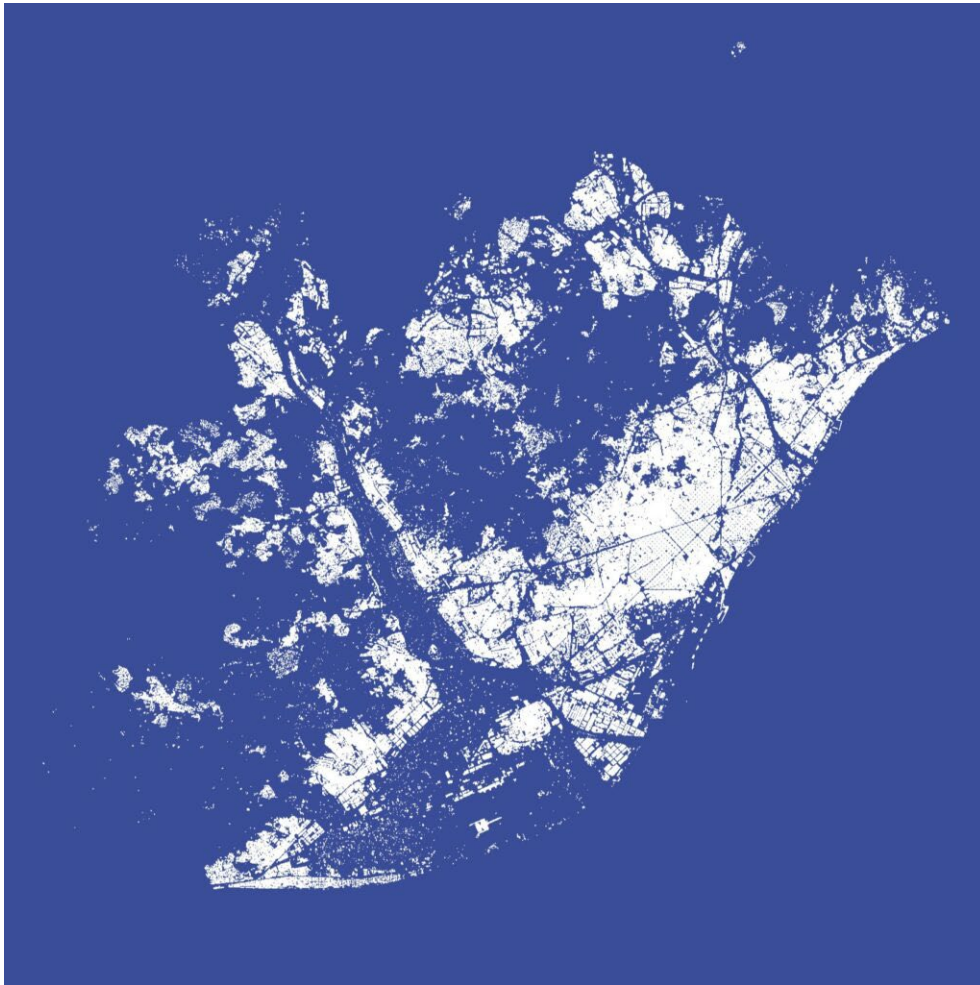


**Glasgow School of Art Course Specification**

**Course Title: Contemporary Urbanism and Urban Design**



*Image Credit: Alberto Ortiz Abad*

*Please note that this course specification is correct on the date of publication but may be subject to amendment prior to the start of the Academic Year.*

Course Code	HECOS Code	Academic Session
	100594 (80%); 100962 (20%)	<b>2026-2027</b>

Course Title	Contemporary Urbanism and Urban Design
Course Contact	<b>Isabel Deakin</b>

Credits	20
SCQF Level	11
When Taught	Stage 1

Associated Programmes	Master of Science in Sustainable Cities Master of Science in Architectural Futures: Practice Based Research
Lead School	Mackintosh School of Architecture
Other Schools	N/A
Date of Approval	Programme Approval September 2025

#### Course Introduction

The Contemporary Urbanism and Urban Design course explores the key drivers of contemporary urbanism through a critically reflective and ethically conscious lens. Students are invited to examine how urbanism and urban design can respond to the history and atmosphere of place while addressing contemporary challenges, offering a framework for understanding sustainable, inclusive and resilient urban futures.

Students will explore the intellectual and spatial evolution of urban thinking across diverse geographies, across a range of global urban contexts shaped by climate, culture and rapid transformation. Drawing on work from leading theorists and practitioners, the course investigates how place-making and new morphologies today must navigate cultural memory, ecological transition, and global development agendas.

Students will engage with case studies from Europe and across the globe and will reflect on how international policy instruments like the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda are being applied at the scale of the city, including in Scotland.

