

The Making of Cities

MIT SA+P. Course 4.241 J / 11.330 J. Spring 2023

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Time: Wednesdays 5-8. Room 5-233

Units: 3-0-9 G; 3-3-6 G



The Mosaic of the Nile. Palestrina. Early 2nd c. CE.

Course Description

Whether planned or unplanned, guided by theory or by ‘organic growth,’ making cities is one of the biggest and most consistent of all collective human enterprises. Our chief interest is in studying the history of how major cities and urban systems are made, remade, and at points have become ‘unmade.’ With that purpose, the class sessions will study and debate a set of historic cases, from the very beginning of cities in the Bronze Age, to the 21st century. These studies will allow us to interrogate, analyze, and differentiate the links between historic and contemporary urban forms.

In the past century—and more so in the past decades—the understanding of the city as a bounded entity has been radically challenged. In many cases the city has expanded so much that it can never be conceived, viewed, or experienced in its totality. Likewise, the urban and the city are no longer one and the same. If the city remains an articulation of a form—a physical entity—, the urban can be understood as a condition; a state-of-affairs or alignment of factors which enables urban-life. Such a condition emerges when a series of elements or forces exist simultaneously within a specific relation to each other. Understanding such factors will be one of our goals. We cannot and should not rely on existing models of understanding urbanism through forms alone. In this sense, our historical analyses seek mostly to investigate a set of concepts that create urban conditions and provide a better point of departure for rethinking urban life. This investigation enables us to re-think certain conceptions of what the city is and establishes a productive foundation for creating other forms of urbanism.

Our study of cities builds upon four main theoretical assumptions. The first is that cities are always shaped by and in turn influence five driving forces: 1) environmental, 2) economic/social, 3) technological/formal, 4) symbolic and spiritual, and 5) political ones. We view these forces as a causal superstructure and frame for considering how cities develop, and through these lenses we seek to better understand the history of urban form and urbanization. We will dedicate an entire seminar session to discuss them, and will see how all or some of them have been crucial to shape city forms at diverse geographies and times.

Our second thesis is that cities and urban systems can only be properly understood when considered territorially. That is, even if the city and the non-city realms have been historically differentiated in contrasting categories (such as urban/rural, or urban/hinterland), these different realms have always maintained a constant interplay. Cities help articulating broader territorial systems, and in turn their functional, formal, and social conditions result from the regime of relations between the urban and non-urban dimensions characterizing that territory. Treating cities and territories as co-constitutive elements allows us better understanding which types of functions, buildings, and structures, a particular city form contains. It also helps us analyzing the relation between cities and material, energetic, and ecological flows, and the challenges these factors imposed on the persistence of urban systems.

The third thesis insists on the singularity of each urban form as a specific way of articulating socio-spatial relations. Every case we will consider represents a particular attempt to explore how humans (and often also non-humans) can live together. Even if we will explore the historical continuities or relations between different city forms, our focus will be on detecting the singularities, the unique contributions that each city represents. Throughout history,

city building has been a tremendously imaginative enterprise, characterized by changes and drastic discontinuities in what different social groups considered a city was. Acknowledging that richness is a way of keep imagining what cities can be.

Our final thesis dialogues with the aforementioned notion of urban forces. Thinking about environmental, material, or economic forces allows us understanding the systemic factors contributing to city formation. However, cities are not only the result of systemic processes. They are the consequence of specific decisions and interventions, carried out by agents who contribute to shaping urban space. Cities are the object of actions of (often privileged) social or political groups. They are the realm of intervention of particular domains of knowledge and disciplines. Our analyses will insist on the importance of those agents in order to highlight that every city has been the result of choices, and that these choices both entail and give form to a vision of social relations.

Course Format

Most classes will consist of two parts. The first one will be a lecture examining targeted cities throughout history and across the globe. The lectures will draw attention to the forces that have shaped urban form, providing an historical account integrated together with an analysis of various physical changes that have taken place in the city. As such the lectures aid in establishing a conceptual-analytic framework for how to approach, understand, and make use of information and data that concerns urban form. The second part of the class will be a student-led reading discussion. The goal of the discussion is to better unpack the concepts treated in the lecture, and building bridges between those concepts and some of our contemporary urban questions.

