Geographer David Harvey famously stated that there is “nothing unnatural about New York City,” an assertion that challenged dominant conceptualizations of nature as distinct from the built environment (or society, more broadly). How have dualisms such as “natural vs. unnatural” and “city vs. country” shaped our understandings of cities and the ecological systems to which they belong? How might an integrated conceptualization of co-evolving social, technological, and biophysical processes – that takes seriously issues of race, class, and gender, power, politics, and capital – help us better understand, imagine, and shape/produce urban natures?

This reading-intensive, discussion-driven graduate seminar introduces students of urban studies, planning, geography, environmental science, anthropology, and sociology to various ways of theorizing urban “nature.” We will first think through “nature” and different ways of “knowing” it. We will then very briefly address methodological and theoretical approaches grounded in ecology, before focusing on social science frameworks emphasizing social processes. After discussing urban environmental history, we turn to more theoretically informed approaches, from urban political ecology with its Marxian emphasis on structure, to post-structuralist approaches that rethink subject-object relations: actor-networks, assemblages, non-human agency, and the role of affect and emotion, among others. We will discuss the historical evolution of these various theories (with attention to the social, political, and economic contexts in which they arose) while critically examining their differences and underlying assumptions. We will also address the implications of each framework for research, practice, and politics.
Course Texts

We will mostly be reading journal articles or chapters, available as links/PDFs posted on D2L. In addition, we will read significant sections from the following books (available from the PSU bookstore, Powell’s, etc):


After a whopping 185 pp. the first week, plan to read anywhere from 75 to 150 pp. of dense academic prose per week, or four to five articles or chapters. As always, you should read strategically; remember, not all text is created equal! Focus on the authors’ key claims, how they structure and advance their argument, how they conceive of urban nature, etc., as opposed to the getting hung up on the specific details of their empirical case study.

Expectations & Assignments

At the graduate level, my job as a professor isn’t to lecture, but rather, to structure the course, to ask questions, and to keep us on track, if necessary. Our goals each week are to critically engage with the readings, to situate them conceptually in relation to the other readings, and to think about their theoretical and methodological implications for your own research. In order for this to work, it’s essential that you come to class having read all assigned readings and prepared to discuss them thoughtfully and critically. It will be obvious if you come unprepared. Grades are based on the following:

*Participation* (15%)

This is a discussion-driven seminar. You are responsible for reading the assigned materials before class and coming ready to discuss. We’ll be building each week on the previous readings, so it’s vital to come to class and to keep up with the readings. Everyone must join in the discussion. If you’re shy, push yourself to talk. If you’re a talker, be conscientious not to dominate the discussion, i.e., remember to “share air.” To help move the discussion forward, you should come to class each week with one or two discussion questions. You will need to post these to the week’s Discussion Questions forum on D2L by 11pm on Sunday so others have a chance to read over them before we meet. NB: You don’t need to post questions to D2L if you are leading discussion (see below), so everyone should post 8 times over the course of the term. Barring emergencies, please let me know ahead of time if you are unable to come to class.

*Discussion Facilitation* (15%)

Everyone will be required to lead the discussion at least once along with a partner. You should be prepared to walk us through the key concepts/arguments/theories from the week’s readings. You should also be prepared to get our discussion started (and keep it going, if necessary!) with a few questions/topics/themes of import. Look over the discussion questions posted to D2L by your peers as you organize your questions and discussion topics. Please prepare an outline/diagram/visual aid to steward us through this process. This can be a one-page handout, or you can use the blackboard.

*Reading Responses* (35%)

You are responsible for writing a short reading response (~250 to 500 words) for any 7 of our class meetings. You don’t have to prepare a response the week that you lead discussion (so essentially you get one freebie). Your response should not simply summarize the key arguments from the reading; rather, it
should *synthesize* the key insights you take from the ensemble of readings and raise new questions, or can respond to some of the questions raised by others (see above). Please turn in a hard copy of your responses to me at the end of class. **Please use 1” margins, 12pt Times New Roman font, and single-spacing!** NB: You must turn in a response for any week you are absent, barring extenuating circumstances.

