History of American Landscapes and Architecture

COURSE GUIDE

HIS/IAR 624           Fall 2008
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Course Objectives

A landscape “happens not by chance but by contrivance, by premeditation, by design.” –John Stilgoe, Common Landscape of America

This course is designed as an advanced reading seminar in the history of American landscapes and architecture. The course will introduce you to a variety of methods developed by architectural and cultural historians to interpret buildings and landscapes as cultural artifacts with historically specific meanings that must be understood in particular context over time. An important objective of the course is to go beyond classroom reading and discussion to application of specific scholars’ arguments and methodologies through analysis of particular buildings and landscapes.

By the end of the semester you should be able to do the following:

• Identify and explain the defining characteristics of major periods in the development of the American landscape from the colonial era through the mid-twentieth century.
• Explain how buildings and landscapes document cultural and social change over time.
• Define particular architectural styles and use specialized architectural vocabulary/terminology accurately.
• Explain the differences between vernacular and academic building traditions and the approaches to studying them.
• Compare and contrast the methodologies developed by a variety of scholars to interpret landscape and architecture as historical evidence.

• Use different interpretive approaches to evaluate a particular landscape or building in historical context.

**Evaluation**

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<th>Component</th>
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<td>Participation and Reading Responses</td>
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<td>Midterms</td>
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<td>Research Bibliography/PowerPoint Presentation</td>
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All written assignments should be typed, with appropriate citations in Turabian style [http://library.uncg.edu/depts/ref/handouts/turabian.html](http://library.uncg.edu/depts/ref/handouts/turabian.html). You will submit your written assignments electronically to my email address on the appropriate due date. Late assignments will be penalized. Communication is essential …you should make arrangements substantially in advance of the due date if you are unable to meet a course deadline.

**Participation and Reading Responses (15%)**

This assessment will be based on three elements:

1. Consistent attendance—this is a seminar, not a traditional lecture course. We will be critically evaluating the content of the readings and practicing the application of analytical skills during each class period. You will not be able to make up for your absences by copying someone else's notes. Consistent attendance is essential to your learning in this course. Therefore, beyond the part attendance plays in the overall participation grade, **there will be a 3% reduction of your final grade for each absence after the first 1**. Beyond even this penalty, a student who seriously neglects attendance and preparation risks failing the course.

2. Thorough preparation for class—readings must be completed before class and assignments must be turned in on time. I will evaluate your comprehension of reading assignments through periodic one-page reading responses.

3. Regular contributions to class discussions—the success of this course for your learning depends on active intellectual engagement with your peers.

**Midterm and Final (50%)**

You will complete two take-home tests consisting of a choice of essay questions. The questions will be distributed 1-2 weeks in advance of due dates. All answers should be typed and double-spaced, about 7-10 pages long, with appropriate citations in Turabian style [http://library.uncg.edu/depts/ref/handouts/turabian.html](http://library.uncg.edu/depts/ref/handouts/turabian.html). You will submit your essays electronically to my email address: lctolber@uncg.edu on the due dates identified in the course schedule below.
Reading Landscape: Research Bibliography and PowerPoint Presentation (35%)
The primary goal of this assignment is to practice reading a specific landscape or building using interpretive strategies developed by scholars whose work you’ve encountered in the course and through independent research. You will analyze visual evidence, put your building/landscape in appropriate historical context, create a meaningful research bibliography useful for understanding your subject, and present your analysis of the subject to the class in a PowerPoint presentation at the end of the semester. See the guidelines posted to Bb for more specific instructions. Presentations will be scheduled for Nov. 12 and 19.

Course Readings

Books (Available at the UNCG bookstore)

Book Chapters/Journal Articles (Available on electronic reserve or online as noted.)


**Course Schedule**

### 27 August

Introductions

### 3 September

**Form and Style: Learning to Look at Architecture**

*American Architectural History* Reader:

- Introduction / Keith L. Eggener


**Writing Exercise:** In no more than one single-spaced page, explain the difference between form and style using specific examples from the assigned reading.

### 10 September

**Rebuilding the American Landscape in the 18th Century**

Gelernter 4. The age of revolution 1763-1820

*American Architectural History* Reader:

- 4. Space : parish churches, courthouses, and dwellings in colonial Virginia / Dell Upton –


Writing Exercise: Choose either Wells or Sweeney to evaluate the following questions: In no more than one single-spaced page, what types of primary sources does the author use to evaluate the landscapes they studied? Consider both archival and physical evidence. How do the different types of primary source materials provide support for the author’s thesis? Use specific examples from the reading to explain your reasoning.

17 September Multiple Perspectives on Architecture in the Early Republic
Writing Exercise: In no more than one single-spaced page explain Small’s thesis. Be sure to explain, using specific examples, how she employs both archival and physical evidence to support her thesis.

24 September Form and Style/National and Regional Identities
Gelernter, 5. Culture realigned 1820-65

American Architectural History Reader:
1. National design: mercantile cities and the grid / John R. Stilgoe –
7. The Greek revival: Americanness, politics and economics / W. Barksdale Maynard –

Architects and Builders in the Market Economy
American Architectural History Reader
6. The first professional: Benjamin Henry Latrobe / Mary N. Woods

1 October Defining Public and Private Space
American Architectural History Reader:
8. Independence and the rural cottage / Gwendolyn Wright –
11. Creating New York’s nineteenth-century retail district / Mona Domosh –


8 October Housing Workers in an Industrial Economy
Gelernter, 6. Enterprise and turmoil 1865-85
Writing Exercise: In no more than one single-spaced page explain how Heath’s thesis relates to the overall goal of this course: to understand buildings and landscapes as cultural artifacts with historically specific meanings that must be understood in particular context over time. Use specific examples from the reading to explain your reasoning.
10 October    Midterm due by 5:00 p.m.

15 October    Redesigning Urban Space
Gelernter 7. The age of diversity 1885-1915

*American Architectural History* Reader:

22 October    Modernism and National Identity
Gelernter, 8. Between the World Wars 1915-45

*American Architectural History* Reader:
14. The prairie house / James F. O'Gorman –
15. Wright, influence, and the world at large / Anthony Alofsin –
16. The search for modernity : America, the international style, and the Bauhaus / Margaret Kentgens-Craig –

29 October    The Role of the Developer

**Writing Exercise:** In no more than one single-spaced page address the following question:
The three case studies Loeb evaluates represent very different suburban landscapes. To what extent do commonalities among the different suburban developments support Loeb’s argument that together they document the emergence of an entrepreneurial vernacular?

5 November    Main Street

**Writing Exercise:** In no more than one single-spaced page explain how Isenberg’s thesis relates to the overall goal of this course: to understand buildings and landscapes as cultural artifacts with historically specific meanings that must be understood in particular context over time. Use specific examples from the reading to explain your reasoning.

12 November    Ppt Presentations

19 November    Ppt Presentations
26 November  Thanksgiving Holiday

3 December  Modernism and Consumer Society at Midcentury
Gelernter, 9: Modern Culture, 1945-1973

American Architectural History Reader:
  17. People who live in glass houses: Edith Farnsworth, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Philip Johnson / Alice T. Friedman –
  18. Mirror images: technology, consumption, and the representation of gender in American architecture since World War II / Joan Ockman –


Final due Monday December 8 by 5:00 p.m.