

# Urban Informality in Global Perspective: Policy, Planning, and Design



--Istanbul, 2018

NURP 5039

Day/Time: Tues 4 - 5:50 pm

Location: Synchronous online

Faculty: Joseph Heathcott <joseph@newschool.edu>

Office Hrs: By appointment, via Zoom

Schedule w/ Daniel Chu <chuc873@newschool.edu>

## **Purpose of the course**

Over the past few decades, there has been a growing interest in informality as a major driver of urbanization and city life around the world. Researchers, policy makers, planners, architects, development workers, artists, and activists have focused on urban informality across multiple domains: from housing and settlement, to labor, infrastructure, mobility, finance, and other modes of human experience. In most cases, urban informality takes hold as a 'problem to be solved.'

And yet, the more we study informality, the less we understand it. We often describe the 'informal' as the constitutive outside of the 'formal,' to paraphrase Chantal Mouffe, locating both along the boundary of legal oversight, government regulation, public provision, and state authority. But even under mild scrutiny this binary breaks down or collapses altogether; formal systems operate through many informal means, while informal networks are fully entangled with formal laws and institutions. Moreover, we have come to see informality as highly discursive: it has been recruited alternately into narratives of Modernity and Progress to disparage the 'unplanned' and 'unregulated,' on the one hand, and into narratives of self-determination and resistance on the other. And yet, to cast informality as merely conceptual or discursive would be to downplay the socio-spatial marginalization that it produces, and to dismiss one of the most important forces shaping the urban world today.

This course takes a close and careful look at urban informality as it emerges across the world, examining it along several dimensions, including the conceptual, the historical, the material, and the affective. We consider the long history of informality as a condition created through enclosure, expropriation, state expansion, and privatization of the commons. We then examine modes of informality across a broad swath of the Global North and Global South, with due attention both to informal practices among elites and the middle-class as well as working-class and poor people. We will grapple with informality in a range of human endeavors as they relate to the city-building process, both in terms of uneven spatial production and the provision of public goods, but also as individuals and groups learn to extract advantage by exploiting the murky, fugitive boundaries of the formal and informal.

Finally, we will review multiple efforts over the last half-century to define and intervene into urban informal systems, whether through ideologically-driven programs or well-intentioned technocratic 'improvement' schemes. In the end, the purpose of this course is not to figure out how we can "fix" or "solve the problem" of urban informality, but rather to figure out how we are conceiving of "the problem" in the first place, and what we might learn by taking informal practices on their own terms.

## **Course objectives**

The main goal of the seminar is for students to contribute to knowledge and understanding in the field of urbanism. By the end of the course, students will be able to do the following:

- Recognize and integrate diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives
- Critically analyze scholarly texts for structure, assumption, argument, evidence
- Conceptualize, design, and execute a substantial project
- Demonstrate proficiency in the use of research tools and resources
- Work through varied modes of exposition, including descriptive, argumentative, and analytical
- Understand the nature, function, and ethical responsibilities of research
- Communicate effectively with an audience appropriate to the topic
- Present a clear voice as a writer, scholar, and critic

## Course Format

Students will meet and work together on a regular basis to address common concerns, such as developing topics, reviewing the nature of research and writing, sharing important resources, and learning advanced methods. Weekly readings are limited so that students can engage in detailed study of the research design of each work. As this is a seminar, I will lecture very little, though now and then will present material that might be useful to advancing our understanding of particular texts, theories, methods, or sources. We will have several different kinds of meetings, including:

### In-class discussion

In these sessions, students dissect readings for their thematic, methodological, and disciplinary approaches. Students also review aspects of research, writing and project organization. Over the course of the semester, close critical reading of scholarly texts will become a reflexive practice.

### Writing and peer editing workshops

In these sessions, students produce drafts and critique one another's work. We discuss best practices in argument structure, sourcing, grammar, composition, and other aspects of writing. The goal is to analyze a range of models from which to draw for your own work.

### Conferences

In these sessions, students meet individually or in small groups with the professor to evaluate the progress of research and writing, to discuss challenges and roadblocks, and to strategize ways to improve the work.



