

Brown University

# Urban Studies

2013-2014 Newsletter



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*Cover photo by Eddie  
Mansius*

# Letter from the Editor: What is Urban Studies?

BY GREG JORDAN-DETAMORE '14

All the time, I am asked: "What is Urban Studies?" I've tried to craft many different explanations, with my preferred one being something like: "the interdisciplinary study of anything and everything urban and suburban (and sometimes rural), incorporating fields such as sociology, history, public policy, economics, anthropology, political science, architecture studies, education studies, American studies, and English." Whew! With a broad definition like that, what *isn't* Urban Studies?

The key to Urban Studies is that it focuses on analyzing the world around us through the lens of the political, social, and economic forces that shape the built environment and the people who inhabit and interact with it, as well as understanding the representation of these places and people in art, literature, and imagination.

I have a somewhat unique double-concentration in Urban Studies and Geological Sciences. I am often told that it's an interesting combination and asked what the connection between the two is. While I used to tell people, "I just like both of them and don't feel the need to find a connection," I later realized that there was in fact a connection, the connection being that they both focus on understanding the environment around us, with Urban Studies focusing on the built and

social environments and Geological Sciences (soon to be Earth, Environmental, and Planetary Sciences) focusing on the natural environment. Both give students the tools to understand the systems, relationships, and processes that have shaped and continue to shape our world, as well as gain an appreciation for the wonder, beauty, and dynamism of our cities and our Earth.

Both Urban Studies and Geological Sciences are very hands-on; I enjoy and often brag about the fact that they are some of the only disciplines on campus that not only involve field trips but really *depend* on field experience to show students what is being discussed in the classroom, because they are about the "real world" around us. I am reminded of a quote from T. S. Eliot's poem "Little Gidding":

*We shall not cease from exploration*

*And the end of all our exploring*

*Will be to arrive where we started*

*And know the place for the first time*

Just as my geological education has helped me be able to stop at a rock outcrop, river, or beach and actually understand its past and future, my urban studies education has allowed me to stand in a neighborhood, park, suburban shopping mall, or urban high school and analyze the forces at play.



Urban Studies graduates have taken a variety of paths. The focus of this newsletter (see pages 4 and 5) is on opportunities for Urban Studies students post-graduation. You will find a feature on alums who choose to move to small- and medium-sized cities, an article by a 2013 grad who works for the I-195 Redevelopment District Commission in Providence, and a recap of the "Degree Days" event that was held this spring to showcase career opportunities. Additionally, this issue contains news about this year's events, a senior thesis spotlight, and information on new courses.

Wherever Urban Studies graduates choose to go after graduation, the concentration will serve them well by giving them a new lens through which they can understand and critically analyze the world around them. Where will Urban Studies take you? ■

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## Letter from the DUG: Building Community

BY SOPHIE SOLOWAY '14

The Urban Studies Departmental Undergraduate Group (DUG) provides a casual home for undergraduate concentrators to share ideas on all things from course selection to current events during the semester. The fall 2013 semester kicked off with a bang and brought a new generation of potential concentrators into our orbit, thanks to the Urban Studies Film Festival. The double-header, which was held at the Granoff Center, featured the documentary *Detropia* from 2012, as well as Woody Allen's 1979 classic *Manhattan*.

The allegations of Mr. Allen's pedophilia provide a somewhat chilling context for the May-December romance featured in the film. However, when we watched it last semester with a crowd of around 80 students, the mood cast by the enduring, timeless scenes of New York City wove a spell that answers the question "why cities?" on a visceral level for many of us.

*Detropia*, hailing from a very different corner of the cinematic spectrum, offered some very real answers of its own. Amidst the descriptions of Detroit's troubles, we enjoyed the



vivid depictions of people creatively making their lives in a uniquely American postindustrial city.

The semester continued with more events designed to foster community and knowledge-sharing in the Urban Studies Program. The semester planning kick-off brought concentrators together to swap tips on class selection, senior thesis questions, and how to chart a course through the concentration.

The DUG also hosted an open house that

featured presentations from alum Kate Holguin '13 and Professor Stefano Bloch. Ms. Holguin discussed how Urban Studies led her into her current career working for the I-195 Redevelopment District Commission that is tasked with redeveloping the large former highway parcel in the middle of downtown Providence. Professor Bloch described his early days in the Los Angeles street art community, and how he came to Urban Studies on a long and winding path.

