

Wesleyan University
Class: 2011

Proposal for a University Major
In Urban Studies

Dear Committee on University Majors,

I am writing to petition a University Major in Urban Studies grounded in the disciplines of Sociology, Environmental Studies, and Government. My objective as an undergraduate is to leave Wesleyan with a solid understanding of how these disciplines intersect to describe and explain contemporary urban spaces.

Now harboring more than 50 percent of the world's population, cities have become a locus for human activity and interaction. While cities are sites of creative human collaboration, innovation, and cultural expression, they are also the battle grounds where conflicts of interest and values wars are fought out. I am interested in studying how competing visions and values clash, coincide, change, and finally crystallize to shape contemporary cities. Put another way, I am interested in the spatialization of cities; I want to learn how to read and interpret the text of the built environment, pulling out the layers of meaning that are tucked into the urban landscape.

Understanding the spatialization of cities inherently requires an interdisciplinary approach. There is no single correct way of understanding the city—instead; when asking questions about urban issues, I believe it is paramount to understand a variety of perspectives and how they inform one another. How does urban poverty arise and what determines how poverty is geographically distributed? How do residential patterns form and who has the power to influence the nature of housing in a city? How does suburbanization, automobile traffic, and highway expansion impact the environment? How can the need for privacy and open space be reconciled with concerns about whether or not our cities are structured in sustainable ways? To what extent are and can cities be planned? To what extent do free-market mechanisms shape the urban landscape? How do banks and patterns of investment impact the urban space? What is the functional organization of the city; where do commercial, industrial, and financial sectors of the city take root and what are their social and financial impacts? How have shifts in the economy and employment affected the shapes of cities? How is the city a locus for the intersection of local-state-national and international policy? What are the effects of globalization on cities?

How are the voices of different interest groups (community organizations, business interests, financial institutions, mainstream environmental groups, environmental justice activists, consumers) incorporated (or not) into the policy-making process?

In order to address these complex and interlinking questions, other acclaimed academic institutions with Urban Studies majors have similarly chosen an interdisciplinary approach. Brown University draws faculty from eight different departments, including public policy and sociology. The University of Pennsylvania offers courses such under umbrella themes such as *The Built Environment*, *Comparative and Theoretical Dimensions*, *Urban Economics/Finance*, and *Public Policy/Government*. At UC Berkeley, the Urban Studies program is found within the College of Environmental Design. In designing my major, I hope to replicate the established Urban Studies programs found at these institutions, thereby lending my major legitimacy and ensuring that I am acquiring important skills and tools. I have chosen to ground my program in three very different disciplines in order to guarantee that my major is of sufficient breadth. At the same time, I bring these disciplines together by relating them specifically to urban issues, thereby lending my program depth. The dialogues generated between these distinct yet complementary disciplines will expand and deepen my understanding of contemporary urban issues.

While putting this major together, I consulted with several deans and professors who offered mixed feed-back about my program and the concept of a University Major in general. I have taken their criticisms very seriously and here I will attempt to address their concerns. One of the main objections was that I could effectively study urban issues by completing an established major. Professors emphasized that following the major-paths designed by the university would ensure that I acquire specific skills and methodological tools that I might not know how to incorporate into my University Major. I agree that it would be a shame to leave Wesleyan only with general ideas but without the technical tools necessary to compete professionally or obtain credibility in my field. I have consulted professors in various disciplines about what courses I should take in order to get a solid technical foundation, and they suggested that I expand into Quantitative Analysis (*Applied Data Analysis QAC 201*) and Economics (*Intro to Econ 101*). These courses will enhance my quantitative reasoning skills, enabling me to analyze and interpret data and view urban issues through the lens of economics. I hope to take

foundational courses during my second semester Junior year after returning from abroad, and then explore higher level courses specific to urban studies during my senior year.

My study abroad program will contribute significantly towards my educational goals of understanding urban space. Next fall, I will travel with the International Honors Program to Detroit, USA; Bangalore, India; Cape Town, South Africa; and Buenos Aires, Argentina with the *Cities in the 21st Century Program*. Urban Studies is necessarily a comparative discipline, and this program will provide me with the opportunity to compare and contrast urban patterns in different regions and the consequences of these patterns. I hope to count some of the credits of this program towards my major. Given the variety of types of classes I hope to take, I sincerely believe that the pursuing a University Major is the best way to accomplish my academic goals. Please see *Possible Courses/Course Pathways* for a more detailed outline of how I hope to structure my education over the next two years at Wesleyan.