--Mombasa, 1995

## Term Project

The main work of the semester is the design and execution of a project based on substantive research grounded in core conventions of scholarship. I will work with each of you to delineate the optimal format for your work, given your interests, what you need out of the course, and what is feasible in the space of a semester. Your research topic and format will need to be established by the third week of the course so that you have the maximum amount of time to complete the work. The seminar provides the structure for you to develop a project through a stepwise process where each assignment builds on the previous one. The work unfolds through careful conceptualization, deep analysis of evidence, and the construction of expository prose around lines of inquiry. Every project, regardless of the form it takes, will include an argument-based narrative, a literature review, illustrations, and an evidentiary trail.

*Students may select among the following options for their final projects, in close consultation with the instructor. Examples of each format are available on Canvas.*

### Research Paper

By research paper, I mean a work of scholarship suitable for submission to a peer-review journal. Typically, journals limit submissions to 5000-6000 words, all-inclusive (title, abstract, main text, citations, captions, and appendices). This usually works out to be around 20-25 pages. *Students who wish to pursue this option must have a sufficient head start to produce a publishable paper; ideally, this would mean coming into the seminar with data already gathered or readily available, as well as some previous engagement with the scholarly literature.* There is no scope in the seminar to develop a publishable piece of empirical research from square one. If in doubt, make an appointment to discuss this option with me in the first week or two of the course.

### Research Proposal

Students coming into the seminar without an ongoing project in this field may opt to produce a research proposal of 3000-4000 words. The proposal provides an opportunity to lay the groundwork for future scholarship, art, media, or design projects. It should outline the problem, theoretical framework, existing literature, methodology, primary evidence to be examined, description of the setting, and potential contribution. For artists and designers, iteration and prototyping may comprise a substantial part of the work. The completion of a substantial research proposal can be useful for a range of purposes, including grant applications, preparation for fieldwork, or the beginnings of a thesis project. A research proposal does not need to be based on analysis of empirical evidence--it simply proposes what evidence will be gathered and how. However, it must be grounded in rigorous scholarship.

### Policy Memorandum

A policy memorandum is a professional document that provides evidence-based analysis of a delimited issue or problem for a specific audience. It is grounded in a clear analytic method, usually some variant of logic modeling, with well-delineated criteria and metrics for evaluation of alternatives. It is also an act of translation, presenting complex material to an informed but not expert audience. The objective of the memo is not to discover or create new knowledge, but rather to integrate knowledge in order to provide a pre-determined group of readers the rationale for choosing a particular policy alternative or course of action. As such, it is typically geared toward institutional questions of governance, regulation, funding, implementation, and other practical matters. Students should prepare a memo that is 2500-3000 words all-inclusive. However, do not assume that because this option yields a shorter document, it is somehow 'easier': writing a concise, elegant, and persuasive policy memo is by no means an easy task!

## Case Study

The case study is a tried and true artifact of social research. What it sacrifices in generalizability, it makes up for in deeply engaged and richly detailed investigation. Case studies examine particular places, practices, networks, organizations, or other phenomena in order to understand the interrelation of elements in complex systems. They have many uses, such as informing policy decisions, preparing the ground for urban planning and design projects, or providing neighborhood and civic organizations with information relevant to their work. Typically case studies involve both highly descriptive and empirical dimensions; however, during the pandemic, gathering empirical data through fieldwork, surveys, archival research, or interviews could be more challenging. Nevertheless, students can still pursue a case study in this course provided there is enough secondary literature on the topic from which to base an argument. Case studies may range from 2500-5000 words, depending on the scope of the work.

## Assignments

The following assignments comprise the core activities of the seminar. Assignments largely follow a stepwise process that enables students to develop their own projects while contributing to the collective effort. We will frequently engage in 'round robin' updates of projects in class.

Participation. A seminar is a self-organizing space of collaborative learning based on principles of shared purpose and mutual respect. Students should embody these principles by preparing for class, contributing to discussion, and engaging one another on a civil basis. Disagreements should be expressed in ways that advance rather than hinder learning. Following these guidelines, we can create a supportive and potent learning environment (10% of the final grade).

Facilitation: Every week, a team of students will organize a presentation on the reading materials. Presentations should introduce the author of the work, describe the argument and evidence, and discuss the findings in relation to our course. The team will also generate four main questions that arise from the readings, and facilitate a discussion on these questions (10% of final grade).

Annotated Bibliography. Students compile bibliographies of at least 10 secondary scholarly sources that will inform their literature reviews and final projects. Five of the entries should be annotated with a 50-100 word description of the key arguments, methods, and evidence (10% of final grade).

