Course Description

This course offers an introduction to the social study of infrastructure based on concepts and theories from the environmental social sciences, science and technology studies, and the environmental humanities. Topics explore the meanings, consequences, and possibilities of the built environment and its interconnected social and environmental demands, challenging us to rethink our relationships to things, society, and politics.

Questions center on taken-for-granted aspects of the built world. For example, what happens when we view roads, highways, water supply systems, oil pipelines, ports, seawalls, border walls, and other socio-technical systems as materializations of specific ideas, desires, and aspirations? Do these materializations serve to maintain political authority and reinforce social inequality, or do they challenge existing structures of power and environmentally unsustainable practices? What do we mean by terms like “the crisis of infrastructure” and “sustainable infrastructure”? What is at crisis, what is to be sustained, and for whom?

Studying infrastructure as a manifestation of human interactions with the material world requires us to reach beyond time and to see the ways in which we are bound to each other’s pasts, presents, and futures. Such an investigation is inherently political and often personal, and the readings will reflect this. The world that we occupy has undergone a process of rapid change over the past hundred years, transforming life in profound and unexpected ways, and as such, infrastructure touches upon each and every one of us. Each year, over a billion tons of concrete is poured into new structures, and each year extreme weather knocks at the doors of unsuspecting communities. With the coming crisis of climate change, the construction of everyday life has become increasingly unstable, if not altogether impossible. Flows of people, resources, commodities, information, and capital are weakened under the pressures of endless maintenance, environmental catastrophe, financial crisis, social inequality, and political impasse.

We will encounter a number of case studies that illustrate the myriad ways in which the production and maintenance of infrastructure plays out historically and in real time, with real consequences for those who are bound to these materializations. We will also look at what lies ahead and work together to imagine creative alternatives that can help build ecologically sustainable and just futures. You will be asked to consider and debate perspectives from scholarly studies, work in groups to investigate problems and research alternatives, follow, reflect upon, and analyze the built environment around you, and apply your knowledge in a final project.
Readings

All readings will be available free on GauchoSpace to review and download. There are approximately 100 pages of readings per week divided between two class meetings. I recommend purchasing a copy card at the UCSB library and making hard copies of the material that can be marked up and organized into a binder with your hand-written or printed notes. This will be an invaluable source when completing your papers. Copy cards can be purchased on the 1st floor Mountain Side, in the main computing area near the Reference Desk. Please note: double-sided printing is available at the library for the same price as printing on one side (10 cents per sheet of paper).

Assignments and Evaluation

The format guidelines for all papers in this course are 1” margins all around, 12 point size, double spaced. Upload papers as Word or pdf documents onto GauchoSpace.

20% Ethnographic exercises
10% Film Review
25% Midterm (take home examination)
10% Group Vision Project
25% Final Paper
10% Participation

Ethnographic Exercises

Answering Susan Leigh Star’s (1999) call to “study the boring things,” these exercises are an opportunity for you to practice and demonstrate what you’ve learned from the week’s reading by noticing the world around you and describing something that you have encountered that can be conceptualized as infrastructure. I will provide more detailed guidelines for each assignment before it is due. Through these exercises, you will be prompted to connect concepts from the readings to socio-technical systems in your built environment. These may include short descriptions (1-2 pages double-spaced) or diagrams and photos with written explanations (1 page double-spaced). There will be a total of four throughout the quarter. The first one will be due in Week 2.

Film Review

You will be asked to write a short (2 double-spaced pages) essay on Franny Armstrong’s *Drowned Out* (2002). I will screen this film in class during Week 3. Do not summarize the film in your review. Use your space to develop an argument and discuss the film from your perspective. It is recommended that you take notes and refer to specific scenes. This assignment is due on February 7th.
Midterm

You will be assigned a take-home midterm essay (4-5 double-spaced pages), due before class on February 23rd. The format for this midterm will be an essay prompt in which you will be asked to develop an analysis that draws upon specific concepts and themes in the readings.

