

MPHIL IN URBAN STUDIES

SOUTHERN URBANISM

Fostering the next generation
of urban scholars rooted in
Southern city perspectives



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UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
IYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA • UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD



AFRICAN CENTRE *for* CITIES



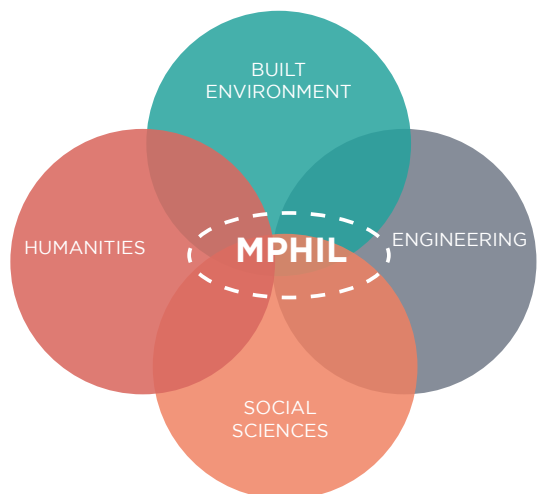
It is well known that the world is transitioning to an irrevocable urban future whose epicenter has moved into the cities of Asia and Africa, which together will account for 86% of all growth in the world's urban population over the next four decades. This unprecedented increase will pose new environmental, economic and social challenges, the full implications of which demand new understandings as city-making and remaking are entangled in these vast multi-dimensional shifts.

These shifts also highlight a profound crisis of knowledge production, one that forces us to question taken-for-granted assumptions of the field of Urban Studies. What is needed is critical engagement with the dominant global North theories, bold methodological experimentation, plural perspectives brought into conversation through co-production and critical inquiry from a global South perspective that resists easy generalisations.

If you are interested in taking up this challenge, the MPhil in Southern Urbanism is your learning platform. Through a combination of guided learning in small group seminars, experimentation in various spaces of urban practice and independent thesis research, the programme provides a truly unique opportunity to ground yourself in the realities, theories and practise of cities of the global South.

“ Postcolonial urbanism cannot be understood with 20th century concepts and epistemologies.

- Edgar Pieterse



Urbanism is fundamentally an interdisciplinary field and as such we welcome scholars from diverse academic background.

THE ACADEMIC JOURNEY

The MPhil curriculum combines course work (50%) and a minor dissertation (50%), a full-time load completed over 24 months. The language of instruction is English. In year one, students complete the Masters coursework, which includes a compulsory City Research Studio, a choice of two of three interdisciplinary

urban modules, and an urban focused elective. In year two, students write minor dissertations based on their own fieldwork, under the supervision of expert faculty and researchers in either the Humanities, Engineering and the Built Environment, or Science Faculties at the University of Cape Town.

YEAR 1 Course work 90 credits	Three Core Courses: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• City Research Studio (Compulsory, year-long course) 2 of 3 MPhil Urban Studies courses: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Urban Theory• Urban Everyday• Curating Urban Regulation
	Designated Urban Course (minimum of 23 credits) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Existing courses with a disciplinary or thematic urban focus from approved list and with convenor approval
YEAR 2 Minor dissertation 90 credits	Semester 1: Minor Dissertation Research Semester 2: Thesis submission/examination

AFTER THE MPHIL

Continue from MPhil to PhD

The programme has been designed to act as a bridgehead for those who wish to continue with a PhD and academic career. The MPhil provides both the theoretical and methodological tools essential for PhD-level work.

Continue from MPhil to practice

Your field of professional expertise augmented by the theoretical and methodological foundation obtained through the programme can be applied in a wide range of opportunities for research, professional practise and consulting in urban related fields.



CORE COURSES

CITY RESEARCH STUDIO (CRS)

The City Research Studio is the cornerstone of the MPhil programme. It is a year-long compulsory course that runs alongside the core and elective modules. CRS is designed as a learning context in which you will experiment with multiple forms of urban knowledge, expertise and research methodologies beyond the conventional classroom setting. It is a laboratory space where the students and faculty will learn to walk, see, smell, touch, embrace, explore and reimagine the city through intimate engagements with the aim of exploring and understanding the city.

