

# URBAN STUDIES



Cover photos (from top left):  
Downtown/Foxpoint neighborhoods  
in Providence, 1951-1952, 1972,  
2002, courtesy of the Providence  
Plan's online Historical Aerial  
Mapper; Model of master plan  
proposal for the vacant I-195 parcels  
in downtown Providence as part of  
Brown and RISD's "Land Use  
Planning" studio course.

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITORS, Ben Gellman '14 and Kate Blessing '13



*Above: Ben Gellman '14*

*Below: Kate Blessing '13*



Cities are complex entities. Both of us have come to Brown from Detroit, a city that has suffered immense losses and most recently taken the national stage for its Emergency Manager debate. However, we're the first ones to say that there is more to Detroit than its spectacularly decrepit auto factories and financial straits. The city also serves as one of the globe's most iconic centers of urban innovation, past and present.

When we left Detroit to come to Brown, we found excuses to study the city as much as possible. With each class, we have learned more about our hometown--where it has come from and how it has gotten to where it is today.

Many within the Urban Studies program at Brown share our Rust Belt roots; however, not all of our studies have revolved around narratives of urban life that reflect our own city's. The Urban Studies

Program has been valuable in connecting dots between urban experiences from across the globe, challenging us to think about urban life more holistically and draw connections between our hometown and other cities.

In this newsletter, concentrators share some of their experiences in vastly different urban contexts. Alex Lipinsky discusses his relationship with urban agriculture in Youngstown; Benson Tucker discusses the role of Urban Studies in shaping his post-graduation plans; theses from eight concentrators reflect trends in urban life from San Salvador to Motown to Australian airports. It is through the Urban Studies program that we have come to encompass such varying perspectives on urban space, and through which we've been able to exchange the wisdom that these communities have given us throughout our career at Brown.

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### ALUMNA PROFILE

Lizette Cháparro '12 used to run the Urban Studies newsletter and participate heavily in the DUG during her time at Brown. Currently, she is enrolled at Rutgers University in New Jersey where she is pursuing a Master of City and Regional Planning Degree. During her first semester at Rutgers, Lizette built on the great foundation she received from the Urban Studies Program and

pursued coursework in community development. Lizette is also involved in research on campus; currently, she is conducting studies of immigrant worker centers and community development credit unions with Dr. James DeFilippis. Their work will be published in late spring. We wish Lizette the best of luck in her endeavors this semester and summer, including an internship with the Hudson County Division of Planning!





## DIRECTOR'S GREETINGS

Hilary Silver



Urban Studies has had a busy and exciting year. In addition to the welcome addition of a new Academic Program Coordinator, Meredith Paine, our faculty grew this year. In the fall, Dr. Yesim Sungu-Eryilmaz, an urban planner, taught two new courses, "Sustainable Urbanism" and "Regional Planning." Bob Azar, who was serving as Acting Director of the Providence Planning Department, taught his "Downtown Development" course. Professor Nathaniel Baum-Snow, an urban economist, joined our ranks, as did a new Assistant Professor of Sociology and Urban Studies, Josh Pacewicz, who taught "The City," our multidisciplinary introductory course, and an ethnographic fieldwork class. And Professor Dietrich Neumann teamed up with RISD architect Friedrich St. Florian and Yale architect Ed Mitchell to teach an innovative course on "Land Use

Planning" in which the cross-institutional teams developed designs for the empty parcels in the former path of I-195.

In the spring, we were fortunate to hire another Assistant Professor, this time of Anthropology and Urban Studies, Rebecca Carter. She has been visiting at Brown as an ACLS postdoc, offering a course on Urban Life in which students collectively studied Kennedy Plaza in downtown Providence and presented an exhibition of their work in the Haffenreffer Museum (see "Faculty Profile" on page 7 for more on Rebecca Carter). Urban Studies is also in the "Law & Order" business. This spring, Chris Smith offered a fabulous course on "Crime and Policing," and next year, we will have a new postdoc, Stefano Bloch, offering "Crime and the City" and a cool new course on graffiti and other city arts. Finally, we partnered with Environmental Studies and Engineering to offer a cutting edge course on "Guts of the City" (AKA urban infrastructure). After all the natural disasters in cities around the world, we realized that our curriculum needs to expand into new fields like urban resilience.