Research Design. This document presents your tentative title, guiding research question, project format, and 5-7 keywords. Additionally, it will include brief paragraphs on primary sources, methods, and format. Finally, it will include an expanded bibliography and a project outline (10% of final grade).

Literature Review. Each student will produce a two-page literature review that can later be revised, expanded, and 'plugged in' to the project. The literature review presents a succinct account of the state of scholarship on a topic, and positions your research within this literature (10% of final grade).

Peer Review Report. We will form pairs based on your research interests. Each of you will complete a brief report on your partner's draft, providing one copy to her and one to me. The review should present both general and specific comments useful for undertaking revisions (10% of final grade).

Term Project. As noted in the previous section, the main work of the semester is the design and execution of a project based on substantive research. While projects may be undertaken in varied formats, they should all include an argument-based narrative, a literature review, appropriate illustrations, and an evidentiary trail. They are due in final draft form on the last class meeting of the semester (40% of final grade).

## Grading

### A-/A

Reserved for exceptionally good work that goes well above and beyond the expectations and requirements set forth in the assignment. Such work demonstrates substantial effort and achievement in the areas of critical thinking and scholarship. It also demonstrates considerable interpretive connections between texts and ideas, a high level of analysis, and power of argument. The argument is clearly laid out and consistent throughout the paper, and it governs the use and interpretation of all examples and source material. "A" projects are very well organized, and are free of grammatical and editorial errors.

### B-/B/B+

These grades indicate work that ranges from good to very good. The project offers better execution and a more complex structure than a paper at the "C" level. What also distinguishes "B-/B/B+" work is the student's ability to offer unique insight, to ask questions of primary or secondary source material, and/or to set up a debate between texts or points of view. The point of view is clear and an argument is sustained fairly consistently throughout the paper. There may be a few writing or execution issues, but these do not generally detract from or obscure the project's purpose. "B-/B/B+" papers/presentations are logically organized, and also respond to the assignment in thoughtful and distinctive ways.

### C-/C/C+

These are average papers and presentations. They will demonstrate some success in engaging with the assignment. The work will show that the student can identify and use key terms and passages in a text and apply them to other texts, or materials. Additionally, the work will demonstrate effort in the areas of analysis and critical thinking by posing an interesting problem or question. However, a typical problem with "C/C+" work is that the original problem or question, once asked, does not move the paper forward. Often, there is no real insight or proposition given, or there are a variety of possible ideas put forward but with little commitment or coherence. "C/C+" papers may also have significant organizational, grammatical and/or editorial errors in evidence. These errors impede the reader's ability to understand the author's point, or result in a product that seems repetitive or circular.

### D-/D/D+/ F

The student's work adheres to all of the minimum guidelines of formatting, page-length, or other terms of the assignment. Written work or audiovisual presentations receiving a grade in the "D" range may be a simple restatement of fact, or advance an opinion or argument unsubstantiated by evidence. These kinds of projects will also tend to be logically inconsistent and lacking in clarity, putting forward contradictory or conflicting points of view that are never resolved. "D" papers may also have serious organizational and grammatical errors that impede the reader's ability to understand the argument.

### F

Failing grades are given for required work that is not submitted, for incomplete final projects, or for assignments that fail to follow even the basic requirements (without prior notification and approval). Make-up work or completion of missed assignment may be permitted only under exceptional circumstance with the approval of the instructor.

## Course Policies

We want all of you to be successful in this course. The policies listed here provide the structure within which you can ensure success. You are responsible for all assignments, even if absent. Late assignments, failure to complete the readings, and lack of preparedness for in-class discussions and presentations will jeopardize your successful completion of this course.

### Attendance

Students are expected to attend every session. Attendance is taken at the beginning of each session. The instructors may fail any student who is absent for a significant portion of class time (3 absences for classes that meet once per week). Lateness or early departure from class may also count as absence.

### Participation

Meaningful class participation is essential and includes: completing readings, contributing to class discussions, maintaining civil conduct, and attending regularly and on time. Every student is expected to contribute, even if it takes the form of a comment prepared in advance. Attendance and participation constitutes 20% of the grade, and can make a significant difference in the final grade.