Student participation is a crucial component of the course. Participants in the class will divide themselves in groups. Each of these groups will be responsible for 1) Presenting and dialoguing about a specific urban force; and 2) Leading one reading discussion. In addition, students will work individually on a semester-long research project, to be presented in our last class. This research project must focus on a particular, existing urban artifact (a building, an urban area, an infrastructure) in order to illuminate how it was produced, what type of urban condition it enables, and what is its potential value for your own way of thinking about urbanism. Additionally, every student should actively participate in the reading discussions.

Outside of classroom hours, students should expect to devote time to reading texts, preparing their in-class presentations and their semester long research project, as well as attending the meetings with the TAs to develop the project.

Course Requirements and Grading

The course contains several, interrelated assignments. The intention is that you will build your work sequentially, interrelating your participation in class, with your research, with the dialogue with your peers.

1) Attendance, participation, and leading of reading discussions (total 50%)

On the first day of class, you must bring an image of an urban element, and briefly explain in 2 minutes why it is important to you.

- **As an individual**, you are expected to come to every class with thoughtful questions and well-reasoned arguments based upon the assigned readings, and to participate fully in the discussion. Every Tuesday before class, you must upload to canvas a short reflection on the readings, plus a paragraph from each text that you find important to discuss.
- **As a member of a group**, you are expected to participate in the dialogues on forces on Week 3, and later to present the readings assigned to your group, structuring and leading the conversations about them. This last conversation must be prepared with the class TAs.
Regarding the dialogues. Every pair of groups involved in a dialogue must meet the TA to prepare the dialogue. You have to all the texts in your dialogue group (i.e, the one you will present and the one from the other group). Every group will need to summarize what we should learn from the text in a 3 minutes presentation, and then engage in a dialogue with the other group, interrogating both texts.

In the class we all learn through mutual dialogue. As such, attendance in class is mandatory, and your participation mark will be impacted if you fail to actively participate in class.

Absences to the class should be notified, although we understand that in emergency cases that may not be possible. Please note that more than one unexcused absences, will lower your final grade by one grade (A to A-, C- to C+, f.i). In turn, greater than two absences from class without medical excuse supported by a doctor's note or verifiable personal emergency could result in a failing grade or a NE for the course. Finally, those missing more than 3 classes during the semester will receive a fail or NE. Persistent lateness will also contribute to a lowered grade for participation.

A final note relates to the class' no-screen request. This is hard for all of us in a connected age! But it substantially improves the focus and quality of our discussions, and the work that results from them. If you find yourself truly needing to respond to a call or other phone-related emergency, please feel free to do so but leave the classroom quietly.

2) Semester long research project (total 50%)

Every student will develop a semester long research project. In this exercise you need to select a urban artifact (a building, a neighborhood, a street, a infrastructure) that you can approach as a historian. This artifact must have been built, even if it has disappeared since its original construction. Then, your work should illuminate at least three things: 1) how this element was produced and what is its relation to the history of the settlement where it is located; 2) what are the conditions that this urban element has enabled or enables, 3) why it is important and we should be looking at it today. The final format of the project is a pdf booklet with a 5,000 words text, properly referenced and sourced, plus 8 visualizations of your own making. The instructors will provide an InDesign template for the pdf. The students will present their project the last day of class. The visualizations must be printed independently in a tabloid paper.

The project will be developed sequentially and debated with the instructors during office hours. We will organize your topics thematically so that you can always develop your work in conversation with your peers. The idea is that we will be able to discuss urban topics collaboratively.

