

URBN.

URBAN STUDIES DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER

Edited and Designed by: Kyle Gee



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From The Department

Hello URBN,

Thanks for another great year in Urban Studies. We've had a banner year in our concentration. Our numbers continue to grow, and I know we've all enjoyed and learned from the many talks and events we've hosted this year. From our vibrant alumni panel on affordable housing to visits from Dian Tri Irawaty and our own Craig Barton and everything inbetween, we've had a great year for urbanism, despite the challenges we're all facing on the national scene. Cities continue to be worlds of experiment, ideas, vision, and struggle that will shape our collective future. For our seniors, who are headed out

into that world, we look forward to seeing how you help us chart that future. Thanks very much to our DUG leaders— Klara Davidson-Schmich, Riki Doumbia, James Hardy, and Josue Morales—for all the great events and get-togethers. And thanks to Mia Reiland for editing this year's forthcoming Urban Journal, and to Kyle Gee for his editorship of this newsletter. Congratulations and good luck to seniors, and best wishes to all for a restful and productive summer. See you here in the fall!

Sandy Zipp, Director

From the Editor

As this is my last work as I student at Brown University, I want to describe what this experience has meant to me. From a first-year until now, I had no idea I would end up in this position writing really anything for the school. I had no idea I would take up urban studies as a concentration as I was just trying to figure out the whole open curriculum thing. After looking though the concentrations, it was only clear that Urban Studies truly was an encapsulation of my interests as a whole and has enriched me far more than any other concentration I was considering during my sophomore year. This year has been a great one in urban studies with many events a plenty of encouraging signs

for the future of the department. Thanks for letting me write this newsletter! Enjoy!

-Kyle



KG

Rhode Island FC Season Preview

Kyle Gee

Outside of writing this newsletter, I'm a soccer player at heart—so one of the most exciting developments this year has been the rise of Rhode Island FC. After a stellar inaugural season that ended with a hard-fought loss in the USL Championship Final, the club enters its second year with high expectations. They're aiming not only to defend their Eastern Conference title but to win the league outright.



This season also marks the debut of their new home: a 10,500-seat, fully electric, soccer-specific stadium located on the

west side of the Seekonk River in Pawtucket, RI. Designed with sustainability in mind, the stadium is the first of its kind in the state and promises to bring energy and excitement to the region's growing soccer community.

By the time you read this, the season should be in full swing. Rhode Island FC kicks off with six straight away matches before hosting their inaugural home opener on May 3rd. With a mix of returning key players and exciting new signings, the team is poised to establish itself as a true powerhouse in the United Soccer League.

Parcel 5: Which Vision is Best for Providence?



<https://ppsri.org/here-are-the-four-finalists-for-parcel-5/>

The I-195 Redevelopment District Commission has selected three finalists to transform Parcel 5, a prime 1.5-acre lot in downtown Providence. Each proposal offers a unique take on urban development:

Transom Real Estate(bottom right) envisions a six-story, 220-unit residential building with five landscaped courtyards and 11,500 square feet of retail, designed to blend into the cityscape.

Design Center Partners proposes a five-story, mixed-use hub with 200 apartments (including creative workforce housing), retail, and public art spaces inspired by Fox Point.

Bluedog Capital Partners presents a six-story hybrid space featuring commercial use, a hotel, and condos, with architecture influenced by the pedestrian bridge.

Each plan reimagines how this central site will shape Providence's future. Which one do you think fits the city best?

Daniel Solomon

Kyle Gee

Daniel Solomon is a junior student at Brown Univeristy completing his studies in Urban Studies and... His most recent project was the Urban Subject. This project encapsulated the lived experience of some in Providence and on Brown’s campus. Daniel hopes that this project will help raise awareness and create more equitable solutions for disabled individuals on campuses around the country.



Photo Credits: Nick Dentamaro/Brown University.

Can you share your personal journey and how it has influenced your advocacy for the blind and visually impaired community?

Yeah, so I’m from Miami, and I was born with ocular albinism, which is a genetic condition that makes me very light-sensitive. My eyes shake back and forth uncontrollably, and I have poor visual acuity.

When I was growing up, my parents were very insistent that I attend a traditional public school instead of a school for the blind. This was a major decision in my life because it meant I was in an environment where teachers and classmates had never interacted with a blind or visually impaired person before.

As a result, I had to engage in a lot of self-advocacy, helping others understand who I am, what my condition means, and how they could best support me. At a societal level, I also wanted to destigmatize blindness, as there are many misconceptions about what it means to be blind.

For example, the media often portrays blindness with negative tropes, and even synonyms for “blind” in a thesaurus include words like aloof, ignorant, or unknowing—which can be very demoralizing for blind and visually impaired people.

This self-advocacy experience led me to apply my skills to broader advocacy efforts, including education, the arts, and fighting anti-Semitism.

