

Rice University Urban Lab Program

The Urban Lab Program at Rice University¹ is an interdisciplinary program that combines coursework on comparative urban or regional politics and policy with field research that allows students to study the dynamics of urban or regional political, economic, and social development first hand. Since 2011 the program has been housed in the **Political Science Department**, but represents a partnership with both the **Chao Center for Asian Studies** and the **Baker Institute Center for the Middle East**.

The program includes parent courses that offer a broad overview of urban or regional politics and policies. These courses examine how national, regional, and local forces shape the processes and outcomes of governance within and across cities, metropolitan areas, or regions, paying particular attention to critical problems and policies that affect urban centers: growth, immigration, class conflict, gender issues, public order, service management, human rights, education, housing, transportation, environmental protection, sustainability, land-use planning and spatial competition.

Current parent courses include:

POLI 362: Comparative Urban Politics and Policy

POLI 355: Government and Politics of the Middle East

POLI 464: Research Seminar on Comparative Urban Politics and Policy

POLI 458: Gender and Politics in the Middle East

In addition to taking one of the parent courses, students simultaneously enroll in one of the one-credit lab courses. In the lab, students focus on a specific city and engage in an in-depth study of not only the history, culture, and political economy of the city and country, but also identify a specific research project related to a contemporary problem facing the city or nation. During spring break, students travel with their lab instructors to their city for an intensive field-research trip that includes visits to think tanks, municipal governments, government ministries, community centers, housing projects, local schools and cultural sites. Students also attend lectures at local universities (Boğaziçi and Koç Universities in Istanbul, San Andrés University in Buenos Aires, and Shanghai Jiao Tong and Tongji Universities).

The program started in 2011 with the Urban Lab **Istanbul** (POLI/ASIA 349) and expanded to include labs for two other cities: **Buenos Aires** (POLI 348) and **Shanghai** (POLI/ASIA 347). In Spring 2016 we will also add **Dubai** (POLI 345).

¹ Note, this is a different program than the Global Urban Lab (GUL), which is run by Associate Dean Ipek Martinez in the School of Science. GUL is primarily the London Study Abroad program, but also features an Istanbul Lab course/trip (POST 400).

Participation in the Urban Lab program is open to students of all years and all majors. There are no prerequisites. However, participation is by application only. Applications will be accepted beginning in September and decisions are typically made by late October/early November. For more information about the program, including previous years' itineraries, student blogs, syllabi, etc., go to the individual the lab websites:

<http://istanbul.rice.edu>
<http://buenosaires.rice.edu/>
<http://shanghai.blogs.rice.edu/>

You can also contact Professor Melissa Marschall (marschal@rice.edu), who directs the urban lab program and also teaches the core courses on comparative urban politics & policy and the Istanbul lab.

Urban Lab Student Reflections & Testimonials



“My interest in traveling abroad and in local government engineering led me to the Urban Lab Program. I was hoping to get a view into an engineer’s place in the political picture, and I was wonderfully surprised right from the start. The entire trip has turned out to be one of the most incredible experiences of my undergraduate career.” - Maria Rangel, Senior, Weiss College, Civil Engineering Major.



“My motivation to join the Buenos Aires Urban Lab stemmed from my desire to gain a larger perspective of cities and how they function within different geographical and cultural contexts. Having grown up in New York City and having had the opportunity to travel to other cities abroad, I developed a strong interest in urban environments and how they form and develop. I chose Buenos Aires specifically

because South America seemed to be an overlooked region of the world in terms of political and economic influence. Learning about and experiencing a major city in South America helped solidify my perspective of the region as a rising economic power with growing international influence.” –Sean Leong, Class of 2016, Political Science and Economics Double Major.



“Shanghai was amazing. I learned a lot from our speakers, from visiting both tourist-heavy and non-tourist-heavy areas, and most significantly, from interacting with local citizens. From the history of Shanghai, architecture and housing, disparities between migrants (who make up half the population) and non-migrants, and the speakers, I can’t help but think of Shanghai as containing little that

is actually *of* Shanghai. Shanghai seems to be more like bits and pieces of different parts of the world and history constructed into one mish-mash, patchwork urban dystopia.” – Nicole Zhao, Class of 2015, English Major.