In the spring semester, the DUG planned a Degree Days event that brought in Urban Studies alumni from diverse fields to discuss life after graduation with our concentrators. We look forward to continuing the conversation and strengthening the undergraduate community with more events and opportunities for engagement with the city of Providence, alumni, professors, and fellow students. ■

*If you would like to contact or get involved with the DUG, email the leaders Sophie Soloway at [sophie\\_soloway@brown.edu](mailto:sophie_soloway@brown.edu) and Sage Green at [susannah\\_green@brown.edu](mailto:susannah_green@brown.edu).*

# Letter from the Director: A Successful Year

BY PROFESSOR HILARY SILVER, DIRECTOR OF THE URBAN STUDIES PROGRAM

Urban Studies had a wonderful year. We welcomed two new faculty members. Rebecca Carter has joined the faculty as Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Urban Studies. She offered a well-received first-year seminar on *Urban Life in Providence*. In addition, Cogut Mellon postdoctoral fellow and geographer, Stefano Bloch, won accolades for his courses on *Crime and the City* and on *Do-It-Yourself Urbanism*, and organized several special events for students and faculty. To internationalize the curriculum beyond the United States, I offered a new course on *World Cities* this spring. Our urban planners, Robert Azar and Yesim Sungu-Eryilmaz, also returned to teach, respectively, *Downtown Development* and *Sustainable Urbanism*. Professors James Morone and Sandy Zipp returned from leave to teach full-time this year. Please join me in congratulating Professor Zipp on his promotion to Associate Professor with tenure.

Our DUG, under the leadership of Sophie Soloway and Sage Green, organized a number of exciting events this year, including the “kick off” event, our Urban Film Festival on the Granoff Center big screen, and the Brown Degree Days, which brought Urban Studies alumni Christopher Cirillo, Jill DeSimini, and Kristina Wiig back to campus. We also had

three invited lectures. One was by Vanderbilt Professor Richard Lloyd on three music scenes in different neighborhoods of Nashville. That was followed in March by a panel discussion on evictions from the Mumbai slums by Liza Weinstein of Northeastern with comments by Matthew Desmond of Harvard. Our last speaker was Marcus Hunter of Yale on his new book, *Black Citymakers*, one that revisits W.E.B. DuBois’ *Philadelphia Negro’s* Seventh Ward.

Our annual conference was co-sponsored by the Ford Foundation and took place in November, just before Detroit declared bankruptcy. The theme was a timely one: “The Return of Urban Fiscal Crisis.” It also had special significance locally, given the emergence from municipal bankruptcy of Central Falls, R.I., where our alumnus, Stephen Larrick, is now Director of Planning and Economic Development. Speakers included bankruptcy lawyers, municipal bond traders, and scholars who came from all over the country. The keynote was offered by Richard Ravitch, who was central to solving the New York City fiscal crisis of the 1970s. All of the PowerPoint presentations and a videotape of the entire conference can be found on the Urban Studies website.



Let us hear your own news and views on our lively Facebook page! Be sure to join our group at [facebook.com/groups/BrownUrbanStudies](https://www.facebook.com/groups/BrownUrbanStudies).

Alumni and students are always posting opportunities and fascinating information about urban affairs around the world. Share your reactions to our conference and your thoughts about urban life. You can post internships and job openings for our students, or propose activities, research topics, or articles on urban affairs.

Urban Studies alumni returning for reunion are cordially invited to our graduation ceremonies and reception at the Faculty Club. Come by, say “Hi!” and catch up. We hope you will stay part of our community, on campus and online! ■

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## Senior Thesis: Detroit Gay City

BY BEN GELLMAN '14

For my senior thesis, I’m examining ongoing dialogue around the construction of a gay neighborhood in the city of Detroit. I grew up in and outside of Detroit, and half my family has lived in Michigan their entire lives, so this region is phenomenally close to my heart. Coming to Brown as a gay male interested in urban development, I realized at some point over the course of my Urban Studies career how intimately intertwined LGBT issues are with urbanization.

Most big cities around the United States are home to concentrated gay enclaves, which are often drivers of economic development, filled to the brim with retail, dining, and other institutions. Detroit’s gay scene is way more dispersed than that of many other regions. The city’s history of intensive white flight and suburbanization has deeply divided gay communities across Metro Detroit, leaving LGBT institutions (like bars, clubs, and restaurants) scattered all over the region.