Sadly, we are also losing a faculty member. Vernon Henderson, our esteemed colleague in Economics, is retiring from Brown, but moving to the London School of Economics! Please join me in wishing him well.

The program's internal review reached out to our students and

the College Curriculum Council for suggestions about improving the curriculum. One innovation is to guide students through a "focus area" that culminates in a capstone. Another change is to offer an Honors Thesis Workshop in seniors' final semester. In 2013, eight students peer-reviewed their independent work and helped each other finish their theses in time to present their work to the entire program in May, followed by the traditional spring barbecue in our back yard.

Urban Studies is internationalizing, so this year's conference on March 16 concentrated on comparing cities. Our honors students introduced the speakers who came from Europe and elsewhere in the United States. The program is on our website, as is a video of the entire conference, so you can belatedly "attend" it too!

As you can see, under the able leadership of Kate Blessing and Alex Lipinsky, our DUG is active and vigorous. Last September, they organized our first urban film festival. Taking advantage of the outdoor screen at the new Granoff Center, we showed *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth* and *Urbanized* under the stars, with food carts nearby for refreshments.

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!



## SENIOR HONORS THESES

### ***Sam Cohen (top left), "Measuring BIDs: An Empirical Analysis of BIDs in Southern New England"***

The first Business Improvement District (BID) in the United States was implemented in New Orleans in 1974. Today there are close to 1,000 designated districts throughout the U.S. A BID is a legal mechanism that levies additional taxes on property owners within a defined area to supplement services provided by the city. The fundamental goal of a BID is to enable businesses in a dense urban core to establish a sustainable funding source and implement an authority to distribute the pooled revenues in an effort to create a more appealing urban fabric and establish an economically thriving downtown. My thesis explores what definitive impacts BIDs can have through a comparative and empirical analysis of the twenty-two BIDs in Southern New England. This analytical study will measure the success of BIDs as mechanisms to facilitate urban revitalization and economic development.

### ***Manu Venkat (second from top), "Virtual Cities, Real Significance: Dissecting the Value System of the SimCity Games"***

Since the original game was released in 1989, the SimCity franchise of city-simulation computer games has introduced millions of individuals around the world to the field of urban planning. Despite their flashy graphics and entertainment value, ultimately the SimCity games are texts, complete with assumptions and value judgments about city life. My aim is to identify these factors and link them to real-

world paradigms of urban theory and planning.

### ***Pearse Haley (second from bottom), "That's the Way the School Building Crumbles: How Collaborative Local Governance Can Improve School Quality"***

I am exploring the promotion of small, community-oriented schools as a means of addressing the poor quality of America's public school infrastructure despite record spending in recent years. I am looking at the pairing of mixed-income housing with new schools and increased collaboration between school districts and city governments as means of creating these types of schools. I argue that policy changes to promote these two changes combined with increased participation of community stakeholders and design professionals in school planning will produce a more equitable stock of public schools.

### ***Dawson Dohlen (bottom left), "Bend-But-Don't Break: An Ethnographic Investigation of the Improbable Existence of Providence's Gay Bathhouses"***

My thesis is an ethnographic investigation of the two gay bathhouses in Providence, Rhode Island. My analysis defines the bathhouse in three ways: as a sexual space, as a gay community institution, and as a profit-driven business. Within each of these functions various tensions are observed that make the existence of these institutions seem improbable. A close examination of the bathhouses through each of these lenses, however, demonstrates how and why they continue to exist despite obvious tensions.



