

# Public Realm Design: Urban Space, Civic Life, and Spatial Justice

**Program:** Master of Urban Design

**Format:** Twice weekly TTH, lecture/seminar + applied design exercises and student presentations

**Prerequisites:** Graduate standing in Urban Design, Architecture, Landscape Architecture, or Planning (or permission of instructor)

Instructor: Ann Hildner

Office Hours: Arrange with instructor in advance

CRN: 25722

Location: CAP Indy

Time: 9:00 – 10:50 am

## Catalogue Description

Focuses on the study of urban, shared spaces in the public realm including public streets and plazas. Students will be engaged in the study and exploration of the principles of public open space design. Methods of planning and designing active people spaces will be examined through site-specific design problems. Prerequisite: permission of the MUD program coordinator. A total of 4 credits may be earned, but no more than 2 in any one semester or term. Open only to College of Architecture and Planning students.

## Course Description

This course examines the public realm as the spatial, social, and ecological foundation of urban life. Streets, parks, plazas, waterfronts, and infrastructural spaces are studied as designed systems that shape civic identity, equity, environmental performance, and everyday experience. Emphasis is placed on human-centered design, spatial justice, climate responsiveness, and the translation of public values into implementable urban form.

Through lectures, case studies, field observation, mapping, and design exercises, students develop analytical and design tools to evaluate and propose public realm interventions across scales—from street and corridor sections to districts and urban frameworks.

## Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Define and critically evaluate the public realm across cultural, spatial, and political contexts
2. Analyze public spaces using behavioral, spatial, environmental, and equity-based methods
3. Design inclusive, human-scaled public spaces responsive to climate and culture
4. Translate public realm principles into clear, legible design proposals
5. Communicate public space ideas through drawings, diagrams, and narrative argument

## Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete this course will demonstrate:

- Advanced understanding of public space typologies and systems
- Ability to conduct field-based observation and mapping
- Competency in public realm design at multiple scales
- Improved graphic, written, and verbal communication
- Critical reflection on civic life

## Course Structure

- **Lectures/Seminars:** Conceptual frameworks, historical context, and contemporary practice
- **Applied Exercises:** Weekly or bi-weekly design and analysis tasks
- **Field Observation:** Required site visits (local or assigned urban contexts)
- **Reviews:** Midterm and final critiques

## Assignments & Grading

Component	Percentage
Participation & Weekly Exercises	20%
Precedent & Observation Portfolio	15%
Midterm Public Space Redesign	25%
Final Public Realm Framework / Prototype	35%
Reflection Statement	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Assignments

### 1. Participation & Weekly Exercises (20%)

Ongoing engagement through:

- Attendance and informed participation
- Short mapping, diagramming, and observation exercises
- Contribution to discussions and peer feedback

**Evaluation Criteria:**

Engagement, rigor, clarity of thinking, responsiveness to course themes

**2. Precedent & Observation Portfolio (15%)**

Students compile a curated portfolio of:

- 2 public space precedents (local or global)
- 1 in-depth field observation study

Includes diagrams, annotated images, short analytical texts, and reflective notes.

**Evaluation Criteria:**

Analytical depth, clarity of representation, critical insight, graphic quality

**3. Public Space Repurposing (25%)**

Students select an underperforming or contested public space and:

- Diagnose spatial, social, environmental, and equity conditions
- Identify key challenges and opportunities
- Propose a design intervention grounded in course principles

**Deliverables:**

- Site analysis diagrams
- Concept plan + key sections
- Short narrative (1,000–1,500 words)

**Evaluation Criteria:**

Problem framing, design logic, human-centered thinking, spatial clarity

**4. Public Realm Framework or Prototype (35%)**

A comprehensive public realm proposal that may be:

- Site-based (street, park, plaza, corridor) **or**
- System-based (network, district, typology framework)

Must address:

- Social inclusion and equity
- Environmental performance
- Spatial experience and human scale
- Feasibility and implementation logic

**Deliverables:**

- Plans, sections, and diagrams
- Framework or design proposal
- Final presentation + short written statement

**Evaluation Criteria:**

Integration, originality, rigor, clarity of communication, design excellence

**5. Reflection Statement (5%)**

**Due:** Final week

A 750–1,000 word reflection addressing:

- How your understanding of the public realm evolved
- Key lessons from observation and design
- How this course informs your future practice

**Weekly Schedule Overview**

<b>Week</b>	<b>Topic</b>
1	Defining the Public Realm
2	Historical Foundations of Public Space
3	Streets as Public Space
4	Human Experience & Behavioral Urbanism
5	Parks, Open Space & Urban Nature
6	Public Space & Social Equity
7	Informality & Everyday Urbanism
8	<b>Midterm Review</b>
9	Climate, Comfort & Resilience
10	Mobility, Infrastructure & Public Space
11	Governance, Policy & Implementation
12	Public Art, Memory & Identity
13	Global Perspectives
14	Measuring Success

Week	Topic
15	Future Public Realms
16	<b>Final Review</b>

## Evaluation Criteria (General)

All work will be assessed based on:

- Conceptual clarity
- Analytical rigor
- Design quality
- Graphic and verbal communication
- Responsiveness to social and environmental context

## Course Policies

- **Attendance:** Required. More than two unexcused absences may affect final grade
- **Late Work:** Penalized unless prior arrangements are made
- **Academic Integrity:** All work must adhere to university policies

## Course Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Range
A	100% - 94%
A-	<94% - 90%
B+	<90% - 87%
B	<87% - 84%
B-	<84% - 80%
C+	<80% - 77%
C	<77% - 74%
C-	<74% - 70%
D+	<70% - 67%
D	<67% - 64%
D-	<64% - 61%
F	<61% - 0%

## University Statement

We are committed to ensuring that all members of the community are welcome, through valuing the various experiences and worldviews represented at Ball State and among those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse.

## Disability Statement

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact the instructor of record as soon as possible. Ball State's [Disability Services Office](#) coordinates services for students with disabilities; documentation of a disability needs to be on file in that office before any accommodations can be provided. Disability Services can be contacted at 765-285-5293 or [dsd@bsu.edu](mailto:dsd@bsu.edu).

## Course Policies

Attendance and participation are essential. Please notify the instructor in advance of any absence. Late assignments will be accepted only with prior approval or documented emergency. Academic integrity is expected of all students. Plagiarism will result in disciplinary action.

## Course Involvement

*Class participation is critical.* You will be expected to verbally engage in each class session, offering questions and critique when your colleagues and instructors make presentations. This course topic is a new one to most in the class; the topic also is complex. Course learning outcomes should be read carefully and pursued with each project, as they will comprise the framework for grading rubrics. Supplemental information will be provided through class discussions, lectures, and reading assignments as required by specific problems and student interests.

## Freedom of Expression

In this course, we are committed to fostering a learning environment that values intellectual diversity, encourages free expression, and promotes open inquiry. As members of the Ball State Community, we treat each person in the Ball State community with civility, courtesy, compassion, and dignity and respect and learn from differences in people, ideas, and opinions. Please review Ball State University's [Statement on Freedom of Expression](#), the resources on Ball State's [Freedom of Expression webpage](#), and [Ball State's Beneficence Pledge](#).

## Title IX

Ball State University is committed to providing a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students. If you or someone you know has experienced sexual harassment—including sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, please know that you are not alone. The University offers support services and resources. For more information or to report an incident, please visit [bsu.edu/titleix](http://bsu.edu/titleix) or contact the Title IX Coordinator at 765-285-1545 or at [titleix@bsu.edu](mailto:titleix@bsu.edu)

**As your instructor, I am a mandatory reporter under the Title IX policy and required to report any information I receive about possible sexual harassment.** This includes information shared in class discussions, assignments, or private conversations.

## University Grade Appeal Policy

If you believe you received a final course grade that does not reflect your performance due to fairness or a procedural issue, you have the right to file an appeal within 5 school days after final grades are posted by the Office of the Registrar. Review the [University Grade Appeal Policy and Process.](#)]

## **Student Academic Ethics Policy**

Honesty, trust, and personal responsibility are fundamental attributes of the university community. Academic dishonesty and other forms of academic misconduct threaten the foundation of an institution dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and will not be tolerated. To maintain its credibility and reputation, and to equitably assign evaluations of scholastic and creative performance, Ball State University is committed to maintaining a climate that upholds and values the highest standards of academic integrity. Visit the VPAA's [academic integrity website](#) (Students tab) for resources on understanding academic integrity, citing sources properly, and avoiding inadvertent academic dishonesty. To learn about BSU's academic integrity expectations and students' rights, please read the University [Student Academic Ethics Policy](#).

Academic integrity violations include giving or receiving an unfair academic advantage (cheating), presenting someone else's ideas or work as your own (plagiarism), and falsifying academic records. Unless otherwise indicated, you must work independently by yourself. Check with me if you are unsure whether something constitutes academic dishonesty. Examples of academic integrity violations include but are not limited to:

- Using resources not authorized by the faculty member (including devices, AI tools, hidden notes, and open books)
- Using commercial study websites to find answers to graded.
- Without the instructor's written permission, giving away, buying, or selling graded assignments class notes, exams, study guides, or other course materials to other students or to third-party vendors.
- Working with another person on any assignment other than authorized group projects.
- Sharing or allowing others to access your files, whether done with permission or not.
- Reusing your own work from another semester, course, or section.
- Sharing answers with others during exams (passing notes, texting, whispering, gesturing)
- Discussing exam questions and answers with students who have not taken the exam.
- Soliciting others to complete work for you.

### **Some Use of Generative AI Permitted Under Some Circumstances or With Explicit Permission**

You may use generative AI applications for some work submitted in this course. You will be informed as to when, where, and how these tools are permitted to be used, along with guidance for attribution. Any use outside of this permission constitutes a violation of Ball State University's [Student Academic Ethics Policy](#).

