

# Vacant/Wild/Ruined: Feral Urbanism



*A building in St. Louis' LaSalle Park neighborhood. Photograph by the instructor.*

**ARCH/LAND 554C | Spring 2022**  
**Graduate School of Architecture, Urban Design, and Landscape Architecture**  
**Washington University in St. Louis**

**Location: Weil Hall 330**  
**Time: Thursdays, 8:30 – 11:20 AM**

**Instructor: Michael Allen**  
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## **Description**

What urban design practices are needed in areas that have declined, are in decline or simply are not growing? What if we let the city decline or go wild? What if we look at decay, ruin, wilderness and depopulation as something other than a crisis? This seminar examines experimental urban land management and preservation practices - practices that embrace systems of emergent, wild and unexpected urbanism, but also raise questions of austerity and democratic rights to the land. Topics that readings and field work will illuminate include state landbanking and autonomous land trusts, demolition and building deconstruction, historic preservation, managed depletion or urban "rightsizing", wilderness conservation and greenway creation, urban agriculture, homesteading in vacant houses, experimental preservation, land art and more. Students will develop projects for actual sites on location in St. Louis. Course meetings will be hybrid, divided between online meetings and in-person field work.

## **Readings**

All readings are accessible on Box.

## **Aims**

This seminar aims to cover an overview of practices and theories related to the development of cities, with an emphasis on those that engage decline, depletion, right-sizing, planned shrinkage, demolition, landbanking, re-wilding and historic preservation. Through study, the course will introduce ways of identifying land management problems and priorities in a declining city (such as St. Louis) and distinguishing them from those of a growing city. This understanding will support the evaluation of the appropriateness of different policies on land use, demolition and open space, and the development of place-specific hypothetical proposals of new best practices for St. Louis.

## **Learning Outcomes**

Students will be able to:

1. Explain and comprehend the concepts of abandonment, depopulation, right-sizing, shrinking cities, landscape urbanism, adaptive reuse, brownfields, land-banking and experimental preservation.
2. Develop practices that accommodate growth (development) and shrinkage (anti-development) as separate and sometimes simultaneous management regimes, not necessarily as an opposition;
3. Explain and comprehend how American cities have come to a point where they are shrinking in both built mass and population;
4. Explain and comprehend the differences in economics between shrinking cities and growing cities, and articulate the sets of design needs in both types of cities;
5. Develop an ability to harness abandonment, building ruin, vacancy and wilding as productive practices.

## Schedule

### Thursday, January 20: Introductions

Introductions

### Thursday, January 27: Ruin and Affect

Guest Lecture: Dana Levy, artist and 2019-20 Freund Fellow, Sam Fox School (danalevy.net)

Readings:

J.B. Jackson, "The Necessity for Ruins," *The Necessity for Ruins* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980).

Camilo Jose Vergara, "Energies of the Outmoded," *American Ruins* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1999).

Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin" (1903).

### Thursday, February 3: Manufacturing Vacancy, Wilderness and Ruin

Discussion Points

Readings:

Team Four, *Technical Memorandum 6B* (1975).

Patrick Cooper-McCann, "The Trap of Triage: Lessons from the 'Team Four Plan,'" *Journal of Planning History* 1.21 (2015).

Brent D. Ryan, "Rightsizing Shrinking Cities: The Urban Design Dimension," *The City After Abandonment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

Jason Hackworth, "Saving the City to Kill It," *Manufacturing Decline: How Racism and the Conservative Movement Crush the American Rust Belt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

### Thursday, February 10: American Urban Decline, Part I

Field Visit: Cahokia Mounds

Readings:

Larry V. Benson, Timothy R. Pauketat and Edward R. Cook, "Cahokia's Boom and Bust in the Context of Climate Change," *American Antiquity* 74.3 (July 2009).

Rod Barnett, "Designing Indian Country," *Places Journal* (October 2016).