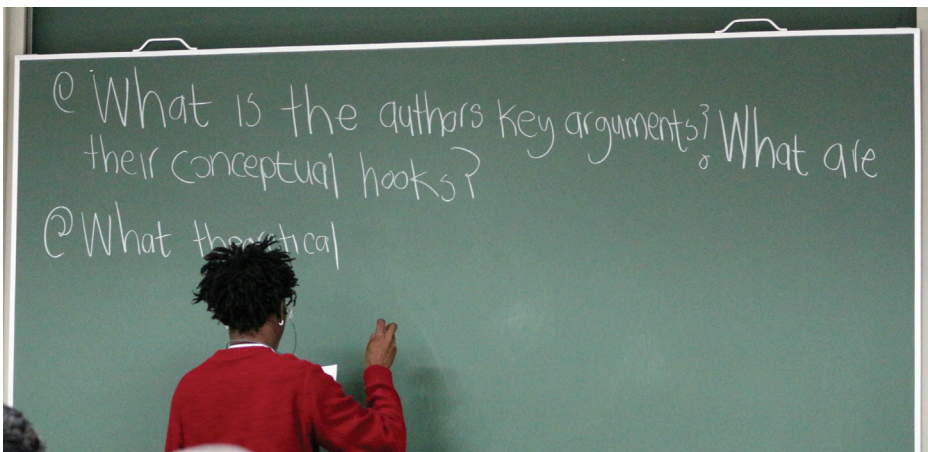
URBAN EVERYDAY

The Urban Everyday approaches urban studies through literature grounded in everyday practices central to the dynamism that shapes African and Southern city

contexts and their transformations. The course reflects on the productive tensions in and between structural forces (the state, capital etc.) with ordinary forms of agency (citizenship, collective movements, and ordinary acts of encroachment) and thinks through the ways the everyday locates and disrupts theorising Southern cities.

URBAN THEORY

The course sets out with the contention that urban theory is in crisis because it is not able to account for the diversity and innate complexity of urban worlds, especially as it manifests in the global South. The empirical basis of this contention is briefly explored before students are engaged to learn the craft of theoretical analysis and construction. Key urban theory works from the traditional canon and the Southern counterpoint will be explored to equip



students to read critically, and ultimately be able to locate contemporary urban theory debates in a geo-historical context and place their own positionality within such a conceptual landscape.

CURATING URBAN REGULATION

The central question of this course is this: What does critical policy look like from the vantage point of African cities? It seeks to offer answers to this question through a design thinking methodology that investigates space and politics and what alternative modes of regulation are possible (given, for instance, constant technological innovation) and necessary (given the multiple and intersecting crises

of access to water, food, housing and other basic needs). Students will be equipped to map, interpret and devise regulatory modes and practices of urban intervention that are capable of addressing the most pressing problems of our cities and transforming the places where people live.

THE MINOR DISSERTATION

The pinnacle of the MPhil is the minor dissertation. To graduate, students must complete a minor dissertation of 25 000 words maximum. It is the chance to conduct original research, engage in fieldwork, put methods into action and experience the satisfaction of producing original writing under supervision.

FACULTY TEAM



PROF EDGAR PIETERSE

Edgar Pieterse is the founding director of the ACC. He teaches City Research Studio (CRS) 3 and Curating Urban Regulation



DR ANNA SELMECZI

Anna Selmeczi is a senior lecturer at ACC and convenor of the MPhil in Southern Urbanism. She teaches CRS1 and Urban Theory



PROF NANCY ODENDAAL

Nancy Odendaal currently holds the University of Basel-UCT Professorship in Urban Studies. She teaches CRS2



GEETIKA ANAND

Geetika Anand is a doctoral researcher in the EGS department and an ACC Research Associate. She co-teaches CRS1



DR LAURA NKULA-WENZ

Laura Nkula-Wenz is a lecturer and researcher at ACC. She teaches the Urban Everyday course



DR NOBUKHOSI NGWENYA

Nobukhosi Ngwenya is an ACC Research Associate. She co-teaches CRS3 and Curating Urban Regulation



APPLICATION GUIDELINES

REQUIREMENTS

Prospective students need to have completed a four-year Bachelors or Masters degree.