## **The Learning Center**

The Learning Center offers free Tutoring and Academic Coaching for many courses at Ball State. Students can make appointments for online (Zoom) or in-person (NQ 350) appointments. To make an appointment, visit [myballstate.bsu.edu](http://myballstate.bsu.edu) and click on "Navigate" in the Academic Tools section, or just go directly to [bsu.navigate.eab.com](http://bsu.navigate.eab.com).

Testing accommodations for students with disabilities are available for students who have received the appropriate documentation from Disability Services. Tests may be administered in the Learning Center. Supplemental Instruction is available in select courses. If you have an SI leader for your course, that person will provide students with information the first week of school regarding weekly study sessions.

For more information about Learning Center programming, visit [bsu.edu/learningcenter](https://bsu.edu/learningcenter) or call 765-285-1006. Follow us on Instagram: [BallStateLC](#).

## **The Writing Center**

All writers improve with practice and feedback, so as a student in this course, you are encouraged to use the Writing Center (in Robert Bell 295 during weekdays, Bracken Library First Floor West in the evenings, or online during any of our regularly scheduled hours) to get additional feedback on your writing.

The Writing Center offers free planning, feedback, and accountability sessions (in person and online) to all students composing essays, reports, reflections, research projects, web content, lesson plans, slideshows, poster presentations, resumes, and other digital or print texts. To schedule a free appointment to discuss your writing, go to [bsu.edu/writingcenter](https://bsu.edu/writingcenter). Online and in-person appointments are available; however, plan ahead because appointments book quickly!

## **The Basic Needs Hub**

If you are having difficulty affording enough food, do not have a safe and reliable place to sleep, and/or experiencing an emergency or crisis, help is available through the [Basic Needs Hub](#). The Basic Needs Hub has information, resources, and provides individualized support to students. To talk with a supportive staff member about your experience, receive one on one assistance, or learn more about resources, you can submit a [Basic Needs Assistance Form](#).

## **The Counseling Center**

The Ball State University Counseling Center offers free and confidential services to all students. The Counseling Center is located in Lucina Hall, Room 320. To schedule an appointment, you can contact us at 765-285-1736. Ball State also offers a 24/7 Crisis Line, which can be reached at 765-285-HOPE (4673). The Crisis Line is a mental health resource for those who are struggling with any mental health concerns, including thoughts of self-harm and/or suicide.

At the Ball State Counseling Center, we see students for a variety of reasons, some of which include homesickness, relationship concerns, anxiety, and depression. At your first appointment, you will work with a therapist to create a plan that will connect you with resources that best fit your needs. We assist students with getting connected to therapy at our Center as well as connecting students to self-help resources, other on-campus resources, and community-based resources. All Ball State students also have access to several on-demand, self-help resources through a variety of different platforms. All of these resources, including a direct link to our website, can be found [here](#).

## **The Speaking Center**

The [Speaking Center](#) is a free resource available to all members of the BSU community wanting to improve their public speaking abilities. We offer personalized coaching designed to help you become a more confident and effective speaker. Our trained coaches provide constructive feedback and support throughout the entire speech preparation process, whether you are in the early stages of brainstorming ideas and organizing your thoughts, or you need to practice your delivery and refine your message.

The Center is in the David Letterman Communication and Media Building, room 302. To schedule an appointment, please access us through your Navigate app or use this [direct link](#) to sign up for a time. Appointments are available both in person and on Zoom. Appointments are available in person, on Zoom, and in virtual reality (VR) for those interested in practicing in an immersive speaking environment.

## **Canvas Accessibility**

Canvas provides a user experience that is easy, simple, and intuitive. Special attention has been paid to making Canvas screen-readable. The Rich Content Editor encourages users to create accessible content pages (i.e. text formatting is accomplished using styles). Canvas is designed to allow limited customization of colors and schemes to be accessible for all users. The National Federation of the Blind granted Canvas the Gold Level Web Certification in 2010. **Find more information by visiting the [Canvas Voluntary Product Accessibility Template \(VPAT\)](#).**

## **FERPA and Privacy**

As a student, your educational records are considered confidential. Under FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act), your records are confidential and protected. Under most circumstances, your records will not be released without your written and signed consent. However, some directory information may be released to third parties without your prior consent unless a written request to restrict this is on file. You can learn more about student rights to privacy by reading [Ball State's FERPA and Privacy and Protection](#).

## **Video Conferencing Recording**

In this class, software may be used to record live class discussions. As a student in this class, your participation in live class discussions may be recorded. These recordings typically will be made available only to students enrolled in the class, to assist those who cannot attend the live session or to serve as a resource for those who would like to review content that was presented. Students who prefer to participate via audio only will be allowed to disable their video camera so only audio will be captured. Students who prefer to listen only must disable their audio capability and visual camera. If you have concerns, please discuss these options with me.

## **Plagiarism Detection**

The campus subscribes to Turnitin, a plagiarism prevention service, through Canvas. You may need to submit written assignments to Turnitin. Student work will be used for plagiarism detection and for no other purpose. The student may indicate in writing to the instructor that he/she refuses to participate in the plagiarism detection process, in which case the instructor can use other electronic means to verify the originality of their work.