

Urban Studies Learning Compact

The core of Urban Studies is an interdisciplinary understanding of the city as both a built and social landscape, drawing on theory as well as empirical research from sociology, political science, anthropology, geography, environmental psychology, history and economics. In a liberal arts setting, students also draw insights from the humanistic disciplines (e.g., art history, literature), and can draw on the natural sciences for an understanding of the relationship of human settlements to natural systems. Common career paths for students graduating in Urban Studies include the following areas: urban and regional planning, urban policy and public administration, environmental and land use law, architecture and environmental design, non-profit management related to community development, and sustainable urban development.

The Urban Studies AOC requires students to take a total of 15 courses, plus an “Urban Lab” or internship, and a senior project. Although each student selects the topic of their senior project, support for their work will be in the collaborative context of a thesis workshop. Students will work with faculty to plan a coherent and focused program, with an ultimate emphasis on the development of both foundational knowledge and skills relevant to a career in a related field. The requirements start with **4 core courses**, including Introduction to Urban Studies, an urban-focused course in the social sciences, a course that will introduce them to the history and current practices in urban planning, and an urban history course.

The core courses will be followed with a set of courses focused on “Tools for Urban Analysis,” and a set of courses focused on developing a foundation in relevant disciplinary knowledge (depending on the student’s specific interests and emphasis, as worked out with their faculty adviser). Under “Tools for Urban Analysis,” students are required to take statistics, an introduction to GIS, a course related to techniques of visual communication, and a methods course in an area relevant to their particular focus. The methods course might be in the social sciences, or it might be in biology, chemistry, or data science. The goal is for students to develop skills in urban analysis that can either be applied immediately in seeking employment after graduation from New College, or provide a starting point for pursuing a further degree in either research or professional practice. Students are required to pick four courses from the list under “Disciplinary Foundations.” These courses may not be directly related to Urban Studies, but should provide foundational knowledge in support of the particular areas of student interest. For example, a student might pursue a focus on urban ecology and ecological assessment, developing a set of skills related to data collection and analysis of urban environments. Or they might add work in Public Policy or Sociology to research methodology and quantitative tools used in those disciplines.

Urban Studies Student Learning Outcomes

1. Students will apply interdisciplinary knowledge to understanding the history, processes, and issues related to the growth, development and sustainability of human settlements.
2. Students will gain a foundational knowledge of the theories, methods and empirical findings in relevant research literature.

3. Students will gain a foundational knowledge of the history and contemporary practices in urban planning and environmental design.
4. Students will build skills and practical experience in research and data analysis relevant to understanding urban issues.
5. Students will learn skills and techniques related to collaborative problem solving and leadership in the context of community projects.
6. Students will develop skills relevant to visual as well as oral and written communication.
7. Students will gain practical experience in a career track related to urban studies.

Measures to track student progress:

Beginning and continuing students in courses are evaluated on the basis of class assignments, papers, presentations, exams, lab reports, and participation in collaborative projects (both in class and in a practicum setting). Evaluative comments are summarized at the end of each semester in a narrative course evaluation. Two faculty members review all aspects of a student's previous work and the student's proposed plan of additional work in the fifth term before a student is allowed to declare Urban Studies as the area of concentration. Three faculty members review and approve students' progress toward meeting the requirements for an Urban Studies area of concentration when they submit a Thesis Prospectus in their sixth term.

Specific measures to demonstrate each graduate's competencies:

All students with a concentration in Urban Studies will complete an "Urban Lab" project or a practicum, as well as developing and implementing a research thesis or project under the direct supervision of a member of the faculty and defend that research project or thesis in a public oral baccalaureate exam. In the context of collaborative projects (in classes and in the Urban Lab), or through their internship work, students will be evaluated on the basis of their ability to apply what they have learned in practical settings. In the capstone Thesis Studio, students will be evaluated in terms of their ability both to design and follow through on a project, their ability to draw on their knowledge and skills in presenting their own work and offering constructive criticisms of their peers, and their ability to communicate effectively and supportively with their colleagues. Theses and projects are judged according to the comprehensiveness of the research, the strength and originality of the interpretation, and the clarity and elegance of the writing style. Performance on the oral exam is judged by how well the student presents the project in a prepared talk, responds to questions, demonstrates knowledge of the field, and defends their own interpretation.