

LAA 1600: Urban Nature and Society

Quest 1: Nature and Culture

I. General Information

Instructor

- Belinda B. Nettles, Ph.D. (bbnettlles@ufl.edu)

Teaching Assistants

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Course Description

Explores the broad environmental, social, and health benefits that nature and open space provide to our urban environments. From both a historical and modern-day context, highlights foundational parks and infrastructural works found in various cities within the United States.

As much of the world's population lives in urbanized areas, society's interactions with urban nature become increasingly important in improving the quality of urban life in our cities. We will discuss the concept of nature in various contexts and study environmental, social, and health benefits that nature provides specifically in an urban context. We will investigate specific theories, research and case studies from the United States that demonstrate the variety of societal benefits urban nature provides and how these spaces reinforce community identity and sense of place.

This course addresses the theme of nature and culture. We will explore our conceptions of nature, how human intervention has shaped nature in the urban context, and the important role that nature plays in those contexts. It answers the essential question: how can we incorporate nature into urbanized areas to provide societal benefits and allow people to connect with nature and place in everyday urban life? How can we use this knowledge across multiple professions to improve quality of life and affect positive change in our urban communities?

Quest and General Education Credit

- Quest 1
- Humanities

This course accomplishes the [Quest](#) and [General Education](#) objectives of the subject areas listed above. A minimum grade of C is required for Quest and General Education credit. Courses intended to satisfy Quest and General Education requirements cannot be taken S-U.

Required Readings and Works

There is no required textbook. All required readings and works are available in Canvas and are reflected in the weekly schedule.

Materials and Supplies Fees: n/a

II. Graded Work

Description of Graded Work

Discussion and Reflection Journal (30% of grade – 7 submissions throughout semester)

Students will keep a weekly journal throughout the course that reflects on the discussions in class and reflects on prompts provided each week. Students will be expected to sketch as part of the journal exercise. The quality of the sketch is not evaluated; meaning, you do not have to be artist to sketch. The quality of thought behind your journal entries and your willingness to participate in the sketching exercise are the criterion for the journal submittal.

Quizzes (5% of grade – 5 quizzes @ 1% each)

Throughout the semester, you will be expected to complete quizzes on Canvas that test your knowledge of the subject matter found in the readings and media assigned.

In-Class Exercises (5% of grade)

There will be multiple exercises in class throughout the semester that will reinforce the concepts learned. Certain exercises will be collected and graded for general completeness of the work and timeliness of the submittal. Missed exercises will not be accepted late.

Visual Works (20% of grade – 5 works @ 4% each)

There will be multiple experiential exercises in the semester where you will explore urban nature. You will document these experiences through visual works such as photo montage and still life photography. These visual works will be provided digitally and presented during your discussion sessions.

Urban Nature Paper (40% of grade)

This is an experiential assignment, and you have one of two paper options:

1. You are to identify an urban nature site on campus or within the surrounding area that you believe demonstrates the qualities identified in one or more of the following: Kaplan and Kaplan's Attention Restoration Theory, Ulrich's Stress Reduction Theory, and the principles of Biophilic Design.
2. For a given site, you will argue whether the site could be considered urban nature based on the concepts learned in class.

For either paper, you will write a paper (1,000 word minimum) that provides a clear thesis, defends your claim, and explains in detail how the site characteristics substantiates your argument. Please format your paper and references in MLA style. Include figures, graphics, and photos as appropriate.

Grading Scale

For information on how UF assigns grade points, visit: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

A	94 – 100%		C	74 – 76%
A-	90 – 93%		C-	70 – 73%
B+	87 – 89%		D+	67 – 69%
B	84 – 86%		D	64 – 66%
B-	80 – 83%		D-	60 – 63%
C+	77 – 79%		E	<60

A minimum grade of C is required for general education credit.