Could you describe “The Blind Urban Subject” and its objective?

Yes! The Blind Urban Subject is an interactive public art installation that allows people to experience a simulation of blindness from the perspective of the four most common eye conditions in America:

Glaucoma
Macular Degeneration
Cataracts
Diabetic Retinopathy

The goal is to encourage urban spontaneity and curiosity by allowing people to engage in an experience that challenges their usual perspective. The installation is often placed at a busy urban intersection, where people already have their own mental image

of the space. The idea is for them to reimagine that space through the lens of visual impairment, making them more aware of how differently people experience the same environment.

Many people assume that blindness means total darkness, but in reality, it is much more complex. Blindness is not a simple sliding scale between full vision and no vision—it’s a multi-dimensional experience that affects everyone differently.

Through this project, we hope to break down stereotypes and educate people about the diversity of visual impairment.

How does your concentration in Urban Studies inform your approach to accessibility and inclusivity in the urban environment?

Actually, The Blind Urban Subject originated from my experience in an Urban Studies class, specifically URBN 210 (The City).

There was a unit in the course called “The Urban Subject,” which encouraged students to understand urban life from different perspectives—including gender, race, ethnicity, and religion.

When I was completing a streetscape assignment, I had a moment where I critically reflected on how my experience as a blind person was different from others when navigating urban spaces. That’s when I realized it would be meaningful to share that experience with others through an

interactive project.

This relates to urban planning because cities are not always designed for everyone. The classic flâneur (urban wanderer) is often envisioned as a middle-aged affluent white man in France, which is not representative of society as a whole.

So when we design cities, we have to ask fundamental questions:

For whom is the city designed?
How do different people experience urban life?

How can we make cities more inclusive?
This connects to universal design—the idea that making cities more accessible for blind and visually impaired people ultimately improves cities for everyone.

Are there any other projects or initiatives you are working on to promote inclusivity?

Yes! We are currently in the process of bringing The Blind Urban Subject to New York City.

We’re working with the New York City government and are currently in the permitting process to install it in SoHo, Manhattan.

Additionally, this project is connected to a research study that I’m conducting with Professor Yapp. The study analyzes public perceptions of blindness through urban public art.

Our plan is to take the findings from the Providence study, replicate it in New York City, and then compare the results. While Brown University might feel like a microcosm of the world, we’ll see if those perceptions hold up in a much larger, more diverse environment like NYC.

I’m really excited about the New York launch, as it will expose these ideas to a wider audience from many different backgrounds.

How can educational institutions better support blind and visually impaired students, both academically and socially?

That’s a great question. I think higher education institutions can support blind and visually impaired students both academically and socially through the same core principle: understanding.

Academically:
Professors should be willing to work with students and have open conversations about how to make their courses more accessible. Simply asking, “How can I best support you?” can make a huge difference.

The goal is for students to enjoy their courses and gain substantive knowledge—not to struggle because of unnecessary barriers beyond the actual course content.

Socially:
There needs to be a culture of curiosity and inclusion. One thing I’ve appreciated at Brown is that many of my peers genuinely want to learn more about my experience as a blind person and how they can be supportive.

This openness should apply to all identities and backgrounds. People don’t have to agree on everything, but understanding how different life experiences shape perspectives can make us all more empathetic.

If we had more conversations about why people think the way they do, the world would be a much better place.

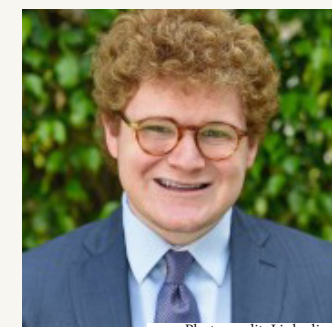


Photo credit: LinkedIn

City Valentines

Kyle Gee

The Urban DUG launched its first event of the year with Valentines to Our Cities, an open forum and creative space for members to share their love or critiques of cities from around the world. Participants brought their unique perspectives and artistic flair, showcasing thoughtful and imaginative creations that highlighted what they admire or wish they could change about different urban spaces.

The event had a great turnout, filled with lively discussion, laughter, and plenty of creative expression. To top it all off, attendees enjoyed festive heart-shaped cookies from Insomnia, making for a sweet and spirited start to the semester.