- W4 March 1** Submission 1: Research topic. Due: March 1 before class.
- Including: 1) title, 2) 300 words abstract, 3) three main questions that you want to study, 4) basic bibliography with ten titles (MLA citation), and 5) a minimum of four images that allow you to study the topic. These are images you find, not images that you produce.
- W5 March 8** Before our class on Wednesday March 8, you would have to meet your TAs. Bring a diagram to the meeting summarizing your research intentions.
- W6 March 15** Submission 2: Images. Due: March 14, 11: 59 pm.
- Upload 3 analytical images to canvas. Format jpeg. Name your file: Surname, Name_Image nr_Title. So, for instance: Salgueiro, Roi_01_Tower of Babel.
- W9 April 5** Submission 3: Theories. Due: April 5 before class.
- Submit 500 word text with key ideas that you want to study in your research. Relate those ideas to theories that you are considering. Connect authors that you are reading to your own thought.
 - Meet TAs to discuss the submission and advance your research.
- W11 April 19** Submission 4: Images. Due: April 19 before class.
- Upload an updated version of the 3 images presented on W6, plus 3 additional analytical images to canvas. Format jpeg. Name your file: Surname, Name_Image nr_Title. So, for instance: Salgueiro, Roi_01_Tower of Babel.
 - Add captions indicating how these images are supporting your argument.
 - Meet TAs to discuss the submission and advance your research.

W12 April 25 Submission 5: Preliminary paper. Due: April 25 before class.

W14 May 10 Final submission.

- 5000 words research paper (including bibliography and notes)
- 8 analytical images submitted independently of the paper.
- The instructors will provide a template for both types of documents.

In addition, during class time we will have two presentations of the work (March 15, mid-term, and May 10, final) and two workshops on the projects (March 22 and May 3).

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

W1 Feb 8 **Class Presentation.**

Presentation of the class contents and structure. Introduction of the teaching team and students. Submit an image to accompany your presentation.

W2 Feb 15 **The origins of cities**

Readings:

- Lewis Mumford, “The Crystallization of the City,” in *The City in History. Its Origins, Transformations, and its Prospects* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, and World Inc, 1961), 29-54.
- Mark Jarzombek, “Village and Chiefdom Worlds,” in *The Architecture of the First Societies*. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2013), 299-315.
- David Graeber and David Wengrow, “Imaginary Cities. Eurasia’s first urbanites – in Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, Ukraine, and China- and how they built cities without kings,” *The Dawn of Everything. A New History of Humanity* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021), 276-328.

W3 Feb 22 **Dialogues with presentation of readings on the forces shaping urban development.**

Dialogue 1

- 1) Group 1. Environmental forces.
 - William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis* (New York, W.W. Norton: 1991), 23-54, and 63-74.
- 2) Group 2. Technological forces.
 - Maria Kaika, “The Phantasmagoria of the Modernist Dream,” in *City of Flows. Modernity, Nature, and the City* (Routledge: New York, 2005), 27-51.

Dialogue 2

- 3) Group 3. Economic forces.
 - Reinhold Martin, “Financial Imaginaries: Towards a Philosophy of the City,” *Grey Room* 42 (2011): 60-79.
- 4) Group 4. Symbolic and Spiritual forces.
 - Rem Koolhaas, “The Double Life of Utopia: the Skyscraper,” in *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 81-159.

Dialogue 3

- 5) Group 5. Formal forces.
 - Aldo Rossi, “The Structure of Urban Artifacts,” in *The Architecture of the City* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1982), 29-61.
- 6) Group 6. Social forces.
 - Reyner Banham, “In the Rear Mirror,” and “Ecology I: Surfurbia,” in *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (London: Penguin Press, 1971), 21-57.

Dialogue 4

- 7) Group 7. Political forces 1
 - Hamed Khosravi, “Camp of Faith: The political theology of the Islamic City,” in *The City as a Project*, Pier Vittorio Aureli, ed. (Berlin: Ruby Press, 2013), 70-100.
- 8) Group 8. Political forces 2
 - Dolores Hayden, “What Would a Non-Sexist City Be Like? Speculations on Housing, Urban Design, and Human Work” *Signs* 5, no. 3 Women and the American City (1980): 170-187.
- 9) Group 9. Political forces 3
 - Marcus Anthony Hunter and Zandria F. Robinson, “The Sociology of Urban Black America,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 42, no,1 (2016): 385-405.