Nevertheless, I have also seriously investigated other majors as alternative possibilities. Below I detail my findings:

1. Anthropology: I have completed the pre-requisite and one of the nine core courses, for this major, and I have declared it as a back-up in case my University Major falls through. This major is attractive as it would allow me to develop a concentration in Urban Anthropology. Nevertheless, it would significantly narrow my approach to Urban Studies; I would not have time to acquire a technical foundation in quantitative analysis and economics, nor would I be able to approach the subject from a truly cross-disciplinary perspective. My exploration of Sociology, Government, and Environmental Studies would be stunted by the requirements of the Anthropology major.
2. Sociology and Government: Double majoring in these disciplines may have allowed me to get some of the breadth and depth that I hope to attain through a University Major. However, it would be difficult for me to major in either of these disciplines as I have not yet completed the pre-requisites. Most significantly, concentrating in these majors would limit my ability to explore Urban Studies through alternative lenses such as Economics and Environmental studies. Contrastingly, I feel that an interdisciplinary major would grant me the opportunity to understand urban space from a wider range of perspectives.

Professors in the Sociology and Government departments have expressed concern that I will emerge from my University Major without a clear set of skills. I have taken these criticisms to heart; however, I feel that I can still come away with a very useful set of tools given how I am constructing my major. These skills may differ from those I would acquire if I pursued a pre-constructed major, but does this necessarily make them less valid? If someone were attempting to construct a University Major in Physics, Chemistry, and Biology, I can understand how not following a pre-ordained pathway may lead to a confusing and weak program. This is because these majors require a vertical progression; classes necessarily build upon one another, and this is why there are so many pre-requisites for advanced courses in these majors. In the fields that I am studying, there are hardly any courses requiring pre-requisites. This leads me to understand these majors as less dependent on a vertical structure. Thus, they should be more easily integrated into a University Major program.

Nevertheless, I have investigated the structural dimensions of Sociology and Government, and will attempt to mimic their approaches to the best of my ability. In Sociology, I will try to take some of the foundation courses (*Soc 151, 202, 212*) in order to build skills in sociological reasoning. In Government, I will pursue an American Politics Concentration. Thus, while I am not completing either major, I will still attempt to mimic their structural organization.

3. American Studies: This major is attractive because it would allow me to do a concentration in Urban Studies. However, it would be difficult to complete this major because I have not yet taken the pre-requisites. Moreover, I would feel constricted by the requirements of this major as I would be limited to courses that are cross-listed as American Studies, courses which I do not feel adequately reflect my interests.
4. Earth and Environmental Sciences: This major is too narrow in scope to satisfy my interests in Urban Studies.

I have seriously questioned whether or not pursuing a University Major is necessary or logical given the programs available at Wesleyan. After investigating many alternatives, I have concluded that no established major will allow me to pursue this course of study in the well-rounded, cross-disciplinary fashion that I think is necessary. If allowed to construct my own

major, I will do my best to consult faculty about what classes to take, mimic basic structures found in established majors, and model my major after the programs of established institutions, thereby guaranteeing that I acquire the appropriate skills and necessary tools.

My University Major can be evaluated in the following way in order to determine whether or not I am achieving the academic objectives I have laid out for myself. First, I will present my committee of professors with a set of courses I hope to take. My committee can determine whether my major is structured in an appropriate manner. They can assess whether a course is relevant enough to my program to constitute part of my major. Second, I must achieve a grade of a B or higher in a class in order to count it for credit towards my major. Finally, I must complete a senior essay. The essay should bring together the various disciplines I have chosen to ground my major in. The essay will be an expression of the objectives of my major and should be evaluated accordingly. If deemed necessary, over the course of my major I will be happy to contribute any other material to support how I think that the objectives of my major are being achieved.

