This course, intended for advanced undergraduates who need not be Bloustein School majors, offers an introduction to how municipal government actually works, especially in large and mid-sized cities. It emphasizes the political, economic, social and demographic settings that cities and their governments find or create for themselves and where they must operate. It focuses primarily, but not exclusively, on American cities over about the last century and a half. The course sessions will consist of presentations by the instructor and then class discussion. The students will do three take-home exams drawing on the assigned reading and other sources, plus a research paper at the end of the course.

Of the assigned books, Judd and Swanstrom take a more general view of cities, their history, their issues and their prospects. Then Rae explores specifically how such themes play out in New Haven, Connecticut, a middle-sized old Northeast city with a large university and hospital presence (sound familiar?), and analyzes the implications of this experience for other places. (He, unlike Judd and Swanstrom, has combined academic and serious inside-City Hall work.) The instructor may assign additional short readings, mostly from newspapers, academic journals or the Web, as needed.

The last assignment for the course is a research paper, which may be on any topic relevant to the course that the instructor approves. There will be no shortage of material from which to choose topics or approaches, and the instructor wants students to use their imaginations to develop adventuresome analytic (not solely descriptive) subjects and treatments. The paper should be 10-12 pages, not counting notes, references and graphics.

The instructor expects the exams and research papers to be original products written for this course only. He—and the Bloustein School and Rutgers in general—take plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty VERY seriously. For proof, see the pages on the subject in both the Bloustein School and the Rutgers University catalogues. The penalties for misconduct range
from a failing grade on a paper or an exam to expulsion from Rutgers. If a student has questions on such matters, he/she should consult the instructor. But as a rule of thumb, if you think you may be doing something academically dishonest, you probably are. On a related subject, Wikipedia and other encyclopedias, on-line or off—, are good places to begin research and terrible places to end it. Use them as jump-off points. Don’t cite them.

Twenty percent of the student’s grade comes each of the three take-home exams, and thirty percent from the research paper. The exams and papers must use sources beyond the texts, the instructor’s class presentations and those mentioned in the note on sources below. Ten percent of the grade comes from class participation and general conscientiousness, including getting work in on time.

Some of the class discussion will deal with sensitive matters—issues of race or ethnicity, of economic disparities and fairness, of gender and sexuality, or simply of differences between cities and suburbs or varying kinds of each. Let’s make the class a safe place to talk about these undeniably vexing concerns. Let’s be civil to each other. There are—and always have been—nasty national models of behavior coming from both political parties and all political persuasions. Let’s not be that way. Let’s do our good-faith best to learn from each other and our differences.

All written work for the course should be typed double-spaced. The instructor expects all work to meet advanced undergraduate standards of writing and will lower the grade of any that does not. The instructor also expects students to attend all classes and do the reading for them carefully.

**Schedule**

September 5  Introduction.

September 12 The nineteenth-century context: Judd and Swanstrom, Preface and Chapters 1-4.

September 19 The twentieth-century explosion: Judd and Swanstrom: Chapters 5-8.

September 26 The uneasy resolution I: Judd and Swanstrom: Chapters 9-11.

October 3 The uneasy resolution II: Judd and Swanstrom, Chapters 13-15. First take-home exam handed out.

October 10 Exam due by class time.

October 17 Again, nineteenth-century urbanism: Rae, Preface and Chapters 1-3.

October 24 Deeper into nineteenth-century urbanism: Rae, Chapters 4-6. Second take-home exam handed out.
October 31  Exam due by class time.
November 7  New Haven’s explosion: Rae, Chapters 7-8.
November 14 New Haven’s temporary resolution: Rae, Chapters 9-10.
November 21 No class: Thanksgiving vacation.
November 28 New Haven’s long-term resolution: Rae, Chapters 11-12. Third take-home exam given out.
December 5  Exam due by class time.
December 12 To be announced.
December 14  Research paper due in instructor’s office at noon.

A note on sources


Most major American newspapers and large local TV stations have reporters on urban beats, though they may not be called that. (The “cityside desk” used to be the term for where they work.) There are book-length political analyses and histories of nearly every major American city, with particular emphases on New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Atlanta. (Note the regional balance.) Many big-city mayors have been biographical subjects: both Richard Daleys in Chicago, Rudolph Giuliani in New York, and historical figures like Albany’s Erastus Corning II, Memphis’ Ed Crump, Boston’s James Curley, Jersey City’s Frank Hague, New York’s Seth Low, Philadelphia’s Frank Rizzo, among many others.

There is a growing literature on suburbia—for instance, Robert Beauregard’s When America Became Suburban (2006); Robert Fishman, Bourgeois Utopia: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia (1987); Ann Forsyth, Reforming Suburbia: The Planned Communities of Irvine, Columbia and The Woodlands (2005); Suzanne Keller, Community: Pursuing the Dream, Living the Reality (2003); Kevin Kruse and Thomas Sugrue (eds.), The New Suburban History (2006); and Adam

The are large historical, theoretical and practical literatures on specific urban issues such as planning, zoning, education, municipal finance, public health, economic development, energy, immigration, poverty, housing, transportation, welfare, environment, law enforcement, globalization, waste disposal, food systems, social movements, urban-suburban relations, natural disasters, terrorism, historic preservation, tourism, corruption, gender experiences, African, Hispanic and Native American and other ethnic and racial concerns.

Any number of specialized periodicals can be useful. Among those with the word “urban” in their titles are Journal of Urban Affairs; Journal of Urbanism; Urban Affairs Review; and Urban Geography. Then there are, among many others, American Historical Review; Annals of the Association of American Geographers; City Journal; Governing; Housing Policy Debate (disclosure: the instructor is on its editorial board); Journal of American History; Journal of the American Planning Association; Journal of Geography (ditto); Journal of Planning History; Journal of Planning Literature; Opolis: An International Journal of Suburban and Metropolitan Studies; Planning; and Progress in Planning, plus place-specific periodicals (such as High Country News and Western Historical Quarterly for the American West) or disciplinary ones (such as those on hazardous waste, housing or public finance).

Google News is often helpful for finding smaller newspapers or exploring unusual issues. The nation’s leading journalist whose work focuses on urban issues is probably Neal Peirce, whose syndicated columns and other writings are at citistates.com. Interesting new urban and neighborhood blogs appear all the time—for example, Burgh Diaspora, which writes about Pittsburgh partly to get people who have left the city to return.

Many professional associations focus on urban issues, such as the American Planning Association, American Public Human Services Association, American Public Works Association, Council of Great City Schools, International City Management Association, National Association of Counties, National League of Cities, U.S. Conference of Mayors and numerous others, plus their many state and local counterparts. Most of the national organizations have members; publish newsletters, magazines, journals and more technical studies that are often on-line; maintain state or big-city local chapters; and try to influence local, state and federal legislation of concern to them. If you want to get the flavor of such groups, the New Jersey Chapter of the American Planning Association meets on Friday, November 2, in New Brunswick at the Hyatt Hotel, and admission for students is free. The instructor is speaking there on cities with falling populations.