A lot of people in the gay community in Detroit want to create a gay neighborhood from scratch. No city has done this successfully in the 21st century, so I’m studying the

phenomenon by which cities can invoke gay-friendly development that remains within the urban planning paradigms of urban regions. If Detroit does build a gayborhood, it will be a revolutionary space, redefining the role of space and metropolitan geography in shaping gay identities and cultures. I’ve been learning so much about not only the gay scene in Detroit but about cultural geography and urban planning in general! I feel that having been involved in LGBT life at Brown, it’s cool integrating an interest in cities and in Detroit specifically with my interest in the gay community! ■

*Interested in writing a thesis? Talk to Meredith Paine ([meredith\\_paine@brown.edu](mailto:meredith_paine@brown.edu)) or your concentration advisor. Theses offer the opportunity for students to research and study their own interests in depth and produce a substantial piece of academic work. A thesis is required of students wishing to pursue Honors in the Urban Studies concentration.*

# Off the Beaten Path: Moving to Smaller Cities

BY MAGGIE LIVINGSTONE '16

The average Urban Studies concentrator is fascinated by the metropolis. Like a moth to flame, we flock to the bustling downtown, taking in an expansive transportation network or mammoth effort in urban planning in a city bursting with millions of people—or so most have. For a few recent graduates, their post-collegiate careers have led them to smaller cities or even rural landscapes.

Though these cities do not attract the numbers that New York, Chicago, or Washington, D.C. do, their small networks and slower paces provide cultural benefits that larger cities might not.

New Orleans, which Connor McManus '13 now calls home, is the perfect blend of old time tradition and relaxed celebration. His new city feels Caribbean: a “festive,” “warm,” “relaxed” way of life, he says. McManus hails from Lafayette, Louisiana, so the adjustment to his home state was not as drastic, he said.

Cody Schulman '13, a Philadelphia native, said he is a “big fish in a small pond” in his new home base of Cleveland, Ohio. He was immediately able to get involved with his neighborhood association, which might have been more difficult in a larger city. Fascinated by sustainable aviation, Schulman also easily asked for a tour of Cleveland's airport, something he wasn't “intimidated” to inquire about.

Alex Lipinsky '13 is perhaps the most drastic example of taking the small city plunge. A native of Youngstown, Ohio, population 65,000, Lipinsky returned homeward following graduation last year. Now back in his hometown, he owns and operates a community garden called “Flannel Farms,” where he grows and sells local foods.

His livelihood was inspired by a paper he wrote on Youngstown's 2010 comprehensive plan in Urban Studies Professor James Morone's *City Politics*. Lipinsky was startled by the desper-



Alex Lipinsky '13 (center) sells produce grown from his community garden in Youngstown, Ohio. Lipinsky is among the recent Urban Studies alumni who have moved to smaller cities after Brown. Others include Cody Schulman '13 in Cleveland, Ohio and Connor McManus '13 in New Orleans, Louisiana.

COURTESY OF ALEX LIPINSKY

ate tone of the plan—that the city was shrinking and in need of urban development efforts.

“I really want to grow and be successful, but I also want to show people that they can create their own opportunities in the city,” he said.

Housing seems to be another frontier that benefits smaller city dwellers. Schulman lives in a two-bedroom duplex loft—complete with 14-foot ceilings, a gym, and security—and pays what a shoebox Brooklyn apartment rents for.

“There's much more bang for your buck here, and the most obvious thing is in housing,” he says. Though the metropolitan area's wealth tends to be clustered in the suburbs, Schulman says a slow movement of young people seems to be returning to the city limits.

Lipinsky sprawls out on an acre-large farm in Youngstown, land that was “essentially a wasted resource” and turned it into “economic value,” he said.

And despite the stalled development conception, revitalization is occurring in many areas of these cities. Schulman says that though Cleveland has experienced population decline in the last few decades, the Tremont neighborhood in the city is experiencing a comeback of sorts.

“We're doing better than you might think,” Schulman said. “There's been a complete renaissance in downtown.”

McManus works for architectural and planning firm Concordia, which has grappled with the shifting city landscape of post-Katrina New Orleans. The city is building around its hospital and research institutions and is particularly investing in the Tremé and Central City areas.