KG

Careers in Affordable Housing

James Hardy

This February, the Urban Studies Program and the URBN DUG hosted the “Careers in Affordable Housing” alumni panel, bringing urban studies alums back to campus to discuss their work in a diverse set of subfields within housing affordability. Cory Mian ‘01, Senior Vice President of Real Estate Development at Preservation of Affordable Housing in Boston, shared her perspective as an affordable housing developer in one of the most notoriously unaffordable cities in the country. Jose Loya ‘10, Assistant Professor in the Department of Urban Planning at UCLA’s Luskin School of Public Affairs, discussed his journey from affordable development to academia, where he has affected sig-

nificant change in affordable housing policy. C. Marisa Rodriguez ‘10, Vice President of Acquisitions/Underwriting at Hudson Housing Capital in New York City, described the financial side of affordable housing development, noting the existing challenges and potential emergent ones under the current administration. Kyler Carlson ‘19, Project Manager at the Housing Authority of San Buenaventura, California, shared how public sector development operates and showcased a project he has been working on lately. In their dialogue together, these alums painted a picture of the current state of the field and showed students what different careers in affordable housing can look like.

Can Jam

Riki Doumbia

The Avenue Concept x Urban Studies: The Urban Concept On March 14th, the Urban Studies DUG organized our first outing of the semester to travel with 14 people downtown to the arts nonprofit The Avenue Concept for a spraypaint tutorial, otherwise known as a “Can Jam.” PaintBar Manager Kendel Jo-seph and Program Manager Christen Makram led the tutorial. The Avenue Concept is a visual public arts organization that supports local artists through sponsorship in creating and displaying art. One of these murals includes the famed “Still Here” artwork by artist Gaia on Custom House St in Providence.

After a round of introductions and an explanation of the critical work the organization does to support local artistry, we made our way outside after grabbing essential gear (a smock, mask, and shoe covers!). We were welcomed by a blank blue wall and split into two groups to alternate. We began by forming shapes and quickly realized the efficiency of connecting several shapes rather than restarting with a new lift of the can each time. As instructed, we began with squared, progressing to hearts, and experimenting with new techniques—all demonstrated by experienced artist Kendel Joseph. Throughout the activity, we were allowed to switch out cans for different colors. Towards the end of it, we grew incredibly comfortable with twisting the nozzle caps off in order to replace a can. As we exercised new techniques, we learned about

the art scene in Providence and what is considered the main difference between street art and graffiti writing. As explained by the The Avenue Concept organizers, the emphasis for graffiti writing is placed on the letters with a word-based approach, while the emphasis for street art is placed on the visual piece with an image-based approach. Within an hour and a half, the once empty blue wall had been filled with streaks of color and bountiful images. Soon enough, we were given the opportunity to have free rein around the courtyard to demonstrate our skills. Not too long after, several “URBN”s were spotted around the courtyard in true Urban Studies fashion.

If you want to read a more abstract and artistic piece about this activity, head to the Urban Journal!



“Narrating Change: Stories from Urban Southeast Asia”

Kyle Gee

On April 11, the Urban Studies Department hosted a vibrant joint symposium titled “Narrating Change: Stories from Urban Southeast Asia” in collaboration with the Department of English. Held in Room 310 of Andrews House at the Cogut Institute, the event brought together scholars, students, and community members to explore how storytelling can be a powerful tool in participatory urban planning and understanding city life.

The evening began with a workshop led by Dr. Dian Tri Irawaty of the Rujak Center for Urban Studies in Jakarta, Indonesia. Her session, Participatory Planning through Storytelling, invited participants to think critically about urban spaces and share their own experiences of how policy, environment, and everyday life intersect in Southeast Asian megacities like Jakarta and Manila. Through an engaging and interactive format, Dr. Irawaty emphasized the importance of community voice in shaping equitable and resilient urban futures.

Following a shared meal of catered Filipino food and informal conversations, the symposium continued with a literary reading of true urban stories. This segment featured contributions from Brown and Ateneo de Manila University

students, as well as guest speakers Dr. Charlie Veric, Professor of English at Ateneo, and writers Meredith Talusan and Grace Talusan. The reading was livestreamed to a virtual audience across Southeast Asia and the U.S., creating a dynamic, cross-cultural space of reflection and exchange.

The event brought to light the deeply personal and political dimensions of urban change, offering stories of resilience, displacement, belonging, and transformation. With participants joining both in person and online, Narrating Change demonstrated the power of stories to build solidarity, foster dialogue, and imagine new urban possibilities across borders.



The Urban DUG Hosts Dr. Craig Barton for a Discussion on Urban Renewal in Providence

