Urban design is an increasingly popular and powerful means of shaping settlement, influencing social forces, and accentuating economic activity via the purposeful manipulation of the built environment. Yet the form and realization of urban design are often uncertain. Contrasting ideologies, shifting power structures, and competing imperatives make designers’ jobs challenging. The result is that many human environments, except for a few historic centers and prestige projects, seem little impacted by urban design. At the same time, urban design is riven by ideological divisions between seemingly mutually incompatible groups with little in common. There is only a single city; how can there be multiple urban designs? How is one to evaluate (or decide) which urban design ideals to subscribe to?

This course begins with four assertions. First, urban design is more than a series of stylistic choices; there are ‘good design’ principles that transcend today’s heavily promoted ideals. Second, the contrast between ideals and the overall lack of design in today’s built environment is not inevitable: unrealized potential exists to shape human environments. Third, urban designers must generate both innovative formal ideas and novel means of realizing those ideas, for unrealized urban design cannot benefit people. Fourth, urban design need not associate itself with extremes of political or economic power to achieve its esthetic and functional aims- it can exist in democratic, pluralistic settings.

Over the length of this course, we will explore each of these assertions. Urban Design Ideals and Action is organized as a weekly set of presentation, readings, and structure discussions. Our inquiry will center around ideals in the first half of the semester, and actions in the second. Ideals are theories about the form of the city and region. Ideals are proposed both in theory and in practice, and they usually occupy both of these terrains. Their esthetic assertions about the form of the city often compete with one another, and each ideal rarely admits the legitimacy of its competitors. Actions denote the ability for an urban designer to actually influence any given development condition. Actions both shape and are shaped by ideals. Actions require power, but urban designers have widely varying access to power in different settings; not all actions are available to all designers, nor all ideals.
Course outline

The course is divided into two sections: urban design ideals (six weeks); and urban design action (six weeks). The final day of each section (March 16 and April 27) will be dedicated to generating conclusions for urban design in light of the section’s investigations.

Date     Topic
Feb 8     Course introduction
Feb 15    Which Urbanism? Ideals in Conflict
Feb 22    Ideals: Landscape and Infrastructure
Mar 1     Ideals: Bigness and Architectural Urbanism
Mar 8     Ideals: The Everyday
Mar 15    Ideals: Neotraditionalism and New Urbanism
Mar 22    Ideals: Patchworks and Pluralism
Mar 29    No class (Spring Break)
Apr 5     Action: Encouraging urban design: information and advocacy
Apr 12    Action: Declaring urban design: the hortatory plan
Apr 19    Action: Regulating urban design: zoning and guidelines
Apr 26    Action: Constructing urban design I: public private partnerships
May 3     Action: Constructing urban design II: public projects
May 10    In-class project presentations
May 17    In-class project presentations

Course requirements

Participants will be responsible for attending each week’s class session; reading course materials prior to each session; and participating in class discussions.

There are two primary course requirements:

- A midterm paper (4,000 words or approximately 12.5 spaced pages) on urban design ideals, due March 16. Paper details will be circulated on February 22.
- An urban design guideline project for a site in Manhattan. Details will be circulated April 5.

Please complete readings prior to each week’s class. They will be posted on the course Stellar site at least one week prior to each meeting. Each week’s readings will comprise around 75 to 100 pages.
Course Syllabus

February 8     Course Introduction, go over syllabus

February 15    Which Urbanism? Ideals in Conflict
Readings:

February 22    Ideals: Landscape + Infrastructure
Conversation with Roi Salgueiro, Research Fellow, Leventhal Center for Advanced Urbanism, MIT
Readings:

March 1        Ideals: Bigness and Architectural Urbanism
Readings:

March 8        Ideals: The Everyday City
Conversation with Daniel Campo, Associate Professor, Morgan State University, Baltimore, MD and author, The Accidental Playground
Readings:

**March 15  Ideals: Neotraditionalism and New Urbanism**

Readings:


**March 22  Ideals: Patchworks and Pluralism**

Readings:


**March 26  No class (Spring Break)**

**April 5  Action: Encouraging Urban Design: Information and Review**

Readings:


**April 12  Action: Declaring Urban Design: The Hortatory Plan**

Readings:


**April 19**  
**Action: Regulating Urban Design: Zoning**  
**Readings:**


**April 26**  
**Action: Constructing Urban Design I: Public Private Partnerships**  
**Readings:**


**May 3**  
**Action: Constructing Urban Design II: Public Projects**  
**Readings:**


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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 10</td>
<td>Students present urban design buildouts, Day 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 17</td>
<td>Students present urban design buildouts, Day 2 (if required)</td>
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