<https://placesjournal.org/article/designing-indian-country/>

Keller Easterling, "Disposition," *Extrastatecraft* (New York: Verso, 2014).

### Thursday, February 17: American Urban Decline, Part II

Discussion Points

Readings:

Alan Mallach, "The Rise and Fall of the American Industrial City," *The Divided City: Poverty and Prosperity in Urban America* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2018).

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, "The Urban Crisis is Over—Long Live the Urban Crisis!" *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

Patrick Sharkey, "Neighborhoods and the Transmission of Racial Inequality," *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress Toward Racial Equality* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

**Thursday, February 24: NO CLASS**

**Thursday, March 3: [Resolution I] Restoration**

Field Visit: Old North St. Louis / NGA Site

Reading:

Environmental Protection Agency, *Old North St. Louis: Sustainably Developing a Historic District* (2016).

Ann Whiston Spirn, "City and Nature," *The Granite Garden: Urban Nature and Human Design* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

Kevin Lynch, "The City Image and Its Elements," *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1960).

Alan Weisman, "The City Without Us," *The World Without Us* (New York: Picador, 2007).

**Thursday, March 10: [Resolution II] Feral Urbanism**

Discussion Points

Readings:

Monica M. White, "Sisters of the Soil: Urban Agriculture in Detroit," *Black Food Matters: Racial Justice in the Wake of Food Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020).

Eric Klinenberg, "The Other Side of 'Broken Windows,'" *The New Yorker* (August 23, 2018).

Sara Safransky, "Greening the Urban Frontier: Race, Property, and Resettlement in Detroit," *Geoforum* 56 (2014).

**Friday, March 11**

Midterm Project Due by End of Day

**Thursday, March 17: NO CLASS, BREAK**

**Thursday, March 24: [Resolution III] Landscape Urbanism**

Discussion Points

Final Project Proposals Due

Readings:

Keller Easterling, *Subtraction* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014).

Jill Desimini, "Planned Shrinkage to Formerly Urban," *Landscape Journal* 33.1 (2014).

Joern W. Langhorst, "Re-Covering Landscapes: Derelict and Abandoned Sites as Contest Terrain," *Icon* 10 (2004).

Steven Land and Julia Rothenberg, "Neoliberal Urbanism, Public Space, and the Greening of the Growth Machine: New York City's High Line Park," *Environment & Planning A* 49.8 (August 2017).

**Thursday, March 31: [Resolution III] Experimental Preservation**

Field Visit: St. Liborius Church

Discussion Points

Readings:

Menokin Foundation, *The Menokin Glass House* (Date Unknown).

Daniela Sadler, "Counterpreservation as a Concept," *Counterpreservation* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2016).

Charles Merewether, "Traces of Loss," *Irresistible Decay* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute for History of Art and the Humanities, 1997).

Jorge Otero-Pailos, "Experimental Preservation," *Places Journal* (September 2016).  
<https://placesjournal.org/article/experimental-preservation/>

**Thursday, April 7: [Resolution IV] Cultural Narrative**

Discussion Points

Reading:

Dora Apel, "Ruin Terrors and Pleasures," *Beautiful Terrible Ruins: Detroit and the Anxiety of Decline* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press).

Andrew Herscher, "'Blight,' Spatial Racism, and the Demolition of the Housing Question in Detroit," *Housing After the Neoliberal Turn: International Case Studies* (Leipzig: Spector, 2015).

Camilo Jose Vergara, "American Acropolis or Vacant Land?: The Future of Detroit's Pre-Depression Skyscrapers," *The New American Ghetto* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

**Thursday, April 14: [Resolution V] New Public Policies**

Discussion Points

Readings:

Alan Mallach, *The Empty House Next Door* (Lincoln Land Policy Institute, 2018).

Rebecca Amato, "On Empty Spaces, Silence, and the Pause," *Aesthetics of Gentrification: Seductive Spaces and Exclusive Communities in the Neoliberal City* (Amsterdam University Press, 2021).