### Electronic Devices

Remember when we used to debate issues like 'laptops in the classroom?' Now we are all together in a virtual interface! Still, a few key issues remain. Students should silence their phones during class time, and should refrain from using e-mail or social networking websites during the class except in case of emergencies. If you can, please take notes by hand. After all, there is mounting evidence that taking notes by hand activates specific neurocircuitry in the brain associated with information integration and recall, and that these circuits are not activated in people using electronic devices for note taking. We are not yet cyborgs! We need to ensure that we have spaces in our lives that are not governed by the electronica, but rather by haptic routines and movements.

### Food and drinks

Students are welcome to eat / drink in class, taking care to respect others and to avoid disrupting the discussions. We will usually take a break mid-way through our class session that we can use for getting snacks and drinks. Whether virtually or in person, it is mandatory to share the following items with the instructor: chocolate, chaats of any kind, beer, wine, baklava, and cheese in whatever form.

### Course Website

Canvas is the go-to resource for this class. Students should check it for readings, assignments, and weekly announcements. We will be following the Canvas online syllabus during the semester, rather than the 'paper' version that you received for your records. The Canvas syllabus is dynamic, with hyperlinks to all of the readings, videos, web sites, and other materials. In this way, we will all be apprised of the latest information.

## University Policies

### New School Policy on Academic Integrity

It is the responsibility of students to learn the procedures specific to their discipline for correctly and appropriately differentiating their own work from that of others. As the New School policy states: "Plagiarism and cheating of any kind in the course of academic work will not be tolerated. Academic honesty includes accurate use of quotations, as well as appropriate and explicit citation of sources in instances of paraphrasing and describing ideas, or reporting on research findings or any aspect of the work of others (including that of instructors and other students). These standards of academic honesty and citation of sources apply to all forms of academic work."

Compromising your academic integrity may lead to serious consequences, including (but not limited to) one or more of the following: failure of the assignment, failure of the course, academic warning, disciplinary probation, suspension from the university, or dismissal from the university. Every student at Parsons signs an Academic Integrity Statement as a part of the registration process. Thus, you are held responsible for being familiar with, understanding, adhering to and upholding the spirit and standards of academic integrity as set forth by the Student Handbook.

### Guidelines for Written Assignments

The New School's Learning Center offers many resources for students to help with their writing: <https://www.newschool.edu/university-learning-center/>. There are many other useful guides for academic writing. I often direct students to Wesleyan University's Writing Center, which has many great links to resources such as Strunk and White's classic *Elements of Style*, Paul Brians' *Common Errors in English Usage*, and the University of Wisconsin's *Writing Handbook*. See Wesleyan's Center here: <http://www.wesleyan.edu/writing/workshop/resourcesforstudents.html>.

For further information on proper acknowledgment and plagiarism, including expectations for paraphrasing source material and proper forms of citation in research and writing, students should consult the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th edition (University of Chicago Press, 2010), *The Craft of Research*, 3rd edition (University of Chicago Press, 2008), or *A Manual for Writers*, 7th edition (University of Chicago Press, 2007).

### Student Disability Services

In keeping with the University's commitment to provide equal access for students with disabilities, any student with a disability who needs academic accommodations is welcome to meet with the instructor privately. All conversations will be kept confidential. Students requesting any accommodations will also need to meet with Nicholas Faranda in the office of Student Disability Services, who will conduct an intake, and if appropriate, provide an academic accommodation notification letter to you to bring to me. At that point I will review the letter with you and discuss these accommodations in relation to this course. Mr. Faranda's office is located in 63 Fifth Avenue, room 425. His direct telephone number is (212) 229-5626, extension 3135. You may also access more information through the University's web site at <http://www.newschool.edu/student-disability-services/>



## Class schedule

### PART ONE: FRAMEWORKS

#### WEEK ONE, 01.19: URBANITIES

Simone, AbdouMaliq, and Edgar Pieterse. 2017. "Epilogue: A Story About Stories." In *New Urban Worlds: Inhabiting Dissonant Times*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Tonkiss, Fran. 2014. "Introduction." *Cities by Design: The Social Life of Urban Form*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

#### WEEK TWO, 01.26: EPISTEMOLOGIES

Polanyi, Karl. 1944. "Habitat versus Improvement." In *The Great Transformation: Political Economic Origins of Our Time*. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. Pp. 36–44.

Turner, John F. C. 1968. *Uncontrolled Urban Settlement : Problems and Policies*. Report for the Center for Housing, Building and Planning. New York, NY: United Nations.