III. Annotated Weekly Schedule

Week	Topics, Homework, and Assignments
Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: The Impact of Urbanization and Sense of Place • Summary: This week we will discuss the historical impact of urbanization and suburbanization in the United States scales. We will look at how these changes have impacted the human condition and quality of life in our cities and towns by looking at impacts to natural systems at the landscape scale as well as at the local site scale. Finally, we will introduce the concept of sense of place and its importance to community. (SLO#1,3) • Required Readings/Works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ McHarg, Ian L. "The Place of Nature in the City of Man." <i>The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science</i> 352.1, 1964: 1–12. ○ Davis, Jack E, "Alligators and Plume Birds: The despoliation of Florida's living aesthetic." In <i>Paradise Lost: The Environmental History of Florida</i> edited by Jack E. Davis & Raymond Arsenault. Gainesville: Florida: University Press of Florida, 2005, pp. 235–239 & 251–254. ○ Rainer, Thomas, and Claudia West. <i>Planting in a Post-Wild World: Designing Plant Communities for Resilient Landscapes</i>. First edition. Portland, Oregon: Timber Press, 2015, pp. 6-8 • Assignment: Discussion and Reflection Journal - Weeks 1 and 2 [due Monday – Week 3 at 8:30 am] and Quiz 1 [due by Monday – Week 4 at 8:30 am] (SLO#1,2,4,5,7)

Week	Topics, Homework, and Assignments
Week 2 (No Class 1/19)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: What is Nature? The Nature Transect: from Wilderness to Suburbia • Summary: Is nature only those wilderness areas untouched by humans? With the impacts of rapid urbanization and development throughout the United States, we will begin to explore and define the concept of nature using the transect as a framework for classifying open space in our modern landscape. Specifically, we will explore commonly accepted constructs of nature by reviewing the history of land management and wilderness in the U.S., including the founding of the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service. (SLO#1,2) • Required Readings/Works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bohl, C. C, and Plater-Zyberk, E. "Building Community across the Rural-to-Urban Transect [The Transect]." <i>Places</i>, 18.1, 2006, pp. 4-17. ○ Burns, Ken, Peter Coyote, and Dayton Duncan. <i>The National Parks. The Scripture of Nature : America's Best Idea</i>. Arlington, VA: Public Broadcasting Service PBS, 2009. Film. (video: 1 hr 55 min) ○ Leopold, Aldo. <i>A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There</i>. "Special commemorative edition". New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 188-200. • Assignment: Discussion and Reflection Journal - Weeks 1 and 2 [due Monday – Week 3 at 8:30 am](SLO#2,5,7)
Week 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: What is Nature? The Nature Transect: from Suburbia to Urban Cores • Summary: This week, we will contemplate the concept of nature in our urban environments. We will review definitions of nature from various perspectives to further refine our understanding of urban nature. We will review historic examples of urban nature at a variety of scales and the important role they play in urban environments. Finally, we will discuss the concept of "photomontage," which we will use in assignments, and how this artful technique can effectively be used to graphically communicate ideas. (SLO#1,2,4) • Required Readings/Works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 10 Parks That Changed America: #4 Central Park (https://interactive.wttw.com/ten/parks/central-park) (video 1: 6:22 min, video 2: 2:53 minutes) ○ Hansen, Gail and Joceli Macedo. <i>Urban Ecology for Citizens and Planners</i>. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2021, pp. 1-11. ○ Kaplan, R., "The Role of Nature in the Urban Context" Altman, Irwin., and Joachim F. Wohlwill. <i>Behavior and the Natural Environment</i>. New York: Plenum Press, 1983, pp. 127-161. • Assignment: Discussion and Reflection Journal – Weeks 3 and 4 [due Monday - Week 5 at 8:30 am], Visual Work 1 [due by Thursday– Week 4 at 11:59 pm](SLO#4,5,7)

Week	Topics, Homework, and Assignments
Week 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Designing Nature: The Landscapes of Frederick Law Olmsted • Summary: Frederick Law Olmsted is considered the “Father of Landscape Architecture” in the United States, and his influence and legacy has shaped many cities throughout the United States. This week, we will review many of his works, including Central Park, and discuss how he was able to successfully “design nature.” These designed landscapes begin to expand our understand of nature as both an ecological and cultural construct. (SLO#1,2,4) • Required Readings/Works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Spirn, Anne Whiston. “Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted” <i>Uncommon Ground : Rethinking the Human Place in Nature</i>, edited by William Cronon. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996, pp. 91-113. ○ From landscape architecture to conservation agriculture Thomas Woltz TEDxCharlottesville. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VIY-3V63yI (video: 17:38 minutes) • Assignment: Discussion and Reflection Journal – Weeks 3 and 4 [due Monday - Week 5 at 8:30 am], Quiz 2 [due by Monday – Week 6 at 8:30 am] (SLO#1,2,4,5,7)
Week 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: The Benefits of Urban Nature –Ecosystem Services • Summary: How do we determine the value of urban nature to society? Do we accurately capture the benefits these spaces provide and their contribution to improving the human condition and our quality of life? We will define the concept of ecosystem services and the various tangible and non-tangible benefits landscapes can provide. We will then discuss how landscape performance seeks to quantify and document the environmental, social, and economic benefits that urban nature provides to the public. Specifically, we will review the Elliott Bay Trail and Seattle Waterfront and discuss how collaborative design across various disciplines can create multi-functional infrastructure that provides environmental, social, and economic benefits. (SLO#3,4) • Required Readings/Works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bennett, Elena M, and Joseph Alcamo. <i>Ecosystems and Human Well-Being: A Framework for Assessment</i>. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2003, pp. 53-60. • Assignment: Discussion and Reflection Journal – Weeks 5 and 6 [due by Monday – Week 7 at 8:30 am], Visual Work 2 [due by Thursday– Week 6 at 11:59 pm] (SLO#5,6,7)

