

Urban Environments (BA/BS)

Students who choose this concentration have examined environmental, climate, energy, and health effects of increasing urbanization. Growing population size and densities along with immigration from rural communities or foreign nations can pressure available resources, overwhelm institutional resources such as water, food, and energy supplies, while increasing pollution and waste. Normally inadequate infrastructure such as housing, educational facilities, transit, police, fire, and waste disposal together threaten health, safety and welfare. Poor air quality in urban environments is often caused by unrestricted vehicular traffic, limited public transit, open burning of cooking and heating fuels, nearby fossil fuel consuming power plants, and industrial emissions. These combine to create significant threats to health.

A variety of policies might be employed to manage the challenges mentioned above and these could become the focus of an Urban Studies concentration: land use and zoning regulations that restrict types and densities of land settlements; energy efficiency standards, urban climate change and sustainability planning, disaster preparedness and infrastructure investments; creating new cities that are planned and developed at a pace that anticipates patterns and rates of population growth; protecting available ecosystem services such as the cooling effects of parks and trees, floodplain and coastal zone development restrictions; vehicle regulation and public transit subsidies; and planning for new sources of water, energy, and food in regions that already import these resources.

Urban planning, architectural design, green building design standards, ecologically sensitive greenspace design, and land use controls are all essential to accommodate growth pressure while creating and ensuring environmental quality, health, safety, and vitality. While these types of policy initiatives have demonstrated some promise to better manage urban growth, they also rely on top-down planning that may further marginalize the poor, discriminate against minority and immigrant populations, while exposing them to degraded environmental and health-threatening conditions. Explaining failed and successful urban planning efforts might also become a focus.