**Kate Holguin (top right), “Changing the Course of L.A.: Lessons from the Revitalization of the Los Angeles River”**

My thesis tells the story of the Los Angeles River, from the time of the Gabrielino Indians to its designation as a flood control channel in the late 1930s, to river revitalization efforts that are happening today. The restoration of a large-scale project like the fifty-one mile Los Angeles River is not only feasible, but also better for urban revitalization than something smaller. Thirty-two miles of the Los Angeles River run through two-dozen neighborhoods in the City of Los Angeles, and thus the river acts as a natural connecting fabric weaving together the Southern California metropolis. Innovative approaches to public-private partnerships in the river’s restoration are confirming that it is possible for the political, economic, social, and environmental spheres of Los Angeles to intersect in a way that promotes healthy growth and sustainable development of the city. Los Angeles is proving to be a leading city of the twenty-first century, demonstrating a successful approach to restoring the fragmented American metropolis.

**Cody Shulman (second from top), “Aerotropolis, New South Wales”**

My thesis topic involves analyzing aviation as the, intercity transport means of the future, exploring the Airport City and Aerotropolis development models, and applying them to Sydney, Australia. Sydney’s current airport is at critical capacity and unable to expand and the city itself is in a population growth crunch given the natural barriers almost entirely surrounding the core area and its inner suburbs.

**Sam Askin (second from bottom), “The Real Victims of Gang Violence: Local Impacts of Violence on Urban Development in Guatemala City, San Salvador, and Ciudad Juárez”**

My thesis is a comparative analysis of gang violence in three cities: San Salvador, Guatemala City, and Ciudad Juarez. The purpose of the paper is to explore the ways in which pervasive gang violence affects daily urban life on a local level.

**Kate Blessing (bottom right), “Citizen Warriors: Community Action and Maximum Feasible Participation in Detroit’s War on Poverty, 1964-1969”**

Although the “Riots” were certainly an undeniable turning point in Detroit’s history, historians have dwelled on them at the expense of other equally important points in the city’s history. This thesis aims to provide an in-depth exploration of the city’s Community Action Program, a program whose mechanisms for citizen involvement won the city a healthy share of praise in its day. Detroit’s poverty program, and not the Riots, forged a new group of active African American citizens went on to lead political careers in Detroit. This thesis examines a program that functioned before and after the Riots in an attempt to illustrate a degree of continuity in Detroit’s history that scholars and colloquial storytellers alike do not focus on. The Riots were a turning point—the poverty program changed because of them—but there were other turning points in the city’s history during that decade.





## THE FLANNEL FARMS EXPERIMENT

*Alex Lipinsky '13*

Urban farms and community gardens are starting all over the country. Growing Power, Inc. is a farm getting large amounts of attention and foundation support. They are known for their innovative aquaponics system and, specifically, raising fish with salad greens in vertical systems. The idea is to take advantage of limited real estate by building up, a system designed for plastic greenhouses. One of these houses can have fish, beds of lettuce and water cress, microgreens and sprouts, pots of tomatoes hanging from supporting posts, and mushrooms bags hanging at the top. The system is intensive, diverse, and grows valuable produce.

My plan once I graduate from Brown this May is to develop a for-

profit aquaponics farm that can be easily replicated and scaled for lots of any size. My hometown of Youngstown, Ohio and cities that have lost population across the Midwest have an abundance of land, but it is usually not contiguous. By modifying Growing Power's systems, entrepreneurs will be able to start a farming business or grow their own food



on the vacant lots in their neighborhoods.

Another goal of the project is teenage employment. An aquaponics class was recently added to the curriculum of the local technical school in Youngstown, but there are currently no jobs working with aquaponics in the area. Hopefully this project will be the next step for high school graduates with technical knowledge in urban agriculture.

*Alex Lipinsky '13 (middle) with fellow Youngstown-natives Aref (left) and Kelsey (right) on market day.*

## FIELDWORK IN THE URBAN COMMUNITY

*Ben Gellman '14*

Last semester, fifteen Urban Studies concentrators participated in a course entitled "Fieldwork in the Urban Community," in which they took charge of semester-long research projects that engaged with the city of Providence. Professor Jan Pacewicz, who arrived on campus this fall, taught the course and oversaw the various projects that it elicited.