Week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topics, Homework, and Assignments
Week 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Biophilia and Biophilic Design • Summary: We will explore the concept of biophilia and discuss the “typology of biophilia values” and how we can categorize our relationship to nature. We will then identify the basic principles of biophilic design and how it can be used in the design of our built environment to connect people to nature in our urban environments using Tanner Springs Park in Portland, Oregon and the Amazon Spheres in Seattle as examples. (SLO#2,3,4) • Required Readings/Works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Kellert, Stephen R. “The Biological Basis for Human Values of Nature.” The Biophilia Hypothesis, edited by Stephen Kellert and Edward O. Wilson, Island Press, 1992, pp. 42-69 ○ Terrapin Bright Green. The 14 Patterns of Biophilic Design: Improving Health & Well Being in the Urban Environment, 2014, pp. 3-23. ○ ILFI The Bullitt Center: A Living Building https://youtu.be/6TvlwAgi-vQ (video: 6:15 minutes) • Assignment: Discussion and Reflection Journal – Weeks 5 and 6 [due by Monday – Week 7 at 8:30 am], Quiz 3 [due by Monday – Week 8 at 8:30 am], (SLO#1,3,5,6,7)
Week 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: The Health Benefits of Urban Nature • Summary: Much research has been done regarding the physiological and psychological health benefits of nature in our urban environments. We will review general areas of research regarding these benefits. We will also discuss urban agriculture, the Seattle P-Patch (community gardening) program, and how these garden spaces can recoup urban lands to provide micro-nature experiences. (SLO#2,3,4) • Required Readings/Works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. Urban nature for human health and well-being: a research summary for communicating the health benefits of urban trees and green space. FS-1096. Washington, DC, 2018. (24 pages) ○ Papanek, Alicia, Catherina G. Campbell, and Hannah Eason. Social and Community Benefits and Limitations of Urban Agriculture. University of Florida IFAS Extension EDIS publication #FCS3378, 2025. https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/FY1517 • Assignment: Discussion and Reflection Journal – Weeks 7 and 8 [due by Monday – Week 9 at 8:30 am], Visual Work 3 [due by Thursday– Week 8 at 11:59 pm] (SLO#2,3,4,5,6,7)

Week	Topics, Homework, and Assignments
Week 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Theory of Supportive Gardens/Stress Reduction Theory • Summary: Roger Ulrich’s groundbreaking study that demonstrated improved recovery for surgery patients with a window view was instrumental in laying the foundation for his work related to Stress Reduction Theory. This week will discuss, in detail, the various aspects of his theory and how it can be applied in urban nature. (SLO#1,2,3) • Required Readings/Works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ulrich, Roger S. "View through a window may influence recovery from surgery." <i>Science</i>, vol. 224, 27 Apr. 1984, pp. 420-421. ○ Ulrich, Roger S. "Effects of Gardens on Health Outcomes: Theory and Research." In <i>Healing Gardens: Therapeutic Benefits and Design Recommendations</i>, edited by C. Cooper Marcus and M. Barnes. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1999, pp 27-86. • Assignment: Discussion and Reflection Journal – Weeks 7 and 8 [due by Monday – Week 9 at 8:30 am], Quiz 4 [due by Monday – Week 11 at 8:30 am](SLO#3,4,5,7)
Week 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Attention Restoration Theory/Forest Bathing • Summary: Environmental psychologists Kaplan and Kaplan’s work in restorative landscapes demonstrates how urban nature can help in mental fatigue recovery. We will review their Attention Restoration Theory and how it can be applied in our urbanized context. We will also discuss the concept of Shinrin-Yoku: Forest Bathing. (SLO#1,2,3) • Required Readings/Works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Kaplan, S. "The Restorative Benefits of Nature: Toward an Integrative Framework." <i>Journal of Environmental Psychology</i> 15, 1995, pp. 169-82. ○ Miyasaki, Yoshifumi. <i>Shinrin-yoku: The Japanese Way of Forest Bathing for Health and Relaxation</i>. Octopus Books, 2018, pp. 23-39. ○ Li, Qing. <i>Forest Bathing: How Trees Help You Find Health and Happiness</i>. Viking, 2018, 117-151, 225. • Assignment: Discussion and Reflection Journal – Weeks 9, 10 and 11 [due by Monday – Week 12 at 8:30 am], Visual Work 4 [due by Thursday– Week 11 at 11:59 pm], Urban Nature Paper [due Wednesday – Week 16 at 11:59pm, see Canvas for interim deadlines] (SLO#3,4,5,6,7)
Week 10	Spring Break (No Classes)

