

INVISIBLE CITIES

Your guides:

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Your course details:

FYFO 232
Mondays, 1:15-3:55
LSC 138

You are here: Welcome to the course!

Most of us think of space and place as neutral facts about the world around us. There's "the dorm," "the campus," "the city," and so on: state, country, continent, and hemisphere. These are what they are, and if we want to know what they are, we can look and see. Invisible Cities is the course in which you will discover that space and place are neither neutral nor obvious; the world we live in is not found, but made.

One city in particular will be a main topic of the course: Hartford. This city is one with a long history, and many riches and undiscovered stories. Together we will look at alternate ways of telling the stories of Hartford, and at examples from other cities, including Boston, Los Angeles, Jersey City, and other places around the world.

Our research into Hartford and other cities will accomplish several learning goals:

- You'll learn about the data used by social scientists to describe communities and try to improve them. This is partly about statistics, but also very much about "data politics": who decides what information is important to describe, and who gets to use the result? (The course fulfills the Social Science distribution requirement.)
- You'll learn many ways in which data can be clearly displayed. Places, especially cities, are often represented through maps. Thanks to Google, web-based maps are easy to make and can be tagged with information (or mis-information) in myriad ways. These are called mash-ups, and they are popping up all over the web and evolving very rapidly. You'll have opportunities to create unique mash-ups, the first of their kind anywhere.
- You'll extend your skills in information literacy (and be supported in this with the course Research Associate, Caroline Milano). Finding relevant evidence and shaping it with effective logic will be a regular activity.
- You'll extend your skills in collaborative work, and in effective public presentations. Writing will be an ongoing focus, but also you'll develop skills for effective graphical presentations of data (including Powerpoint).
- You'll learn to translate abstract information into concrete images, visualizing maps of virtual realities that you can explore.

Invisible Cities culminates in a Community Learning project in which you'll work in teams with local community agencies to develop maps of information for use by Hartford residents, to empower them through making their city more visible. These maps may become permanent websites or printed maps. We'll meet with our community partner groups repeatedly and ultimately report on your final products in presentations to the campus and community.

Your work for the course:

The Invisible Cities classroom will be an experiment in a communal process of knowledge building. Our discussions will be freewheeling explorations emphasizing the values of imagination, evidence, open-mindedness, and respect.

We will begin with a regular set of assignments, each with a particular purpose; however these are all open to discussion as the course progresses. Meanwhile, you are expected to:

- **ATTEND CLASS AND PARTICIPATE IN DISCUSSIONS.** Most of crucial learning in this course is not covered in any reading. It will come in workshops and labs, and in discussion. Not only will you need to be in class to get it, but your classmates will depend on your presence for their own learning. This is particularly important since the course meets just once a week.
- **COMPLETE A “FIVE MINUTE PAPER.”** Each class meeting will finish with some minutes set aside for a paragraph from you about the main ideas of the day’s class, to organize your thoughts (and memories) of the class and to raise questions. (This is ungraded.)
- **CONTRIBUTE TO A WORD OF THE WEEK (10%).** The course readings introduce terms that may be obscure or specialized, but are nonetheless essential to your understanding. We’ve set up a “wiki dictionary” for the course, where the key terms will be assembled in a glossary. You can find this dictionary at <http://www.seedwiki.com/wiki/wildwords/wildwords.cfm>. Your mission is to add one word each week to the glossary. Your entry should indicate where in the readings the word arose. Some terms may have special meanings to the authors who use them. If so, you’ll need to base your definitions on the explicit meanings signaled in the reading. Other terms may not have special meanings, but are nonetheless new to you. For these, you’ll refer to standard reference works. (As a third option, you can edit definitions already in the glossary.) In any case, you should cite your sources fully and correctly, and sign your entry or edit.

To get you started, here is an example of an entry already in our course glossary:

Wiki – (noun): an online resource or set of linked resources, which can be added to or edited by any user. “Wiki wiki” means “rapidly” in Hawaiian. (Found on the Course Syllabus, p. 2.) (Posted by Dan Lloyd, 1/20/06. from www.parliament.vic.gov.au/sarc/E-Democracy/Final_Report/Glossary.htm ; www.cpsr-peru.org/english_version/privacy_ngo/part4; mobileman.projects.supsi.ch/glossary.html ; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WIKI .)

(These will be graded for accuracy and clarity, and penalized if late.)

■ **WRITE A WEEKLY REALITY CHECK (25%).** The distinguishing feature of good non-fiction writing (including all academic writing) is EVIDENCE. We should believe an author's conclusions (or not) only after weighing the evidence the author provides AND considering further evidence, pro or con, that the author might have used but didn't. To raise your consciousness about this crucial aspect of research and writing, once a week you'll submit a short paper in which you check into one or more pieces of evidence relevant to the week's reading assignment. Each paper will cite the text passage you examined, give a full citation of the additional reference(s) you consulted, and provide a one or two page discussion on this question: Did the reference you found confirm or undermine the author's claim? You should not hesitate to be critical.

We will provide initial structure and suggestions for this regular assignment, but as the course progresses we encourage you to think broadly about possible evidence to look into. For example, many of our works make claims based on visual evidence, including maps and photographs. Your reality checking could include looking for additional maps or new photographs (e.g., using Google), or possibly gathering some new data of your own.

(These will be graded on accuracy and their thoroughness and thoughtfulness.)

Your weekly Reality Check papers will often be the starting point for class discussion. So that we can fold them into the class discussion, they should be submitted at the Blackboard site (email?) for the course by **SUNDAY, 5:00 PM.**

■ **WRITE A WEEKLY WORKSHOP REPORT (25%).** About half of each weekly session will be spent in workshops where the crucial skills of the course will be explored. You'll be learning interesting computer-based methods for organizing and visualizing data, especially data about place, as well as learning general social science techniques for validating statistics and drawing conclusions from statistical data. We'll usually begin each workshop in class, but often you'll finish them, and write your report, at home. These will be somewhat like lab reports in a social science course. Each week there will be specific questions, and the reports will vary in length accordingly. They will be due by the next class meeting. (These will be graded on accuracy, clarity, and conciseness.)

■ **COURSE PROJECT (40%).** The most important part of the course is the project, a community learning collaboration with a Hartford based community organization. You'll be producing a map, probably a Google mash-up, of use to the community. You'll work on these in teams. As you will see, producing an accurate and useful data map will draw on every aspect of the course, and demand thorough research, careful and professional communication with your community partners, and creativity. In addition to the map itself (a website or printed map, depending on its uses), you'll prepare a public presentation about the map and the issues involved in its creation, and submit a background paper that may be quite lengthy. Soon you'll be seeing many examples, and many discussions will focus on developing these projects.

Your readings:

Date	Reading Assignments due
Week 1: January 23	
Week 2: January 30	Baldwin, Chs. 1 – 5
Week 3: February 6	Baldwin, Chs. 6 – 10
Week 4: February 13	Hayden, Chs. 1 – 3
Week 5: February 20	Pawlawski, first half
February 27	Trinity Days: MEETING WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS, TBA
Week 6: March 6	Pawlawski, second half
Week 7: March 13	Hayden, Chs. 4 – Epilogue
March 20	(Spring break: no class meeting)
Week 8: March 27	Scott, Chs. 1 – 2
Week 9: April 3	Tufte (both readings)
Week 10: April 10	Scott, Chs. 3 – 8
Week 11: April 17	Lynch (entire)
Week 12: April 24	Scott, Chs. 9 – 10
Week 13: May 1	Calvino (entire)