David Hummel, "Right-Sizing Cities in the United States: Defining Its Strategies," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 37.4 (2014).

**Thursday, April 21: Final Presentations**

**Thursday, April 28: Final Presentations**

**Thursday, May 12**

Final Work Due at 5:00PM

## Assignments

### Discussion Points

Each student will be responsible for leading discussion on readings with a short presentation that presents key themes and sparks discussion. A worksheet and schedule will be distributed on the first day of the seminar. The schedule for these presentations will be available in week two.

### Midterm Project

Each student will develop a midterm manifesto on the themes of the course that presents a clear point of view. The exact assignment will be distributed in week two.

### Final Project

The final project will be a response to the resolution themes denoted on the syllabus. This response may be a research paper, design project or a creative project such as a photographic essay or video. The assignment will be distributed by week five and project proposals will be due after the midterm.

## Evaluation and Grading

The required work in the seminar will include field notes, a midterm project, a final project, participation in discussion and attendance. The final grade will be based on this formula:

Midterm Project	25%
Final Project	35%
Discussion Points	20%
Attendance and Participation in Discussion	20%

Papers and work will be graded numerically out of 100 points. Final grades will be letter grades based on the following grading scale:

	Conceptual Considerations	Methodology	Craftsmanship	Integrative skills
A	New concepts are explored in original ways. Conceptual basis of project demonstrates clear grasp of complex issues (histories, social contexts, ecological issues). Project is fully developed and expresses a high level of investigative rigor.	Analysis demonstrates rigor and highly developed understanding of scope. Sophisticated and attentive design decision-making apparent throughout process. Logical, confident and iterative procedure generates design outputs that can be described and evaluated in terms of the process.	Clear connection between ideas and their investigation through careful manipulation of design representation and materials. Excellent craftsmanship displays thought and care. Clear demonstration of the importance of the artifact in design production. Attentiveness to the aesthetic of making.	New and complex issues are successfully integrated. Seamless integration of depiction and depicted. Comprehensive marshaling and conjoining of the physical, the conceptual and the representational.
B	Complex issues are adequately integrated. Project is well-developed and design outcomes show understanding of issues.	Process demonstrates adequate grasp of problems and issues. Clear use of iterative method. Source data employed throughout. Project process remains within the confines of the known.	Good quality work, with moderate appeal. Engagement with materiality of representation needs further work. Outputs would improve with greater attentiveness to quality of craft.	Design production shows real understanding of issues, problems, resources and process, but does not quite bring them all together in a unified articulation of design intent.
C	Project exhibits an inherent lack of conceptual engagement.	Clear and effective process never fully developed.	Crafted dimension of production distracts from design intent. Sloppy, ill-	Project remains on the level of a collection of disparate ideas and forms, weakly integrated

The necessary components are gathered but are related and explored only superficially.

Tentative and ill-defined methodology. Tendency to change from approach to approach without fully investigating any one method, suggesting uncertainty with respect to iterative procedures.

managed articulation of the artifact as an object. Ideas remain untransformed by the act of making.

or developed, and only marginally related to the singularity of the site, situation or program.

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<p><b>D</b></p> <p>Project is inadequately developed in all areas. Heavy reliance on found materials. Project shows little or no regulation by means of conceptual thinking.</p>	<p>Inadequate development of project. Muddled thinking about process. Little or no clear methodological procedure utilized. No connection between design output and design process.</p>	<p>Poor quality or negligible craftsmanship. No sense of the development of an aesthetic. Outputs are uninspiring, timid and uncared for.</p>	<p>Little or no sense of the project as an interactive condition. Outcome does not relate to program, site or contexts. Failure of understanding with respect to the nature of design.</p>
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## Course Communication

The first two weeks' course meetings will occur on Zoom. All other meetings will occur in the classroom or in the field as noted on the syllabus. All work will be submitted through Box.