“There's a huge planning effort and community engagement in rebuilding the city,” McManus said. “It's such a historic city—it's really one of the most fascinating places to be right now.” ■

## Degree Days: Examining Career Options

BY MAGGIE LIVINGSTONE '16

Every year for a special afternoon, the Urban Studies Program brings together several alumni for a panel on how their time on College Hill and experience in Urban Studies helped shape their current career path. More so than ever, this year's speakers encompassed the diverse pathways that a degree can lead to, as the speakers were from the non-profit sector, architectural academia, and for-profit consulting.

Held on a sunny afternoon in Barus & Holley, the event began with an introduction by student moderator Sophie Soloway '14 and led into a discussion by speaker Kristina Wiig '01 who

briefly shared how she carved out her post-collegiate path. Wiig works for LogCheck, a Manhattan-based consulting firm that helps startups and other companies implement technological tools.

Wiig's path at Brown was a bit across the board, and she initially came to the University as a basketball recruit. She began in the Egyptology department and later meandered to fields like economics, sociology, political science, and architecture, “learning everything,” she said.

“It's the best possible education you can get because you're exposed to everything,” she add-

ed. “My thread is, I've loved learning.”

In the nearly 13 years since her graduation, Wiig has been employed at a number of different firms, she said, but through her career she has developed “a philosophy” that she never accepts a job simply because of the salary potential.

“Do something 100 percent,” she said. “No amount of money is gonna make you feel any better.”

Jill Desimini '98, a professor at Harvard's Graduate School of Design, similarly took a

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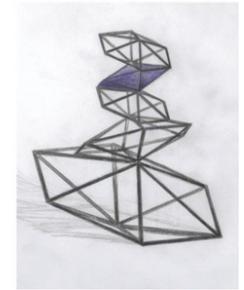
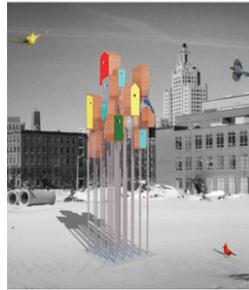
# The LINK: Temporary Art on the I-195 Lands

BY KATE HOLGUIN '13

The I-195 Redevelopment District Commission is responsible for the development of 20 acres of land in Providence (now known as The LINK) made available by the relocation of Interstate 195. This one-mile stretch of land is adjacent to a thriving downtown, connected to highly desirable residential neighborhoods like College Hill and Fox Point, located at the nexus of hospital and university uses, and acts as a gateway to the vibrant and diverse south and west side communities of Providence. It offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create a dynamic center in the heart of the city. By providing a great location, fully equipped infrastructure, and an accelerated development process, The LINK—once fully built out—will be a place for people of all backgrounds to work, live, and enjoy Providence.

Since the completion of The LINK could take several years, part of my role as a Project Associate with the 195 Commission has been to figure out a temporary use for the land in line with the Commission's overall goal for the space: something that enhances the value of the surrounding communities and creates a sense of place while promoting economic development—not just in The LINK, but in Providence as a whole.

In the past six months, a group comprised of the Commission's staff and board members and staff from The Steel Yard, Providence's Department of Art, Culture and Tourism, and the Providence Children's Museum, has initiated an interim use program for The LINK. Individuals or groups in Rhode Island were encouraged to submit proposals for original, temporary art installations to be displayed on the parcels. Six proposals were selected for a mid-May 2014 installation with six more coming in fall 2014. The installations chosen for the pilot program,



PROVIDED BY THE LINK

**The former Interstate 195 lands will be home to temporary art installations.**

proposed by talented young Providence artists, mimic the rich mix that defines Providence. Some echo the built environment, such as a sculpture that draws upon the Jewelry District's rich history, and others draw from nature, such as a colorful birdhouse community and a "gazing garden" made of reflective aluminum bulbs.

As the "Creative Capital", it is crucial that Providence embrace temporary use programs that engage community members through enlivening urban spaces. As a city with an enormous pool of creative talent, from the artists at RISD, to the food innovators at Johnson & Wales, to the entrepreneurs at Brown, temporary use programs give these skillful individuals a connection to Providence. In many ways, Providence thrives because of its small scale, and temporary use programs allow this creative talent, with design flair and fresh vision, to

constantly reinvent Providence in different and meaningful ways. By giving them (and the others that make up the city's imaginative population) a real stake in the city—not just in design and planning but in place-making as a whole—Providence will ultimately benefit.