Week	Topics, Homework, and Assignments
Week 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: The Environmental Benefits of Urban Nature, Resiliency, and Green Roofs • Summary: This week, we will discuss the impacts that urbanization has had, historically, in our urban centers and explore the general environmental benefits of urban nature and the role that urban nature and design can play in improving the quality of life through environmental benefits such as reduction of heat island effect, carbon sequestration, and habitat enhancement. In addition, we will look at examples of Nature Based Solutions being implemented with an emphasis on resiliency in an effort to protect and enhance our coastal cities. We will also explore green roof technologies that provide environmental benefits while providing much needed open space for our urban dwellers. (SLO#1,3,4) • Required Readings/Works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bridges, T. S., E. M. Bourne, B. C. Suedel, E. B. Moynihan, and J. K. King. <i>Engineering With Nature: An Atlas, Volume 2. ERDC SR-21-2</i>. Vicksburg, MS: U.S. Army Engineer Research and Development Center, 2021, http://dx.doi.org/10.21079/11681/40124, pp. 2-11. ○ Oberndorfer, Erica et al. "Green Roofs as Urban Ecosystems: Ecological Structures, Functions, and Services." <i>Bioscience</i> 57.10 (2007): 823–833. Web. ○ Way, Thaisa. "The Lurie Garden 2000-2004." <i>GGN Landscapes: 1999-2018</i>. Timber Press, 2018. Pp. • Assignment: Discussion and Reflection Journal – Weeks 9, 10 and 11 [due by Monday – Week 12 at 8:30 am], Quiz 5 [due by Monday – Week 14 at 8:30 am] (SLO#3,5,6,7)
Week 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Nature-Based Solutions - Green Stormwater Infrastructure • Summary: This week we will look at the history of water infrastructure and its evolution to green stormwater infrastructure that can solve environmental issues in an artful way that reinforces culture, a sense of place, and a connection to nature. We will visit a local infrastructure project, Depot Park. (#SLO1,3,4) • Required Readings/Works: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Echols, Stuart., and Eliza. Pennypacker. <i>Artful Rainwater Design</i>. 1st ed. Washington, DC: Island Press/Center for Resource Economics, 2015, pp. 7-22. • Assignment: Discussion and Reflection Journal – Weeks 12 and 13 [due by Monday – Week 14 at 8:30 am] (SLO#3,5,7)

Week	Topics, Homework, and Assignments
Week 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: The Social Benefits of Urban Nature: Reconnecting Society and the Urban Fabric • Summary: How can urban nature address societal issues? This week we will look at examples of urban nature and how they have been used to restitch the urban fabric in a way that addresses social issues and promotes a better quality of urban life. Specifically, we will look at Seattle's Freeway Park and Gas Works Park completed in the 1970's. (SLO#1,3,4) • Required Readings/Work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 10 Parks That Changed America: #8 Freeway Park https://interactive.wttw.com/ten/parks/freeway-park (video 1: 5:41 minutes, video 2: 3:01 minutes) ○ The Landscape Architecture of Lawrence Halprin: Freeway Park https://www.tclf.org/sites/default/files/microsites/halprinlegacy/freeway-park.html (video: 5:20 minutes) ○ 10 Parks That Changed America: #9 Gas Works Park https://interactive.wttw.com/ten/parks/gas-works-park (video 1: 6:01 minutes, video 2: 5:08) ○ Banel, Feliks. <i>Remembering the Death of Seattle's Major Transit Initiative</i> (https://www.kuow.org/stories/remembering-death-seattles-major-transit-initiative/ - Listen to news story on website, approximately 5 min) • Assignment: Discussion and Reflection Journal – Week 14 and 15 [due by Tuesday at 8:30 am] (SLO#5,7)
Week 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: The Social Benefits of Urban Nature: Connecting Society to History, Culture, and a City's Sense of Place • Summary: How can urban nature reinforce history, culture and a sense of place. We will review case studies of two parks in the United States that provide cultural and interpretive opportunities that strengthen a city's identity and sense of place: Seattle's Olympic Sculpture Park and New York City's High Line. (SLO# 3,4) • Required Readings/Work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 10 Parks That Changed America: #10 The High Line https://interactive.wttw.com/ten/parks/the-high-line (video 1: 7:02 minutes, video 2: 2:46 minutes) ○ WEISS/MANFREDI. Seattle Art museum: Olympic Sculpture Park. https://www.weissmanfredi.com/projects/386-seattle-art-museum-olympic-sculpture-park (video: 3:39 minutes) • Assignment: Discussion and Reflection Journal – Week 14 and 15 [due by Tuesday at 8:30 am]; Urban Nature Paper [due Wednesday – Week 16 at 11:59pm] (SLO#5,6,7)