## Field Work

There will be field work throughout the semester. These meetings will require in-person gatherings of all students who are able *and* willing. Students will be responsible for their own transportation, and instructor will distribute itineraries with meeting locations before these dates. Activities will adhere to practices of social distancing and masking.

## Course Policies and Information for Students

This seminar operates on a pedagogical model of participatory inquiry, where all participants shape the research questions and experiential priorities of the course. The seminar requires a high degree of participation through verbal discussion while also demanding a robust schedule of readings to support exploration of themes. While the instructor will lecture and guide, the seminar is a venue for each student to present questions, findings and connections located in readings and field trips. For readings, students should make every attempt to complete readings before meeting, but if not possible, at least discern authors' key points and themes. The seminar encourages research as practice; that is, research not for memorization but for critical understanding of subjects to advance students' own educational goals. Design students should have no fear.

**Seminar:** *Oxford English Dictionary* definition 1.1: "A class at university in which a topic is discussed by a teacher and a small group of students." Origin: Late 19th century: from German Seminar, from Latin *seminarium* (see seminary).

**Inclusive Learning Environment:** The best learning environment—whether in the classroom, studio, laboratory, or fieldwork site—is one in which all members feel respected while being productively challenged. At Washington University in St. Louis, we are dedicated to fostering an inclusive atmosphere, in which all participants can contribute, explore, and challenge their own ideas as well as those of others. Every participant has an active responsibility to foster a climate of intellectual stimulation, openness, and respect for diverse perspectives, questions, personal backgrounds, abilities, and experiences, although instructors bear primary responsibility for its maintenance.

A range of resources is available to those who perceive a learning environment as lacking inclusivity, as defined in the preceding paragraph. If possible, we encourage students to speak directly with their instructor about any suggestions or concerns they have regarding a particular instructional space or situation. Alternatively, students may bring concerns to another trusted advisor or administrator (such as an academic advisor, mentor, department chair, or dean). All classroom participants—including faculty, staff, and students—



—who observe a bias incident affecting a student may also file a report (whether personally or anonymously) utilizing the online Bias Report and Support System.

## **1. ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Attendance is mandatory, and will be documented for all course meetings. Sam Fox School students are expected to arrive ready to participate and be fully engaged in the day's coursework during the entire scheduled class period. Participation in major critiques and reviews by all students is essential to the development of all of students. Failure to do so will have an impact on your final grade.

Following university policy, class will begin promptly with the start time listed. Students are allowed two unexcused absences. After two unexcused absences, students will receive one full letter grade penalty for each subsequent absence. Three late arrivals and/or early departures will equal one absence. If a student misses more than 20 minutes of a class, they are considered absent. Missing a review or critique equals two absences. If a student must miss a critique, please inform the professor beforehand. Any student who misses class is responsible for contacting a fellow student to find out what they missed, for making up all work, and for being prepared for the next class. In the case of severe medical or family emergencies, contact the Associate Dean of Students Georgia Binnington as soon as possible at [gbinning@wustl.edu](mailto:gbinning@wustl.edu) or 314.935.6532.

## **2. PENALTIES FOR LATE WORK and REQUESTS FOR EXTENSIONS**

Late work will lose a half-letter grade for each week that it is late, after being graded (so a B paper turned in one week late is a B- paper). Requests for extensions must be made before the start of the class session before the assignment is due. No explanations submitted along with late work will suspend these policies. Always consult the instructor if in doubt.

## **3. POLICIES ON MISSED EXAMS, MAKE-UP EXAMS OR QUIZZES**

There are no exams in this seminar.

## **4. REGRADING POLICY**

There is no regrading in this seminar.

## **5. REQUESTS FOR INSTRUCTOR FEEDBACK ON DRAFTS AND REQUESTS TO REVISE**

Students should make every effort to consult with the instructor before submitting work. The instructor is available during office hours, by appointment and by email to review ideas for the papers.