Providence has transformed into a city with real vitality and attractiveness with its flourishing arts scene, culinary revolution, and burgeoning startup culture. Temporary use programs like The LINK's interim use program provide a space to augment, persistently and positively, a sense of place in the city, as Providence continues on the path towards evolving into a great twenty-first century American city. ■

*Kate Holguin '13 is an Urban Studies alum who works for the I-195 Redevelopment District Commission.*

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winding route in her post-graduation career. Though she initially thought she'd work in public policy, she soon realized she was truly drawn to creating public space.

"I migrated toward the design disciplines," she said.

After five years with the New York City government, she worked at an architectural firm in Philadelphia and later studied landscape architecture at the University of Pennsylvania School of Design.

Desimini said during her time as an undergrad at Brown, she frequently explored Providence's century-old mill buildings, and had a penchant for driving cross-country to observe the changing scenery.

"I still drive around a lot," she said. "I did an Indie-rock tour—5,000 miles with 17 cities in 18 days."

The final speaker on the panel, Chris Cirillo '95 rounded out the diverse speeches, explaining his career jumps from governmental work and private for-profit development to his current position as head of a non-profit.

Cirillo, a native New Yorker, currently lives in the city and is the director of Lott Community Development Corporation, an affordable housing development and management company. Previously employed with New York City's parks and housing departments and later a large private real estate development firm, Cirillo said the exposure to so many different sides of development has widened his perspective.

"It's about who you're working with and the

relationships you develop," he said. Cirillo is also currently studying for a master's degree in historic preservation.

The event concluded with time for audience questions, where the speakers were asked about the current state of development in New York and for career advice.

Each speaker echoed similar sentiments about how an Urban Studies degree provides a core frame of analytical thinking, but one's career path is ultimately driven by individual interest. They also stressed the importance of learning for learning's sake and being open to new experiences.

"Don't pigeonhole yourself to say you're not going to work in private, public, non-profit," Wiig said. "Don't worry about your first move, because it's not going to be your last move." ■

# New Course: Urban Life in Providence

BY EDDIE MANSIUS '17

Going into my first year at Brown, I was fortunate enough to have some idea of what I wanted to study. Some stressed over choosing between STEM and the humanities, while others were more focused — and rightfully so — on choosing between Flex 460 and “the weekly” for their meal plans.

I, however, moved into my dorm knowing full-well that I wanted to start off my career at Brown by seeing what the Urban Studies Program had to offer. Navigating my way through Banner for the first time, I added to my cart, without hesitation, *Urban Life in Providence: An Introduction*.

Ever since I was eight, cities and architecture have fascinated me. I used to (okay, maybe still do) daydream about planning cities and imagine how I would develop or redevelop a plot of land in the urban landscape around where I grew up.

My hometown, Charlotte, is the poster-child of the post-war city — poorly planned and highly automobile-reliant. I grew up around freeways, shopping malls, and curvilinear streets. My junior and senior years in high school involved driving approximately 500 miles per week between home, school, and sports practices — vastly different from the pedestrian lifestyle I now have at Brown.

Thus, I entered Professor Rebecca Carter's class with little-to-no knowledge of Providence and its surrounding area. That soon changed, as our class took a historical walking tour of College Hill at the end of the first week, culminating with watching Waterfire. Over the course of the semester, I was slowly introduced to my new home at the head of the Narragansett Bay and to Brown's Urban Studies Program. Learning a valuable mix of local history and urban, sociological, and ethnographic theory, I found the course to be an invaluable staple of my first year of college in an unfamiliar city. I believe *Urban Life in Providence* would also benefit upperclassman, but its format and course materials are arguably the most valuable to freshmen.

“The course could have been taught at any level,” Carter said. “But I thought it worked really well as a first-year seminar.” She pins the reason for this success to the unique energy that freshmen bring to campus in their first year of college, adding that such eagerness was useful and productive with regards to discussions.