W4 March 1

Part 1. Lecture: Polis and demos. The autonomous Greek city.**Part 2. Student presentation of readings and discussion.**

Readings:

- Aristotle, *Politics*. Book 7, chapters 4 to 7
- H.D.F. Kitto, “The Polis,” in *Urban Politics*, Jonathan S. Davies and David L. Imbroscio ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2010), 1-12.
- Richard Sennet, “Nakedness: The Citizen’s Body in Perikles’ Athens,” or “The Cloak of Darkness: The Protection of Ritual in Athens,” 31-68, or 68-87.
- Cornelius Castoriadis, “From Ecology to Autonomy,” in *The Cornelius Castoriadis Reader*, (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1977), 239-253.

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- W5 March 8** **Part 1. Lecture: Urbs, civitas, empire. Roman urbanism.**
Part 2. Student presentation of readings and discussion.
Readings:
- Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), 17-35.
 - Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Meaning in Western Architecture* (New York: Praeger, 1975), 81-88.
 - Colin Rowe, “Collision City and the Politics of Bricolage,” in *Collage City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978).
 - Massimo Cacciari, “The Myth of the Growing City,” in *Europe and Empire. The Political Forms of Globalization* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2016), 101-110.
- W6 March 15** **Part 1. Lecture and discussion. Guest: Huma Gupta, HTC, AKPIA. “The State Between Building & Dwelling.”**
Part 2. Presentations of student work.
Readings:
- Huma Gupta, “Staging Baghdad as a Problem of Development,” *International Journal of Islamic Architecture* 8, no.2 (2019): 337-361.
 - Huma Gupta, “The Birth of Sadr City and Popular Protest in Iraq,” *Middle East Brief* 144 (2021): 1-8.
- W7 March 22** **Workshop**
In class session for discussing and advancing the semester long research project.
- W8 March 29** **No Class. Spring Break**
- W9 April 5** **Part 1. Lecture: Commerce and utopia. Cities in the Hanseatic League and the Italian Renaissance.**
Part 2. Student presentation of readings and discussion.
Readings:
- Tomas More, *Utopia*, excerpts.
 - Derek S. Denman, “Machiavelli and the Fortress City,” *Political Theory* 47, no. 2 (2019): 203-229.
 - Nicholas A. Eckstein, “Prepositional City,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 71, no.4 (2018): 1235-1271.
 - Manuel de Landa” Geographical History 1000-1700,” in *A Thousand Years of Non Linear History* (New York: Swerve Editions, 2000), 26-56.
 - Aihwa Ong, “Worldling Cities, or the Art of Being Global,” in Ananya Roy and Aihwa Hong, ed. *Worldling Cities. Asian Experiments in the Art of Being Global* (Chichester, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 1-26.

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- W10 April 12** **Part 1. Lecture: What is it to “have” a continent? City building and the colonization of America.**
Part 2. Student presentation of readings and discussion.
Readings:
- G.A. De Bruijne, “Colonial cities and the post-colonial world,” in Raymond F., Robert Ross, and Gerard J. Telkamp, ed. *Colonial Cities: Essays on Urbanism in a Colonial Context*. (Dordrecht, Netherlands ;: M. Nijhoff, 1985)..
 - Keller Easterling, “Zone,” in *Extrastatecraft: the Power of Infrastructure Space* (London:: Verso, 2014), 22-62.
 - Sheppard, Eric, Helga Leitner, and Anant Maringanti. “Provincializing Global Urbanism: A Manifesto,” *Urban geography* 34.7 (2013): 893–900.
 - Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall, "Writing the World from an African Metropolis," *Public Culture* vol.16, no.3 (2004): 347-372.
- W11 April 19** **Part 1. Lecture. The medicalization of the city. 18th and 19th century Paris.**
Part 2. Student presentation of readings and discussion.
Readings:
- Antoine Picon, “Nineteenth-century Urban Cartography and the Scientific Ideal: The Case of Paris,” *Osiris* (2003): 135–149.
 - Matthew Gandy, “Rethinking Urban Metabolism: Water, Space, and the Modern City,” *City* 8, no.3 (2004): 363-379.
 - Sabine Barles, “The Nitrogen Question. Urbanization, Industrialization, and River Quality in Paris 1830-1939,” *Journal of Urban History* 33, no. 5 (2007): 794-812.
 - Alvaro Sevilla Buitrago, “Gramsci and Foucault in Central Park: Environmental Hegemonies, Pedagogical Spaces and Integral State Formations,” *Environment and Planning. D, Society & space* 35, no.1 (2017): 165–183.
- W12 April 26** **Part 1. Lecture: Metropolitanization and urban science. 19th century Barcelona.**
Part 2. Student presentation of readings and discussion.
Readings:
- Ross Exo Adams, "Natura Urbans, Natura Urbanata: Ecological Urbanism, Circulation, and the Immunization of Nature," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32 (2014): 12-29.
 - Ludwig Hilberseimer, *Metropolis Architecture and Selected Essays* (New York, NY: GSAPP BOOKS, 2012), 84-134.
 - Constantinos Doxiadis, "Anthropocosmos Model," *Ekistics* 72 (2005): 430-435.