HOW TO APPLY

Complete the online application process here: www.applyonline.uct.ac.za

At Step 8 of 16 (Programme Choices): Follow the following selections from the menu to find the programme:
Masters › Engineering and Built Environment › Master of Philosophy (by coursework & dissertation) (60 research 120 coursework) › Urban Studies

Alternatively: Masters › Engineering and Built Environment › Master of Philosophy (by coursework & dissertation) (60 research 120 coursework) › Urban Studies

NB. Please arrange for two academic reference letters to be sent to Ms Faranaaz Bennett at faranaaz.bennett@uct.ac.za.

CONTACTS

Course Convenor

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Postgraduate Administrator

Faranaaz Bennett
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DEADLINE FOR INTERNATIONAL CANDIDATES: 15 September 2025

DEADLINE FOR SA: 31 October 2025

FUNDING

Limited funding for both local and international students is available. For more information, send an email to the Course Convenor, Anna Selmeczi at anna.selmeczi@uct.ac.za

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The MPhil encourages international students from Africa, the Global South and elsewhere to apply for the course. To find out more about fees, VISA applications and other considerations for international students, go to www.iapo.uct.ac.za

Postgraduate Funding Office

pgfunding@uct.ac.za
+27 (0)21 650 3622

International Academic Programmes Office

iapo@uct.ac.za
+ 27 (0)21 650 2822 / 3740

The MPhil in Urban Studies - Southern Urbanism is hosted by the School of Architecture, Planning and Geomatics at the University of Cape Town.

ABOUT AFRICAN CENTRE FOR CITIES

Established in 2008 and rooted at the University of Cape Town, African Centre for Cities (ACC) is one of the leading knowledge centres conducting meaningful research on how to understand, recast and address pressing urban crises z particularly on the African continent.

Since most urban challenges — for example, food security, climate change adaptation, economic inclusion, cultural vitality and tolerance — are inherently interdisciplinary and spatially layered, ACC nurtures the co-production of knowledge favouring and cultivating critical Southern perspectives.

Through its research, ACC develops imaginative policy discourses and practices to promote vibrant, just and sustainable cities. This purpose has become all the more pertinent with the adoption of Agenda 2063 at a pan-African level, which chimes with the 2030 global agenda for sustainable development. Thus, a lot of the research and capacity development work seeks to foreground the urban dimensions of these new political horizons, embedded in an epistemic commitment to Southern solidarity and theory building.

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN STEERING COMMITTEE

Dr Ruchi Chaturvedi, Sociology

Dr Zarina Patel, Environmental and Geographical Sciences

Dr Zwelethu Jolobe, Political Sciences

Dr Nomusa Makhubu, Fine Art

Prof Francis Nyamnjoh, Anthropology

Prof Nancy Odendaal, Architecture, Planning and Geomatics

Prof Philippa Tumubweinee, Architecture, Planning and Geomatics

Prof Harro von Blottnitz, Chemical Engineering

INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD

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Prof Jo Beall, British Council & London School of Economics

Prof Teresa Caldeira, University of California, Berkeley

Prof Teddy Cruz, University of California, San Diego

Dr Divine Fuh, Institute for Humanities in Africa

Prof Alcinda Honwana, London School of Economics and Political Science

Prof Daniel Inkoom, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi

Prof Susan Parnell, Human Geography, University of Bristol




Assoc Prof Vyjayanthi Rao, Adjunct Associate Professor, Spitzer School of Architecture

Prof AbdouMaliq Simone, Honorary Professor, ACC

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South Africa

Stay up to date with ACC news:

-  African Centre for Cities
-  @UrbanAfricaACC
-  www.africancentreforcities.net



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