Between all the readings, class discussions, lectures, and various walking tours we took, the course made me feel like a Providentian. It also forced me to hone my skills in conducting research projects. I found that putting together a 14-page research paper and presentation was a useful experience so early in my college career. My final project allowed me to explore a



EDDIE MANSIUS

The first-year seminar *Urban Life in Providence* offered students several walking tours of the city.

neighborhood in Providence and become comfortable with the academic resources at Brown. In the final class meetings, the other students and I presented our research — ranging anywhere from a study of Federal Hill to an investigation of a nonprofit that advocates the preservation and restoration of Providence's urban forest.

Looking back, *Urban Life in Providence* was a fantastic addition to Brown's Urban Studies course selection. Carter is a fantastic professor — her patience and enthusiasm were integral pieces to the course's success. Extremely approachable and inspiring, Carter taught the class with a healthy balance of discussion (sometimes outside, weather permitting) and presentations.

“Personally, I'm fairly new to Providence myself,” Carter reflected. “This is my third year here — so I felt like I was right along with [the students] learning about places that I had not been to or new projects or programs that I didn't know of. That was enjoyable to me as a professor.”

Originally from Nashville and New Orleans, Carter came to Brown in 2011 as a post-doctoral fellow in anthropology. In July of 2013, she officially joined the Urban Studies faculty, and sheepishly admits that even though she has an extensive background in anthropology, she always secretly wanted to be involved in urban studies. Her research, based in New Orleans, examines urban violence in the city both before and after Katrina. Specifically, she focuses on the dehumanization and criminalization of young black men, whom she has found to be often dismissed and discounted in the press and

the public sphere.

“Their criminal records get put forward first before anything else about their lives, so a lot of people in those communities see this as a kind of dehumanizing process,” she explains. As a result, members of these communities are trying to restore the humanity for these young men through remembrance, naming, and talking about their familial relations while they were alive.

“The larger project,” Carter continues, “is trying to resituate them and the communities and people they represent in the city moving forward. So as New Orleans comes back and reinvents itself, [I am] trying to create this space for everybody to be a part of this process, regardless of their status or criminal history.”

This semester she is teaching a course called *The City, the River, and the Sea: Social and Environmental Change at the Water's Edge*. The course looks at river cities and coastal cities, focusing on the equally transformative and restrictive space within which people experience risk and vulnerability in relationship to waterways.

With perspectives from all over the country and world, discussions in *Urban Life in Providence* helped me realize why I was so initially eager to explore Urban Studies. Everyone's experiences are different, but the city offers us the opportunity to share those histories and ideals with one another. The course, as it turns out, is much more than a class about living in Providence; it brings a group of enthusiastic first-years together to explore the workings, blights, and politics of cities across the globe, all set against the backdrop of our home city at the confluence of the Moshassuck and Woonasquatucket rivers. ■

# New Course: Do-It-Yourself Urbanism

BY GREG JORDAN-DETAMORE '14

What can we learn from an act of graffiti writing, or an act of painting over the graffiti, both of which can be seen as aggressive acts of placemaking? How can official recognition or sanctioning of a piece of art cause the art to lose some of its meaning? Why should we care about film companies wanting to locate themselves in the expensive Los Angeles region rather than cheaper and more economically rational Shreveport, Louisiana? How can we trace this back to Pierre Bourdieu's ideas about the different forms of capital?

In Urban Studies, it can be easy to focus on big-picture issues, but Stefano Bloch's *Do-It-Yourself Urbanism* rests on the idea that small-scale transgressions and decisions can be even more interesting. Each week, the course considers a new topic that builds upon those previously covered: the city, forms of capital, the "right to the city," democracy, Occupy and the occupation of space, anarchy, do-it-yourself urbanism, graffiti and street art, the idea of the "creative capital," and finally Latino/a urbanism.

This course is placed at the intersection of theory and practice, with urban theory and political economy being discussed hand-in-hand with topics like graffiti, jaywalking, gentrification, public space, and mixed-use development. Students get a chance to discuss illicit and creative place-making, critical sociospatial theory, and alternative urbanization processes.



KIERAN HUGGINS (WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)

**Graffiti, such as that shown here from Toronto, is a frequent topic of discussion in the course.**

The course's extensive reading load includes a mixture of books, journal articles, and other selected passages.

One special feature of the course is its blog, located at [diyurbanism.wordpress.com](http://diyurbanism.wordpress.com). Each week, a group of about three students post content about the week's topic and readings, with analysis, quotes, photos, videos, and discussion questions. The rest of the students then write individual responses, which serve both to in-

form the seminar discussion and offer a chance to discuss ideas that there may not be time to get to during the seminar.