Roy, Ananya. 2005. "Urban Informality: Toward an Epistemology of Planning." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 71(2): 147–58.

### PART TWO: LABOR AND ECONOMIES

#### WEEK THREE, 02.02: TRANSACTING

Sallah, Abdoulie and Colin Williams. 2016. "Re-Theorising the Role of the Informal Economy in Sub-Saharan Africa: Some Lessons from Gambia." *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business* 28 (2,3): 195-215.

Hossein, Caroline Shenaz. 2007. "Fringe Banking in Canada: A Study of Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCAs) in Toronto's Inner Suburbs." *Canadian Journal for Non Profit and Social Economy Research* 8(1): 29–43.

Verhoeven, Maite and Barbra van Gestel. 2017. "Between Visibility and Invisibility: Sex Workers and Informal Services in Amsterdam." *Feminist Economics* 23(3): 110–33.

**Due: Draft research statement**

WEEK FOUR, 02.09: LABOR IN SHADOWS

Hayden, Tiana. 2018. "Disambiguating Legalities: Street Vending, Law, and Boundary-Work in Mexico City." *Ethnoscripts* 19(2): 15–30.

Venkatesh, Sudhir Alladi. 2009. "The Entrepreneur." In *Off the Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Pp. 91-166.

Simone, AbdouMaliq. 2018. "Ensemble Work." *Improvised Lives: Rhythms of Endurance in an Urban South*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. Pp. 34-58.

**Due: Annotated bibliography**

**PART THREE: DWELLING AND DESIGN**

WEEK FIVE, 02.16: SHAPING HABITAT

Cohen, Michael. 2015. "John F.C. Turner and Housing as a Verb." *Built Environment* 41(3): 412–18.

Dovey, Kim and Ross King. 2011. "Forms of informality: Morphology and Visibility of Informal Settlements." *Built Environment* 37(1): 11-29.

Sadikoglu Asan, Hatice and Ahsen Ozsoy. 2018. "The Enduring Influence of Informality in Istanbul: Legalization of Informal Settlements and Urban Transformation." *Berkeley Planning Journal* 30(1): 60–81.

Boudreau, Julie-Anne, Liette Gilbert, and Danielle Labbé. 2016. "Uneven State Formalization and Periurban Housing Production in Hanoi and Mexico City: Comparative Reflections from the Global South." *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 48(12): 2383–2401.

WEEK SIX, 02.23: SHAPING HOME

Khan, Hassan-Uddin. 1985. "Self-Built Urban Housing in Rabat and Tunis: Interview with Serge Santelli." *MIMAR* 17(Jul-Sept): 41–48.

Mahmud, Shihabuddin. 2003. "Women and the Transformation of Domestic Spaces for Income Generation in Dhaka Bustees." *Cities* 20(5): 321–29.

Sharma, Uptal and Bhavesh Mehta. 2007. "Aranya Township, Indore, India: An Innovative Experiment for Human Habitat." In *Proceedings of the Conference on The Transforming Asian City: Innovative Urban and Planning Practices*. Hong Kong Baptist University. Pp. 161-77.

Kamalipour, Hesam and Nastaran Peimani. 2019. "Towards an Informal Turn in Built Environment Education: Informality and Urban Design Pedagogy." *Sustainability* 11(15): 41–63.

## PART FOUR: SPACE AND MOBILITY

### WEEK SEVEN, 03.02: MOVEMENTS

Cervero, Robert and Aaron Golub. 2007. "Informal Transport: A Global Perspective." *Transport Policy* 14(6): 445–57.

Chattopadhyay, Swati. 2012. "Auto-Mobility." In *Unlearning the City: Infrastructure in a New Optical Field*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Sopranzetti, Claudio. 2017. "The Dangers of Mobility." In *Owners of the Map: Motorcycle Taxi Drivers, Mobility, and Politics in Bangkok*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

### WEEK EIGHT, 03.09: INTERSECTIONS

Kinyanjui, Mary Njeri. 2014. "The Quest for Spatial Justice: From the Margins to the Centre." In *Women and the Informal Economy in Urban Africa*. London: Zed Books. Pp 87-98.

Wigle, Jill. 2010. "Social Relations, Property and 'Peripheral' Informal Settlement: The Case of Ampliación San Marcos, Mexico City." *Urban Studies* 47(2): 411–36.