The course is taught through a combination of lectures, seminars and critical discussion, which equip students with the conceptual tools to analyse the ethical, cultural and environmental dimensions of contemporary urbanism and urban design.

#### Course Aims

The aims of the course are to:

**professionalism:** facilitate a student's ethical awareness and development of a critical position in response to the cultural, social and environmental responsibilities of contemporary urban design practice.

**design/create:** facilitate a student's ability to develop critically informed spatial or strategic responses to contemporary urban challenges within the context of place-based and global

change.

**research:** facilitate a student to understand contemporary urban theories and global spatial transformations in relation to specific urban conditions or case studies.

**communication:** facilitate a student to develop a personal position on ethical urbanism through structured written and/or visual communication situated in local, regional or global contexts.

**skills:** facilitate a student to use spatial, cultural and ecological analysis techniques to investigate and interpret complex urban conditions in diverse settings.

**knowledge:** facilitate a student's contextual understanding of the intellectual evolution of urbanism and the current forces shaping 21st-century cities across multiple scales.

### Course Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course students will be able to **appraise, integrate and articulate:**

**professionalism:** an ethical awareness and critical position in response to the cultural, social and environmental responsibilities of contemporary urban design practice.

**design/create:** critically informed spatial or strategic responses to contemporary urban challenges within the context of place-based and global change.

**research:** contemporary urban theories and global spatial transformations in relation to specific urban conditions or case studies.

**communication:** a personal position on ethical urbanism through structured written and/or visual communication situated in local, regional or global contexts.

**skills:** spatial, cultural and ecological analysis techniques to investigate and interpret complex urban conditions in diverse settings.

**knowledge:** contextual understanding of the intellectual evolution of urbanism and the current forces shaping 21st-century cities across multiple scales.

### Indicative Content

This course is designed to support students to critically evaluate 21<sup>st</sup> century urbanism and urban design in relation to social, environmental and cultural ethics, with a focus on the challenges and opportunities of reconciling place-based values with global change.

During the course students will:

- Explore the intellectual evolution of urbanism from modernist planning to human-centred, biophilic and place-based design approaches.
- Analyse contemporary forces shaping cities, globalisation, climate change, migration, inequality, and their spatial manifestations.
- Use precedents and urban case studies to understand the theories, the transformations

and the connections to place and their approaches to urban morphology.

- Investigate the cultural, ecological and ethical implications of design interventions, both at a macro scale and at a grass roots level.
- Reflect on future-facing urban policy and design practice.
- Engage in critical dialogue around the relevance of urban theory to local, regional and global contexts and articulate a personal position on ethical urbanism.

#### Description of Learning and Teaching Methods

##### **Pedagogy:**

The course is intended to provide students with a deep knowledge of the theoretical frameworks and challenges and opportunities within the contemporary city.

##### **Delivery:**

The course is delivered through regular lectures and seminars, using a range of learning and teaching activities including students' presentations of cases and texts.

##### **Timetable:**

The course is delivered over 10 weeks, 2 hours per week.

##### **Canvas:**

The virtual learning environmental tool Canvas is used for the dissemination, discussion, and access to relevant course information, and to signpost students to other relevant teaching and learning platforms used by GSA.

Indicative Contact Hours	Notional Learning Hours
20	200

#### Description of Formative Assessment and Feedback Methods

Formative feedback is delivered during the course following a formative submission in week 6, offering students the opportunity to obtain staff feedback towards their final submission.

As such formative feedback provided fosters reflective learning while supporting the summative graded assessment and feedback process, which generally happens at the end of the course.

#### Description of Summative Assessment arrangements

Summative assessment is undertaken at the end of the course and is designed and delivered to support student learning. Students' work is assessed against the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) for each course.

Summative assessment in this course is undertaken through a coursework assignment in the form of a 3,000-word illustrated essay. Coursework assignment submissions involve visual and text-based submissions utilising both digital and physical tools and formats. Written feedback is provided on all summative assessments.

All submissions will be assessed and moderated in line with the GSA Code of Assessment.

Reassessment opportunities where a student has not passed the course are outlined in the GSA Code of Assessment.

Description of Summative Assessment Method	Weight %	Submission week
<b>Illustrated Essay</b> Students are required to submit an illustrated Essay on a self-selected topic related to the course content (3000 words).	100	Semester 1, week 12

Exchange/Study Abroad	
Can this course be taken by Exchange/Study Abroad students?	No
Are all the students on the course taught wholly by distance learning?	No
Does this course represent a work placement or a year of study abroad?	No
Is this course collaborative with any other institutions?	No
If yes, then please provide the names of the other teaching institutions	

Reading and On-line Resources
Supporting the course, an indicative reading and on-line resource list is accessible via <a href="#">Resource Lists</a> . This list will be reviewed and updated annually. Supervisors, tutors and peers will provide further recommendations appropriate to student's chosen research subject.