- Álvaro Sevilla-Buitrago, “Planning as a Historical Project,” in *Against The Commons: A Radical History Of Urban Planning* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 1-30.

W13 May 3 **Part 1. Lecture: After urbanization. Guest: Brent D. Ryan, DUSP.**

Part 2. Workshop. In class discussion of student work.

Readings:

- TBD

W14 May 10 **Last class Presentations.**

Land Acknowledgement Statement

We acknowledge Indigenous Peoples as the traditional stewards of the land, and the enduring relationship that exists between them and their traditional territories. The lands which MIT occupies are the traditional unceded territories of the Wampanoag Nation and the Massachusetts Peoples. We acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced occupation of these territories, as well as the ongoing processes of colonialism and dispossession in which we and our institution are implicated. Beyond the stolen territory which we physically occupy, MIT has long profited from the sale of federal lands granted by the Morrill Act, territories stolen from 82 Tribes including the Greater and Little Osage, Chippewa, and Omaha Peoples. As we honor and respect the many diverse Indigenous people connected to this land from time immemorial, we seek to Indigenize our institution and the field of planning, offer Space, and leave Indigenous peoples in more empowered positions.

Inclusive Class and Classroom

MIT values an inclusive environment. I hope to foster a sense of community in this classroom and consider this classroom to be a place where you will be treated with respect. I welcome individuals of all backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, national origins, gender identities, sexual orientations, religious and political affiliations – and other visible and nonvisible differences. All members of this class are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment for every other member of the class. If this standard is not being upheld, please feel free to speak with me.

Special Accommodations

MIT is committed to the principle of equal access. Students who need disability accommodations are encouraged to speak with Disability and Access Services (DAS), prior to or early in the semester so that accommodation requests can be evaluated and addressed in a timely fashion. If you have a disability and are not planning to use accommodations, it is still recommended that you meet with DAS staff to familiarize yourself with their services and resources. Please visit the DAS website for contact information. If you have already been approved for accommodations, class staff are ready to assist with implementation. Please inform Professor Ryan at bdr@mit.edu who will oversee accommodation implementation for this course.