I thank the committee for reviewing my petition for a University Major. I believe that I am suited to pursue a University Major for several reasons. First, I am a very serious, dedicated, and passionate student. With a GPA of 3.89, I am in the top ten percent of the class of 2011—but achieving good grades is not the objective of my education. Good grades are a by-product of my fascination with the material that I have studied thus far. So far, I have willingly and enthusiastically embraced my education and its rigorous demands. I believe that my academic success has been contingent upon my ability to choose, direct, and design my curriculum each semester. I take this process very seriously; during each pre-registration, I peruse WesMaps in its entirety, making various lists of schedules until I finally choose one. Drop-add is always hectic as I attend up to eight classes to determine whether or not the classroom dynamic, teaching style, and syllabus will engage me intellectually. I look for challenging courses taught by dedicated and well-organized professors, and I select classes that establish interesting interdisciplinary dialogues. What I have loved most about my education so far at Wesleyan is the freedom that the University has granted me to design my own curriculum. In this way, I have come to truly understand what I am interested in dedicating my self-to academically; the study of Urban Space as viewed through the overlapping lenses of various disciplines. I hope that the

Committee will allow me to continue to exercise the academic freedom that has made my educational experience so unique and fascinating. If granted the opportunity, I look forward to designing my own curriculum and throwing the full weight of my academic dedication behind it.

Thank you,

Wesleyan University
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University Major Proposal
Description of Courses/Course Pathways

Dear Committee on University Majors,

Below I present an outline of the courses that could possibly constitute my major in Urban Studies. I have broken this description down into three parts: Part I lists courses that I have already taken that could possibly count towards the major. Part II illustrates the courses I will take abroad and how they relate to my major. Part III describes possible course pathways I could pursue (A) during the spring of my Junior year when I return from abroad and (B) during my senior year.

Part I: Pertinent Courses from Academic History/Current Class Schedule:

A. Courses Taken That Could Count for Core Credit*:

Sem/Yr	Dept/No.	Title	Core/Elect	Grade
Fall/08	Anth 230	Anthropology of Cities	Core	A
Fall/08	Soc 271	Housing and Public Policy	Core	A
Spring/09	Gov 222	Regulation and Governance	Core	Pending
Spring/09	Afam 213	Environmental Justice and Sustainability	Core	Pending

*I feel that these courses are sufficiently pertinent to my interest to count as core credits towards my major.

B. Courses Taken That are Pertinent to the Major*:

Sem/Yr	Dept/No.	Title	Core/Elect	Grade
Fall/07	E&ES 197	Introduction to Environmental Studies	Intro Course	A
Spring/08	Afam 204	Introduction to Modern Afam History	Elective?	A
Spring/08	Phil 212/ Env Studies	Introduction to Ethics	Core	A-

*I feel that Introduction to Ethics should be counted as a core credit.

Part II: Courses I Will Take With the IHP Abroad Program in Fall 2009:

*IHP: International Honors Program; Cities in the 21st Century**

Sem/Yr	Title
Fall/09	Urban Politics and Development
Fall/09	Urban Planning and Sustainable Environments
Fall/09	Contemporary Urban Issues: Problems and Solutions
Fall/09	Culture and Society of World Cities

*I have been accepted to this program. Rob Rosenthal, the Chair of my committee, has agreed to accept as many courses as credits towards an Urban Studies Major as is permissible within the guidelines of the University Major. This program travels to Detroit, USA; Bangalore, India; Cape Town, South Africa; and Buenos Aires, Argentina during Fall 2009. IHP offers the unique opportunity of exploring urban issues on a comparative level. I will be exposed to different types of cities and urban development, and come to understand what factors lead to different patterns of urban life and the consequences of these patterns. Urban Studies is by nature a comparative discipline in which the policies and practices of different cities are weighed against one another to determine their costs and benefits. Because the IHP program courses are so pertinent to the themes of my major, I hope to count some the credits towards my program.

Part III: Possible Course Pathways to Pursue at Wesleyan to Complete the Major:

Below I list possible course pathways for the second half of my Junior year and my entire Senior year. I generally list the courses in clusters under certain titles (eg; Government, Sociology, etc). I plan to choose from the courses available during each semester, but this outline gives a sense of what types of courses I am aiming to take. Because I am uncertain as to when certain courses will be taught, some of the courses appear twice—once in the outline for my junior year and again in the outline for my senior year. Courses of particular interest are highlighted.