Group Vision Project

Can we imagine creative alternatives that can help build ecologically sustainable and just futures? We will return to this question again and again throughout the quarter. In order to organize our thoughts, we will form small discussion groups. Each group will meet during class time once a week to work on developing ideas, taking notes of each meeting and returning to these notes throughout the quarter. The guidelines for the vision paper will be collaboratively discussed. Group presentation will take place in Week 9.

Final Paper

Your final assignment will be to prepare a research paper (8-10 double-spaced pages) that brings concepts and readings from the course into a topic of your own choosing. Please meet with me ahead of time to discuss your plans (no later than March 14).

Engagement

Participation is essential to the functioning of this course. I expect you to come to class with thoughts and questions from the readings and to participate in respectful and considerate discussion and debate.

Support

Students with disabilities may request academic accommodations for exams online through the UCSB Disabled Students Program at http://dsp.sa.ucsb.edu/. Please make your requests for exam accommodations through the online system as early in the quarter as possible to ensure proper arrangement.

The Mental Health Peer Program (MHPP) is a UCSB campus resource offering guidance with regard to stress management, anxiety, depression and other related challenges. For helpful resources, please contact UCSB Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) at 805-893-4411 or visit http://counseling.sa.ucsb.edu/

For writing support and general academic support visit Campus Learning Assistance Services (CLAS). CLAS can help with the entire writing process and offers instructional groups, drop-in tutoring, writing and ESL services, skills workshops and one-on-one consultations. CLAS is located on the third floor of the Student Resource Building, or visit http://clas.sa.ucsb.edu
Academic Integrity

The Office of Judicial Affairs has definitions, policies, and resources for proper citation use, available on their website at: http://judicialaffairs.sa.ucsb.edu. This includes submitting the same work for two courses without my consent. If I detect academic dishonesty on any assignment, you will receive an F for the assignment, and quite possibly for the course, as well as face potential disciplinary action from the University.

Late Papers

I expect all papers to be submitted to GauchoSpace before class on the day they are due. A 10% deduction will be applied for every day a paper is late. I will not accept papers submitted over one week after the deadline. If you become ill or have an emergency, please let me know within 48 hours.

Course Schedule

* This schedule is subject to change, please check GauchoSpace regularly *

Week 1: Introduction (January 17 and 19)
Readings

Week 2: Historical Perspectives: Infrastructure and Empire (January 24 and 26)
Assignments
• First “ethnographic exercise” due (Wednesday, January 24)
Readings

Week 3: Case Study: The Sardar Sarovar Project (January 31 and February 2)
Assignments
• Second “ethnographic exercise” due (Wednesday, January 31)
Readings/Films
• Drowned Out (2002), directed by Franny Armstrong

Week 4: Urbanization and the Anthropocene (February 7 and 9)
Assignments
• Film review due (Wednesday, February 7)
Readings/Films

Week 5: Infrastructures of Security, Access, and Mobility (February 14 and 16)
Assignments
• Third “ethnographic exercise” due (Wednesday, February 14)
Readings

Week 6: Infrastructural Crisis and Neoliberal Restructuring (February 21 and 23)
Assignments
• Take home midterm due (before class on February 23)
Readings/Films
• Part IV, *When the Levees Broke* (2006), directed by Spike Lee
• Additional readings TBA

**Week 7: Infrastructures of Adaptation** (February 28 and March 2)
*If weather permits, Friday’s class will be held at Goleta Beach

**Readings/Films**
• *Shored Up* (2013), directed by Ben Kalina

• Additional readings TBA

**Week 8: Sustainable Infrastructure and Alternatives** (March 7 and 9)

**Assignments**
• Fourth “ethnographic exercise” due (Wednesday, March 7)

**Readings**
• Selected chapters from Jonathon Porritt’s (2013) *The World We Made: Alex McKay’s Story from 2050.*

• Additional readings TBA

**Week 9: Group Presentations** (March 14 and 16)
Group Vision Projects Due (no later than Friday March 16).

*Final papers are due on Friday, March 23rd by noon on GauchoSpace*