The Fieldwork seminar enabled

students within the concentration to dedicate a full semester to critical analysis of an issue of their choosing within greater Providence, and to utilize on-site fieldwork to unpack this given issue. Students conducted interviews, site visits, and archival research, among other methods, to engage with their projects and arrive at possible answers to their research questions.

Students took on a wide range of projects throughout the course. One student launched an analysis of the Apple Store at Providence Place Mall, considering the

demographics of its customers and how it fits into the consumer ecosystem of the city as a whole. Another student shadowed Bob Azar, a planner in the Providence Department of Planning & Development, to examine the planner's perspective on citizen participation. Other projects included an analysis of "Mothers News," a local comic magazine; an analysis of squatter settlements in formerly industrial Providence buildings; a study of demographic change in Federal Hill; and a historical study of a local prison in Central Falls.

## REFLECTIONS

Ben Tucker '13



A problem that I imagine many Urban Studies concentrators face — and it's a good problem to have — is trying to articulate some distinction between what they do academically and what they do personally, practically, or professionally. I've found the line to be more or less invisible. The academic mode can take many forms for the student of the city.

Providence holds countless fascinations that might be expressed equally well in academic framing and in anecdote. For a few years, I've been interested in the changing reality of Providence's political economy. Various labels can do a certain amount of work in

the description: post-industrial, globalized, you could even grab terms from 'failed state' discourse. In the city's changing electorate, and in the unique relation of governmental scales found in the Providence city-state, immigration looms large as a topic for research.

Even as Rhode Island sees a gradual population decline, the immigrant population of Providence rises: now around 30% of the city's residents are foreign-born. Yet the Ocean State has also been among the strictest immigration law enforcement locations, certainly during the Carcieri administration. The disconnect between policy consequences and the interests of residents has resulted in careful politicking, with officials trying to sell the same policies in different ways to different audiences. Pointing out the misrepresentations and connecting the policy story to a story of people on the ground in Providence proves a fitting task for the urban studies academic citizen. I've tried to do that in my research, reporting, and commentary on Rhode Island immigration policy, writing pieces with varying degrees

of wonkiness in the *Providence Journal* and the *College Hill Independent*.

The oldest academic task, teaching, also involves looking out into the city. As a teaching assistant for the Introduction to Urban Studies this semester, I helped a new crop of urban students administer the neighborhood small business survey that the class has implemented in years past. Students get their first brush with social scientific response coding and the struggles of drawing fairly private information out of strangers, but they also get into longer conversations with small business owners than they likely ever had before. The academic mode of interacting provides a way to see more of the city that is really around them, and if the survey worked as planned, it should have even given them access to attitudes and perspectives they would have never encountered as tourists. As I work with the survey data this semester, I hope to create a report with valuable information for government and business in Providence and demonstrate that enriching data flows both ways.

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## FACULTY PROFILE: REBECCA CARTER

Rebecca Carter, a native of Nashville, TN, is the newest addition to the Urban Studies faculty. A social, cultural, and urban anthropologist, her research

revolves around two Atlantic delta cities (New Orleans, LA and Saint-Louis, Senegal) and specifically the re-creation of person and place in these communities. She is excited to be a part of what she sees as a great place of convergence of conversations and disciplines.



**URBAN STUDIES ONLINE**

Check out the new and improved Urban Studies website! Our internal review process identified some the ways to make our site more interesting and informative to those off campus. Theresa O'Neil, for example, is featured on the capstone page of our new website, describing her great job building green buildings. There are now photos of the faculty, a few pictures of alumni, and you can even stream one of our former students' films!

Don't forget our lively Facebook page (Urban Studies DUG at Brown University)! Be sure to "Like" us. Alumni and students are always posting opportunities and fascinating information about

urban affairs around the world. Let us hear your own news and views. Share 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 APPAREL**

No better way to be urban chic than in your Urban Studies T-shirt! The shirts contain the Urban Studies logo (pictured right) designed by Amy Kendall '10. The T-shirts are white and available in S, M, L, XL and are 100% cotton. Available with a \$10 donation to Urban Studies (Brown University, Box 1833, Providence, RI 02912). Cheques should be made payable to "Brown University."



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