IV. Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the [Quest](#) and [General Education](#) learning outcomes as follows:

Content: *Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, theories and methodologies used within the discipline(s).*

- SLO 1 - Identify how urbanization and societal values have impacted natural and social systems. (Assessments: Quizzes and Journal Entries) (Quest 1, H)
- SLO 2 – Define nature and society’s interaction with nature in various contexts (Assessments: Quizzes, Journal Entries, and Visual Works) (Quest 1, H)
- SLO 3 – Describe and explain the principles, practices, and techniques related to how urban nature provides human health (physiological and psychological), environmental, and social benefits to society. (Assessments: Quizzes, Journal Entries, Visual Works, Urban Nature Paper) (Quest 1,H)

Critical Thinking: *Students carefully and logically analyze information from multiple perspectives and develop reasoned solutions to problems within the discipline(s).*

- SLO 4 – Analyze historically significant and everyday local urban nature sites and how they provide human health, environmental, and social benefits. (Assessments: Visual Works, Journal Entries, and Urban Nature Paper) (Quest 1,H)

Communication: *Students communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms appropriate to the discipline(s).*

- SLO 5 – Communicate your understanding of urban nature and its benefits orally, in writing, and in graphic forms. (Assessments: Journal Entries, Visual Works, and Urban Nature Paper) (Quest 1, H)

Connection: *Students connect course content with meaningful critical reflection on their intellectual, personal, and professional development at UF and beyond.*

- SLO 6 – Experience urban nature and reflect on your experiences as they relate to the theories, principles, and concepts discussed in the course. (Assessments: Journal Entries, Visual Works, and Urban Nature Paper) (Quest 1)
- SLO 7 – Reflect on how the concepts in this course can be applied to your future pursuits. (Assessments: Journal Entries) (Quest 1)

V. Quest Learning Experiences

1. Details of Experiential Learning Component

There will be multiple experiential assignments where students will explore, analyze, and reflect on urban nature sites located on campus or in the surrounding areas. These assignments will require photographic documentation as well as sketching. These experiences are reflected in the weekly schedule and assignment descriptions.

2. Details of Self-Reflection Component

The discussion and reflection journal is the primary self-reflection component through the course. However, students will also have opportunities to self-reflect through the experiential assignments and the urban nature paper.

VI. Required Policies

Please use this link (<https://go.ufl/syllabuspolices>) to UF's academic policies and campus resources, including information on:

- Class Attendance
- Make-up Exams
- Assignments
- Accommodations/Disability Resources Center
- Grading Policies
- Course Evaluations
- Guidance on How to Provide Constructive Feedback
- UF's Honesty Policy
- In-Class Recording

As well as **academic resources**, including:

- E-learning technical support
- Career Connections Center
- Library Support
- Academic Resources: ex. General study skills and tutoring
- Writing Studio: ex. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers
- Academic Complaints: Office of the Ombuds
- Enrollment Management Complaints (Registrar, Financial Aid, Admissions)
- UF Student Success Initiative: for resources that support your success as a UF student, and

Campus Health and Wellness Resources:

- UF Whole Gator Resources: for resources that are designed to help you thrive physically, mentally, and emotionally at UF.

Disclaimer: This syllabus represents my current plans and objectives. As we go through the semester, those plans may need to change to enhance the class learning opportunity. Such changes will be communicated clearly.