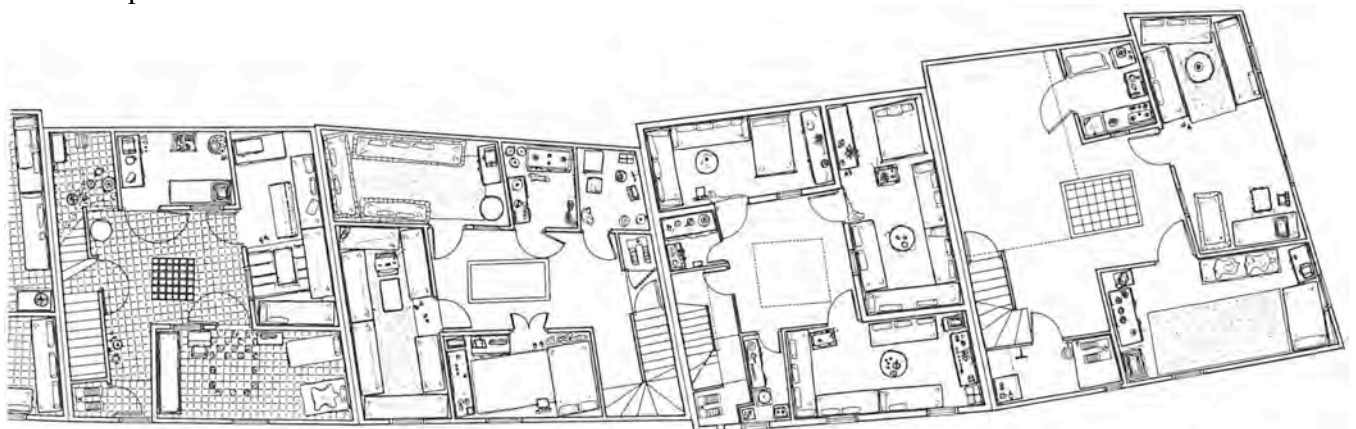
Song, Lily. 2016. "Planning with Urban Informality: A Case for Inclusion, Co-Production and Reiteration." *International Development Planning Review* 38(4): 359–81.

Sosa Lopez, Oscar, Raul Santiago Bartolomei, and Deepak Lamba-Nieves. 2019. *Urban Informality: International Trends and Policies to Address Land Tenure and Informal Settlements*. CNE 20. San Juan, PR: Center for a New Economy.

### **Due: Research Design**

### WEEK NINE, 03.16: SPRING BREAK

Students should use the time over spring break to advance the research project, including reading secondary literature, compiling sources or data, making outlines, and generally preparing for the next phase of work.



## PART SIX: THE CRAFT OF THE URBANIST

### WEEK TEN, 03.23: PRESENTATIONS

Students prepare a five-minute presentation of work in progress. Each presentation includes three slides: a title slide with relevant photograph that evokes the topic, a diagram of the literature review, and a slide with three bullet points: keywords, methods, and format.

**Due: Literature review**

### WEEK ELEVEN, 03.30: INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES

In this session, we will meet one-on-one to discuss the progress of your work, and undertake any troubleshooting that might be needed. The main focus will be on the literature review.

### WEEK TWELVE, 04.06: PEER REVIEW WORKSHOPS

During this week, you will be paired up based on your topics. For this session, you will each submit an introduction, revised literature review, and methods section. You will meet with each other to go over the work.

**Due: Drafts to your peer review partner.** Send to me electronically.

### WEEK THIRTEEN, 04.13: INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES

In this session, we will meet one-on-one to discuss the progress of your work, and undertake any further troubleshooting that might be needed.

### WEEK FOURTEEN, 04.20: PEER REVIEW WORKSHOPS

During this week, you will be paired up with another student based on your topics. You will read one another's work, and draft comments on your peer partner's paper.

**Due: Peer review report.** Send to me electronically.

### WEEK FIFTEEN, 04.27: INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES

In this session, we will meet one-on-one to discuss the last stage of your work, and undertake any troubleshooting that might be needed.

### WEEK SIXTEEN, 05.04: REVISE / RESUBMIT. GATHER FOR BRIEF PRESENTATIONS AND CELEBRATION.

**Final Projects Due on Wednesday, 5 May by 5pm.** Send to me electronically.