A. Spring 2010 (Junior Year):

Goal: I plan to use this semester to acquire basic technical and methodological skills necessary to analyze and understand contemporary urban issues.

- a. First, I hope to strengthen my quantitative reasoning skills by taking Introduction to Economics and Applied Data Analysis. I believe that by taking these courses I can acquire the basic essential capabilities necessary for analyzing and understanding empirical data pertinent to urban studies.
- b. Second, I plan to take one of the foundation courses for Sociology in order to enhance my skills in sociological reasoning.
- c. Third, I hope to take a course in the American Politics Concentration of the Government department (below I list possible courses of interest). I wish to nurture essential capabilities in effective citizenship and ethical reasoning.

Possible Course Pathway for Spring 2010:

Dept/No.	Title	Notes
QAC	Applied Data Analysis	Quantitative Reasoning Skills -Open to Junior non-Majors in Spring (10 spots).
Econ 101	Introduction to Economics	Quantitative Reasoning Skills -Open to Junior non-Majors in Spring (15 spots)
<i>Sociology:</i> -Soc 202 -Soc 212 -Soc 151	→Sociological Analysis (1st Choice) →Sociology and Social Theory (2nd Choice) →Introductory Sociology (3rd Choice)	Sociological Reasoning Skills -Soc 202 and 212: may have trouble getting in during pre-reg. Will have to negotiate.

		Fallback: 2 Gov courses.	
<i>Government:</i>		<i>Pre-req</i>	<i>No. of Spots*</i>
-Course in American Politics Concentration:	-Gov 221 Environmental Policy.....	None	5
-Gov 201-259	-Gov 230 Political Communication.....	None	X Barred
	-Gov 257 Resistance Politics.....	None	5
	-Gov 258 Politics and Prejudice.....	Gov 151	0
	-Gov 259 Black Politics	None	2
	-Gov 269 Minority Coalitions.....	Gov 151	2

*Number of spots open to Junior Non-Majors.

B. Fall 2010—Spring 2011 (Senior Year):

Goal: I plan to use this year to deepen my understanding of Urban Studies issues by taking a variety of upper level classes in various disciplines, namely Government, Sociology, Environmental Studies, and Economics. I will attempt to fine-tune my quantitative reasoning skills by taking classes like *Gov 204* or *Gov 366* as well as Economics courses. At the same time, I will attempt to further develop essential capabilities such as effective citizenship, ethical reasoning, and logical reasoning by taking a variety of courses in different disciplines. Below I list courses of interest, highlighting courses that particularly draw my attention:

Dept/No.	Title:	Pre-Req	No. Of Spots*
<i>Env. Studies:</i>	(Classes listed in Environmental Studies):		
Soc 247	Environmental Sociology.....	Soc 151	4
E&ES 359	Global Climate Change.....	Completed	3
E&ES 290	Oceans and Climate.....	Completed	0
Gov 206	Public Policy.....	Gov 151	2
Gov 221	Environmental Policy.....	Gov 151	5
SISP 207	Social and Cultural Practices of Science.....	None	2
SISP 202	Philosophy of Science.....	None	8
<i>Government:</i>			
-Course in American Politics Concentration	-Gov 204 Quantitative Methods for Political and Policy Analysis.....	Gov 151	0
-Gov: 201-259, 369-380	-Gov 230 Political Communication.....	None	X Barred
	-Gov 257 Resistance Politics.....	None	5
	-Gov 258 Politics and Prejudice.....	Gov 151	0
	-Gov 259 Blacks Politics	None	2
	-Gov 269 Minority Coalitions.....	Gov 151	2
	-Gov 343 Political Representation.....	None	2
	-Gov 366 An Introduction to Quantitative Analysis- Democracy and the Social Sciences..	Math 132	4
	-Gov 375 American Political Development.....	None	X Barred
	-Gov 376 The Conservative Revolution.....	None	0
<i>Sociology</i>			
	-Soc 245 Sociology of Conflict Resolution	Soc 151	4
	-Soc 250 What does Democracy Look Like?	Soc 151	4
	-Soc 262 Sociology of Health and Illness	Soc 151	6
	-Soc 270 Urban Societies	Soc 151	0