This course is rooted in and addresses what is occurring right now, in the year 2014, with a contemporary reading list containing some publications that have not even hit the shelves yet. It is planned to be offered again in the spring of 2015, and Bloch will also teach his *Crime and the City* course in the fall of 2014. ■

# New Course: The City, the River, and the Sea

BY GREG JORDAN-DETAMORE '14



UWE GILLE (WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)

New York, London, Tokyo, Lagos, and Rio de Janeiro. Bilbao, Valparaíso, Perth, Zanzibar City, and Providence. Despite their differences, one feature that most of the world's cities — large and small — have in common is a location on some body of water, such as a river, ocean, or lake.

The coexistence of human settlements and water has many implications, both in the way the water affects people and the way people affect the water. Rebecca Carter's *The City, the River, and the Sea: Social and Environmental Change at the Water's Edge* is a perfect course for students who wish to explore the topic of human-environment interaction.

Topics covered in the course include rivers, dams, deltas, urban slums, water pollution, disaster, river restoration, urban political ecology, rising sea levels, and displacement. The course also features a series of case studies, including

the Yangtze River in China, Villa Flammable in Argentina, Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Kathmandu Valley in Nepal, the Maldives in the Indian Ocean, and the Alaskan village of Kivalina.

This course, perhaps more so than other Urban Studies courses, includes significant discussion of international examples, including ones in the Global South. Drawing on Carter's own background in anthropology, students examine not only scientific data but also ethnographic and documentary accounts.

The course is very current, with its topics of great relevance to contemporary global political discussions in an era of increased environmental awareness as well as persistent global climate change. Students emerge with an interdisciplinary understanding of the challenges of cities "at the water's edge" and opportunities for change. ■

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CONFERENCE SPOTLIGHT

## *The Return of Urban Fiscal Crisis: Alternatives to Bankruptcy (November 1–2, 2013)*

The Great Recession has had huge repercussions for the fiscal condition of cities around the world. The US is experiencing another wave of municipal bankruptcies, and Rhode Island is not exempt. The impact of the economic crisis, delayed by the stimulus, has slowly worked its way down to the states and in turn, American cities. Vulnerable municipalities — with collapsing industries, high poverty, failed investments, over-indebtedness — tipped into insolvency. Central Falls, Rhode Island emerged from bankruptcy just as Detroit declared its own. This conference convened scholars and practitioners from Rhode Island and beyond to discuss the causes of and alternatives to municipal bankruptcy under conditions of economic austerity.

The keynote speaker was Richard Ravitch, co-author with Paul Volcker of the New York State Budget Crisis Task Force Report. A diverse group of experts reviewed the Central Falls bankruptcy and sought to draw lessons from it for other cities on the brink. They assessed some of the factors that helped the city of Providence narrowly avert default in 2012 — closing schools and cutting services, negotiating new pension terms with current and retired municipal em-

ployees, and increasing PILOTs from local hospitals and universities, including Brown.

Key players from Detroit, Stockton, Vallejo, Camden and other fiscally strapped American cities presented their experiences. Speakers considered the role of the states in inhibiting or precipitating urban bankruptcies, the underfunding and risky investment of public pension funds, the need to maintain high municipal bond ratings, and speculative financing of economic development ventures. Scholars offered some comparative insights from contemporary urban fiscal crises in other countries, drew historical lessons from earlier waves of municipal distress, and identified broader trends in American municipal finance.

In addition to the Urban Studies Program, the conference was co-sponsored by the Harriet David Goldberg '56 Endowment, the Ford Foundation, and the C.M. Culver Lectureship.

Past Urban Studies conferences have included “Comparing Cities: An International Conference on Comparative Urban Studies” in March 2013 and “The City Off the Hill: Working Together for Sustainable Urbanism” in March 2012. Look out for next year’s conference! ■



There’s no better way to be urban chic than in your Brown Urban Studies t-shirt! The shirts contain the Urban Studies logo (above), designed by our very own Amy Kendall '10. The t-shirts are white and available in S, M, L, and XL, and are 100% cotton. One can be yours with a \$10 donation to the Urban Studies Program. Contact [meredith\\_paine@brown.edu](mailto:meredith_paine@brown.edu) to arrange payment and delivery. Support the Urban Studies Program and dress like the best! ■