin Mitigation in California's Strawberry Industry." *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 41(3):461–82.

Tuesday, March 3: Another Case Study of Environmental Racism: Plastics & E-waste

- Reading: Watch *Plastic Wars*. 2020. PBS.
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/documentary/plastic-wars/>
- Liboiron, Max. 2018. "How Plastic Is a Function of Colonialism." *Teen Vogue*, December 21.
- Lebbie, Tamba S., Omosehin D. Moyebi, Kwadwo Ansong Asante, Julius Fobil, Marie Noel Brune-Drise, William A. Suk, Peter D. Sly, Julia Gorman, and David O. Carpenter. 2021. "E-Waste in Africa: A Serious Threat to the Health of Children." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18(16):8488.

Thursday, March 5: MIDTERM EXAM

Tuesday, March 10: NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

Thursday, March 12: NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

Critical Issues of Urban Dwelling, Mobility, and Access

Tuesday, March 17: Housing

- Reading: Lipsitz, George. 2011. "The White Spatial Imaginary." Pp. 25–50 in *How Racism Takes Place*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Malson, Hilary. 2023. "'Tearing down and Building up': A History, Theory and Practice of Abolitionist Housing Justice in the US." Pp. 211–27 in *Handbook on Planning and Power*, edited by M. Gunder, K. Grange, and T. Winkler. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Thursday, March 19: Transportation

Reading: Barajas, Jesus M. 2021. "The Roots of Racialized Travel Behavior." Pp. 1–31 in *Advances in Transport Policy and Planning*. Vol. 8, *Social Issues in Transport Planning*, edited by R. H. M. Pereira and G. Boisjoly. Cambridge: Academic Press.

The Untokening Collective. 2017. *Untokening 1.0—Principles of Mobility Justice*. <http://www.untokening.org/updates/2017/11/11/untokening-10-principles-of-mobility-justice>.

Tuesday, March 24: Conservation and Wilderness Corridors – Guest Lecture by Alexa Boesel, UCLA Geography Department, sponsored by the Remsen Bird Fund

Reading: Barua, Maan. 2021. "Infrastructure and Non-Human Life: A Wider Ontology." *Progress in Human Geography* 45(6):1467–89.

Zellmer, Amanda J., and Barbara S. Goto. 2022. "Urban Wildlife Corridors: Building Bridges for Wildlife and People." *Frontiers in Sustainable Cities* 4.

Thursday, March 26: Urban Food Systems – Guest Lecture by Professor Sharon Cech and Professor Rosa Romero, Urban and Environmental Policy Institute

Reading: Horst, Megan, Nathan McClintock, and Lesli Hoey. 2017. "The Intersection of Planning, Urban Agriculture, and Food Justice: A Review of the Literature." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 83(3):277–95.

Gripper, Ashley. 2020. "We Don't Farm Because It's Trendy; We Farm as Resistance, for Healing and Sovereignty." <https://www.ehn.org/black-farming-food-sovereignty>.

SATURDAY, MARCH 28: FIELD TRIP TO THE LOS ANGELES RIVER with Guest Speaker Sissy Trinh from the Southeast Asian Community Alliance, sponsored by the L.A. Encounters Program

Tuesday, March 31: NO CLASS

Case Studies of Extraction

Thursday, April 2: Electromobility and Lithium Mining – Guest Lecture by Theo Figurasin, Jobs to Move America, sponsored by the Remsen Bird Fund

Reading: Jerez, Bárbara, Ingrid Garcés, and Robinson Torres. 2021. "Lithium Extractivism and Water Injustices in the Salar de Atacama, Chile: The Colonial Shadow of Green Electromobility." *Political Geography* 87:102382.

U.S. Department of Labor. 2023. "From Artisanal Mines to Electric Cars." <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/reports/child-labor/list-of-goods/supply-chains/lithium-ion-batteries>.

Assignment Reminder: Field Trip Essay DUE on Friday, April 3

Tuesday, April 7: Nuclear and Oil

Reading: Shamasunder, Bhavna, and Jill E. Johnston. 2023. "The Imperative of Equitable Protection: Structural Racism and Oil Drilling in Los Angeles." *American Journal of Public Health* 113(11):1179–81.

Ishiyama, Noriko, and Kim Tallbear. 2022. "Nuclear Waste and Relational Accountability in Indian Country." Pp. 185–203 in *The Promise of Multispecies Justice*, edited by S. Chao, K. Bolender, and E. Kirksey. Durham: Duke University Press.

Thursday, April 9: Water Justice

Reading: Sultana, Farhana. 2018. "Water Justice: Why It Matters and How to Achieve It." *Water International* 43(4):483–93.

Kimmelman, Michael, and Adali Schell. 2025. "For the Future of Water Conservation, Look to ... Los Angeles?" *The New York Times*, June 27.

Assignment Reminder: Final Day to Submit Event / Speaker Essay on Friday, April 10

Group Project on Urban Design Justice

Tuesday, April 14: Introduction to Urban Design Justice

Reading: Piazzoni, Francesca, Jocelyn Poe, and Ettore Santi. 2024. "What Design for Urban Design Justice?" *Journal of Urbanism: International Research on Placemaking and Urban Sustainability* 17 (3): 379–400.

Thursday, April 16: VISIT GROUP PROJECT SITE; instructions forthcoming

Tuesday, April 21: NO CLASS – Founder's Day

Thursday, April 23: Group Project Presentations

Assignment Reminder: Group Project Written Proposal DUE Thursday, April 23

Urban & Environmental Policy in a Time of Climate Change

Tuesday, April 28: Urban Climate Justice

Reading: Steele, Wendy, Luis Mata, and Hartmut Fünfgeld. 2015. "Urban Climate Justice: Creating Sustainable Pathways for Humans and Other Species." *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 14:121–26.

Ranganathan, Malini, and Eve Bratman. 2021. "From Urban Resilience to Abolitionist Climate Justice in Washington, DC." *Antipode* 53(1):115–37.

Tuesday, May 5, 10:05-11:30am: Final Exam