## **6. GRADE DISPUTE POLICY**

The Sam Fox School aims to provide each student with a fair assessment of their academic work and studio. Students have the right to dispute their overall course grade (not individual assignments) if they believe that grade does not accurately reflect the quality of their work. A grade dispute must be submitted to the faculty member who assigned the grade within 30 days of receipt of the grade. The School stresses that every effort to resolve this dispute be made by the faculty and student involved. A student's eligibility for advancement in sequential coursework requires timely resolution of the grade dispute. For more information visit [https://samfoxschool.wustl.edu/files/Greivance%20Policy\\_Update%202019.pdf](https://samfoxschool.wustl.edu/files/Greivance%20Policy_Update%202019.pdf).

## **7. TECHNOLOGY POLICIES**

Computers or other electronic devices, including "smart pens" (devices with an embedded computer and digital audio recorder that records the classroom lecture/discussion and links that recording to the notes taken by the student), may be used by students at the discretion of the faculty member to support the learning activities in the classroom. These activities include taking notes and accessing course readings under discussion. If a student wishes to use a smart-pen or other electronic device to audio record lectures or class discussions, they must notify the instructor in advance of doing so. Permission to use recording devices is at the discretion of the instructor, unless this use is an accommodation approved by Disability Resources.

Nonacademic use of laptops and other devices and use of laptops or other devices for other coursework is distracting and seriously disrupts the learning process for other people in the classroom. Neither computers nor other electronic devices are to be used in the classroom during class for nonacademic reasons or for work on other coursework. Nonacademic use includes emailing, texting, social networking, playing games, instant



messaging, and use of the Internet. Work on other coursework may include, but is not limited to, use of the Internet, writing papers, using statistical software, analyzing data, and working on quizzes or exams. The nonacademic use of cell phones during class time is prohibited, and they should be set on silent before class begins. In the case of an emergency, please step out of the room to take the call. The instructor has the right to hold students accountable for meeting these expectations, and failure to do so may result in a loss of participation or attendance points, a loss of the privilege of device use in the classroom, or being asked to leave the classroom. Visit <https://sites.wustl.edu/insidesfs/it/> for more information.

#### **8. LICENSE FOR NON-EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO REPRODUCE AND DISTRIBUTE**

Michael Allen has non-exclusive right to reproduce and distribute work produced in this class as part of a publication or body of work, which may include products from this course or other works. Students retain ownership of all rights held under copyright. This permission is revocable for 3 months following the conclusion of this course via notification in writing to Michael Allen.

#### **9. ETHICS/VIOLATIONS OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Ethical behavior is an essential component of learning and scholarship. Students are expected to understand, and adhere to, the University's academic integrity policy: [wustl.edu/policies/undergraduate-academic-integrity.html](http://wustl.edu/policies/undergraduate-academic-integrity.html). Students who violate this policy will be referred to the Academic Integrity Policy Committee. Penalties for violating the policy will be determined by the Academic Integrity Policy committee, and can include failure of the assignment, failure of the course, suspension or expulsion from the University. If you have any doubts about what constitutes a violation of the Academic Integrity policy, or any other issue related to academic integrity, please ask the instructor.

- Always cite sources when ideas are presented and/or language that was developed by another individual, including material from class lectures and discussions.
- Violation of this policy includes collaborating on assignments where collaboration is not allowed and/or utilizing notes, texts, etc. on any assignment where use of such materials is not allowed.
- Computers and smart phones may aid course sessions by allowing students to pull up readings, websites, images or other materials to share. These devices should not be used for other purposes during class time. Absolutely no use of these devices for personal communications, web browsing or games is allowed. If a student uses a device in such a manner, that student's participation grade will be reduced by three points for each infraction. If a student has an urgent need to communicate, the student should leave the seminar room to call, email or text. There will be no penalty.

#### **10. RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS**

The Sam Fox School recognizes the individual student's choice in observing religious holidays that occur during periods when classes are scheduled. Students are encouraged to arrange with their instructors to make up work missed as a result of religious observance, and instructors are asked to make every reasonable effort to accommodate such requests.