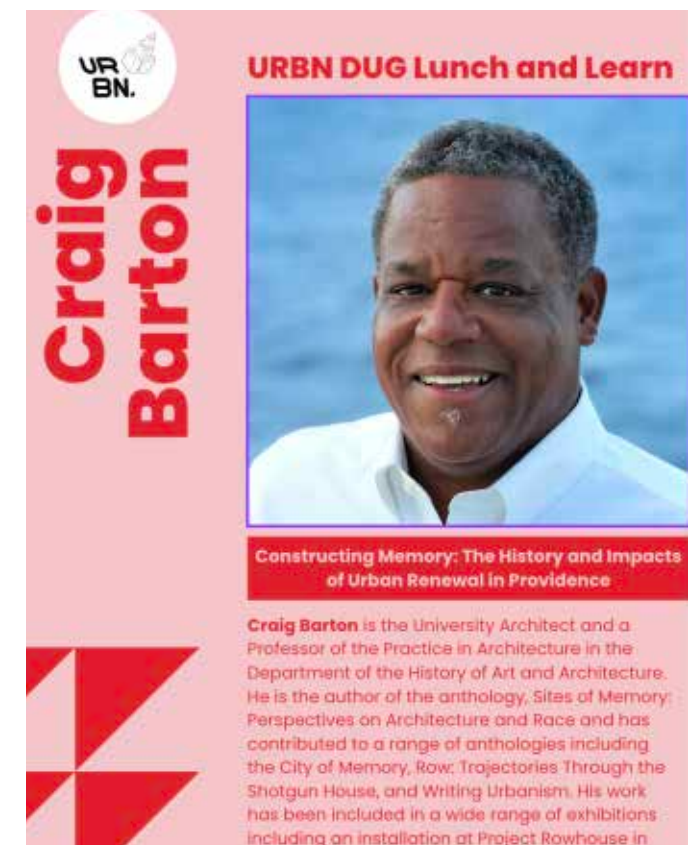
Kyle Gee

On April 16, The Urban DUG welcomed Dr. Craig Barton to Maxcy Hall for an engaging discussion about “Constructing Memory: The History and Impacts of Urban Renewal in Providence.” The event offered a powerful exploration of the historical changes that have shaped College Hill, with a particular focus on how urban renewal policies affected minority communities in the area.

Dr. Barton shared the personal journey that sparked his interest in historical memory and preservation, rooted in his work in West Virginia and family ties to the Providence area. He shed light on the destruction caused by urban renewal projects and examined the evolving relationship between Brown University and the surrounding community.

Using historical maps, Dr. Barton visualized the transformation of

the neighborhood, illustrating how these changes sparked the formation of advocacy groups committed to preservation efforts today. He also emphasized the critical role that race and socio-economic status played in the reshaping of College Hill—particularly on Benefit Street, where Black families were displaced to make way for new development.



Event Photos

Spring 2025



Sanborn Fire Insurance 1951



Wriston Quadrangle Site Demolition



Wriston Quadrangle Aerial View

Sanborn Fire Insurance 1921



Student Photos

Spring 2025

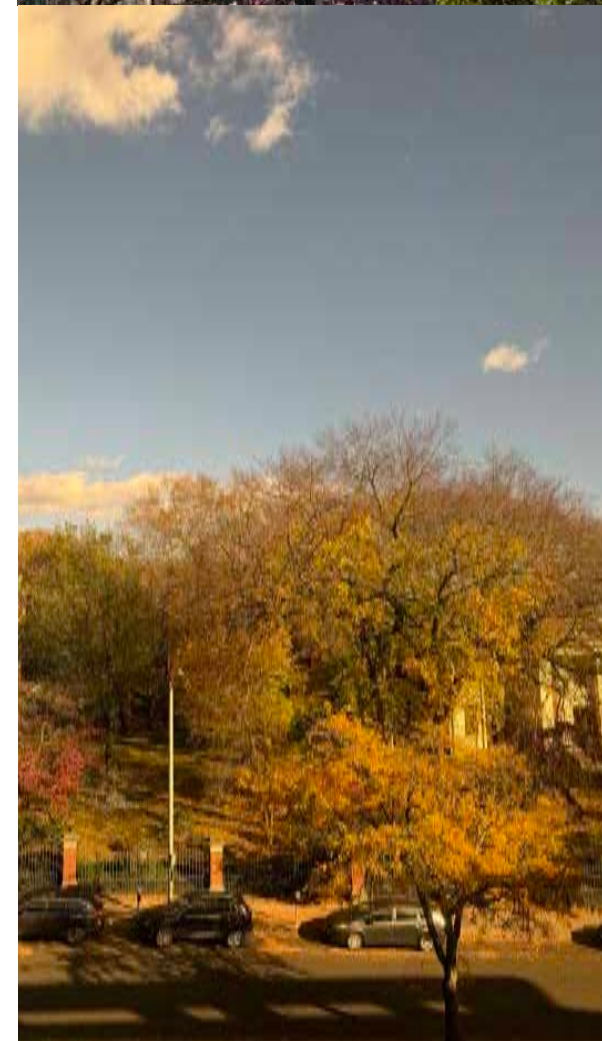


Photo Credit: AL



Sudoku

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			4					
						5		
6		1	7					
		4	1					
	5					2		
				8			6	
	3		9	1				

@full90+

"Cities are where dreams are made, and futures are forged," - Italo Calvino

follow @motivateandbreathe on tiktok for more vids

Be in Touch



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Thanks to Samuel Zipp for allowing
 me to create this year's Newsletter!