Schedule Summary

Week	Topic	In Class	For Class
W01. 02.08	Class Presentation.	Lecture	Upload 1 Image to Canvas.
W02. 02.15	The Origins of Cities.	Lecture Reading Discussion	Read, submit response, prepare discussion. Responsible group: Meet TAs, lead, present.
W03. 02.22	Urban Forces.	Dialogues on Urban Forces	Read and prepare discussion with TAs.
W04. 03.01	Polis and Demos. The Autonomous Greek city.	Lecture Reading Discussion	Read, submit response, prepare discussion. Responsible group: Meet TAs, lead, present. Research: 1st submission. Topic.
W05. 03.08	Urbs, Civitas, Empire. Roman Urbanism.	Lecture Reading Discussion	Read, submit response, prepare discussion. Responsible group: Meet TAs, lead, present. Research: discuss submission in TAs meeting.
W06. 03.15	Guest lecture: The State Between Dwelling and Building.	Guest Lecture Presentation of research proposals	Read the texts selected by the lecturer and prepare questions. Research: 2nd submission. Text and 2 images.
W07. 03.22	Mid-term work session	Workshop on research proposals	
W08. 03.29	No class	No class	No class
W09. 04.05	Commerce and Utopia. Cities in the Hanseatic League and the Italian Renaissance.	Lecture Reading Discussion	Read, submit response, prepare discussion. Responsible group: Meet TAs, lead, present. Research: 3rd submission. Theories. Meet TAs,
W10. 04.12	City Building and the Colonization of America.	Lecture Reading Discussion	Read, submit response, prepare discussion. Responsible group: Meet TAs, lead, present
W11. 04.19	The Medicalization of the City.	Lecture Reading Discussion	Read, submit response, prepare discussion. Responsible group: Meet TAs, lead, present. Research: 4th submission. 2 images. Meet TAs.
W12. 04.26	Metropolitanization and Urban Science.	Lecture Reading Discussion	Read the texts selected by the lecturer and prepare questions. Research: 5th submission. Preliminary paper.
W13. 05.03	Guest lecture. After urbanization.	Guest Lecture Workshop on the research projects	Read, submit response, prepare discussion. Responsible group: Meet TAs, lead, present. Research: refine paper and images.
W14. 05.10	Final Presentation	Final Presentation	Submit final project. Booklet with fifteen visualizations accompanied by text, and ppt or pdf presentation for class. Research: 6th submission. Final paper & images.

Grading definition

- A. Exceptionally good performance demonstrating a superior understanding of the subject matter, a foundation of extensive knowledge, and a skillful use of concepts and/or materials.
- B. Good performance demonstrating capacity to use the appropriate concepts, a good understanding of the subject matter, and an ability to handle the problems and materials encountered in the subject.
- C. Adequate performance demonstrating an adequate understanding of the subject matter, an ability to handle relatively simple problems, and adequate preparation for moving on to more advanced work in the field.

D. Minimally acceptable performance demonstrating at least partial familiarity with the subject matter and some capacity to deal with relatively simple problems, but also demonstrating deficiencies serious enough to make it inadvisable to proceed further in the field without additional work.

F. Failed. This grade also signifies that the student must repeat the subject to receive credit.

NE. No record will appear on the external transcript.

Academic Integrity and Honesty

MIT's expectations and policies regarding academic integrity should be read carefully and adhered to diligently. Plagiarism is a major academic offense. Read: <http://integrity.mit.edu>.

Writing and Communication Resources

The WCC at MIT (Writing and Communication Center) offers *free* one-on-one professional advice from communication experts. The WCC is staffed completely by MIT lecturers. All have advanced degrees. All are experienced college classroom teachers of communication. All are all are published scholars and writers. The WCC helps you strategize about all types of academic and professional writing as well as about all aspects of oral presentations (including practicing classroom presentations & conference talks as well as designing slides). No matter what department or discipline you are in, the WCC helps you think your way more deeply into your topic, helps you see new implications in your data, research, and ideas. The WCC also helps with all English as Second Language issues, from To register with our online scheduler and to make appointments, go to <https://mit.mywconline.com/>. To access the WCC's many pages of advice about writing and oral presentations, go to <http://cmsw.mit.edu/writing-and-communication-center/>. Check the online scheduler for up-to-date hours and available appointments.

Student Performance Criteria. NAAB

Realm A: Critical Thinking and Representation

- A1. Communication Skills: Ability to read, write, speak and listen effectively.
- A2. Design Thinking Skills: Ability to raise clear and precise questions, use abstract ideas to interpret information, consider diverse points of view, reach well-reasoned conclusions, and test alternative outcomes against relevant criteria and standards.
- A3. Visual Communication Skills: *Ability to* use appropriate representational media, such as traditional graphic and digital technology skills, to convey essential formal elements at each stage of the programming and design process.
- A5. Investigative Skills: *Ability to* gather, assess, record, apply, and comparatively evaluate relevant information within architectural coursework and design processes.

Communication with the instructor

I will reply to your emails promptly, usually within 24-48 hours, excluding weekends. Office hours are by appointment on Thursday afternoons.