**Paper (35%)**

In addition to your weekly reading responses, you are required to write a final paper of 3,000 to 4,000 words, or 6 to 8 single-spaced pages (12 pt. Times New Roman, 1” margins). This should be a well-structured essay that applies some of the theory we’ve covered in the course to your research area of interest. Please submit as a Word document so I can insert comments. You will have 5 minutes to present your paper to the class on our last day. Due to the D2L Dropbox by 10:15am on W 12/10.

**General classroom etiquette**

Please be on time so we can start right at 2pm. Turn off cell-phones. Use of laptops is welcome for note-taking, but please respect the rest of us by refraining from checking Facebook, email, or any other distraction. To fight temptation, turn off your Wi-Fi if you have to! Please also refrain from immediately looking up something on Wikipedia every time we have a question about something or a fact to be checked. Unless it’s really important (and we’ll let you know if it is), it can wait! Finally, given the various perspectives, experiences, and ways of knowing in the room, please be patient and respectful with one another if you disagree. This class may push you into unfamiliar intellectual territory… I want your brain to hurt, but that’s it!

**Academic Integrity**

You are graduate students so I don’t need to elaborate on this. I take this seriously, as I expect you to.

**Academic accommodations / Other campus resources**

If you are a student with a documented disability and are registered with the Disability Resource Center (DRC), please contact me immediately to facilitate arranging academic accommodations. Students who believe they are eligible for accommodations but who have not yet obtained approval through the DRC should contact the DRC immediately at 503-725-4150.

- Learning Center, Millar Library 245, [http://www.pdx.edu/tutoring/](http://www.pdx.edu/tutoring/)
- Writing Center, Cramer 188, [http://www.writingcenter.pdx.edu/](http://www.writingcenter.pdx.edu/)

**Office hours / contact info**

Wednesdays 3:30-5pm (or by appointment) in 350-E Urban Center. It’s best to contact me ahead of time to sign up for a slot. My email is n.mcclintock@pdx.edu.
Course Outline

1. Introduction


2. Knowing Nature


Further reading (not required, but of related interest):

- Castree, Ch. 2

3. Urban Ecology, Past and Present


Further reading:

4. Urban Environmental History


[** focus on the author’s conception of urban nature and key claims, as opposed to the empirical details]

Further reading:


5. Urban Political Ecology


Further reading:


6. Metabolism and Flows

• Swyngedouw, E. 2006. Metabolic Urbanization. [HKS, 21-40]

Choose three:


Further reading:
Theorizing Urban Natures – Fall 2014


7. Neoliberal Natures


Choose two:


Further reading:


8. Networks, Assemblages, Situated Knowledge


Choose one:


Further reading:


9. Non-Human Subjects


Choose two:


Further reading:


10. Emotion and Affect


Further reading:

• Oliver, S. 2006. The Desire to Metabolize Nature. [HKS, 93-109]

11. Paper Presentations  We will meet during our final exam slot (W 12/10, 10:15am–12:15pm), during which time each student will give a 5-minute presentation on her/his paper.
## Course Schedule at a Glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9/29</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10/6</td>
<td>Knowing Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10/13</td>
<td>Urban Ecology, Past and Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10/20</td>
<td>Urban Environmental History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10/27</td>
<td>Urban Political Ecology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>11/3</td>
<td>Metabolism and Flows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>11/10</td>
<td>Neoliberal Natures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>11/17</td>
<td>Networks, Assemblages, Situated Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>11/24</td>
<td>Non-Human Subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>12/1</td>
<td>Emotion and Affect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>12/10</td>
<td>EXAM WEEK:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Meet W 12/10 from 10:15 to 12:15. PAPERS DUE to D2L before class.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>