Nothing is more practical than a good theory. Theory helps us to understand and improve our actions. Theory is created through thinking. Progress in theoretical thinking is made by critical reflection of existing theories, adding to the existing body of knowledge. This course discusses theoretical aspects of the disciplinary core of Landscape Architecture as an academic field as well as a profession. It further presents relevant theories for understanding interdisciplinary relations with fine arts, humanities, planning, and biological and environmental sciences.

This semester, the focus will be on post-suburban nature. The term post-suburban is borrowed from the urban planning discourse (cf. Phelps 2015), where it is used to indicate the need to revitalize older suburbs. In New Jersey, these revitalization challenges are most prevalent in residential areas that evolved post-World War II, as well as in aging office parks and malls. The new term post-suburban nature applies that concept to suburban parks and open spaces. With shifting suburban conditions, user expectations of open space characteristics and park amenities are changing. Further, the remaining green spaces are gaining a more important role to provide relevant resiliency and sustainability functions for these suburbanized areas. Outlining these functions and designing appropriate physical features is the task of environmental planning and landscape architecture; however, the new approach must go beyond that. The question for our seminar is:

What is post-suburban nature?

Identify and examine relevant theoretical aspects of disciplinary approaches to landscape and their relevance for understanding interdisciplinary relations among fine arts, humanities and biological and environmental sciences.

Develop competence in actively participating in the scholarly discourse of the field.

Develop original contributions to the existing body of knowledge in Theory of Landscape Architecture and Planning.
Components

Lectures
A series of lectures will provide a context for readings and discussions. They will address both, landscape as a physical object and landscape as a cultural symbol. Lectures will further foster discussions on how the various possible interpretations of landscape relate to the disciplinary core of Landscape Architecture Theory and to other theories in the arts, humanities, and sciences. We will explore how such theories relate to environmental design and the nature, essence, meaning and communication of space.

Readings
The lifeline of this seminar is an active and creative discussion. Due to the very diverse background of the student body in this graduate seminar, some texts might occur to be more relevant to your interests then others, however, you are expected to read and prepare all material assigned for a class. This includes that you prepare at least one question per reading. Feel free to elaborate a little on that question and please post it at least four hours before the class meeting to the according Canvas discussion. These questions will be distributed to support the discussion in class.

Discussions
Guided by the readings, the discussions will complement the lecture material. You are strongly advised to bring a print of the assigned reading with your personal marks and underlines to the classroom. This will help to address questions and insights that occur while reading the text. Each student is expected to take responsibility for one seminar discussion through leadership in preparation and class discussion. It is suggested that the topic of the discussion is related to your research paper.

Papers
In addition to active and engaged discussions, all students will contribute to the class via a paper. Average length between 4000 and 5000 words. The paper will be developed in five steps (see contribution). When developing your paper, imagine that your reader is a person who really wants to understand you. Please don’t consider this paper as just an assignment do get over with, but as an opportunity to develop a new idea. It is all about what you want to say.

The paper needs an introduction, why your question is important, what your goal is and how you will reach this goal. Each subchapter needs an introduction and a link to the next chapter, finally a conclusion explaining what the reader has learned and how this contributes to the topic of the class.

Also, citations don’t speak for themselves. Explain why a citation is important for your train of thought, you may want to repeat a quote in your own words.
Contribution

Reading Question
Prepare your reading questions and post them to the according Canvas discussion, prior to the listed date of the class.

Paper Step 1 Outline
Choose a topic for your research in the context of post-suburban nature. Your choice might be guided by interests that you already bring into the class room or you might rather try something new. This choice might help fostering your individual research interest to be pursuit in you master thesis or final project. In a short initial text you will describe why you choose the topic, define at least one research question and list additional literature. We will discuss these questions in class and will then develop a mutual agreement on the analytic context of your research and how it will be delineated from your peers’ work.

Paper Step 2 Draft
You will document the research on your chosen topic in a comprehensive paper. Please submit a draft of this paper to Canvas and directly to two of your classmates for peer review.

8-12 pages, WORD file, including diagrams/images, and literature list.

Paper Step 3 Peer Review
A proper review consists of productive written comments on the text. Use the word review function. Please submit the completed review to Canvas and directly to the author.

Paper Step 4 Presentation
You will prepare the class discussion of the topic acknowledging the reading questions of your peers. You may introduce your thoughts with a presentation, using media as appropriate. The reading for that period will be selected by you. Please make sure that chosen additional literature is available to the class at least one week prior to your presentation. Your classmates are expected to engage in a lively discussion about the topic and give productive comments on your verbal presentation. The outcome of that seminar session and the comments by your peers shall guide you when revising your paper.

20 minute verbal presentation, preparation and leading of the class discussion

Paper Step 5 Final
The final version of the paper will be part of our course documentation. The layout shall reflect the standards of a design program. Please make an effort to relate your topic to the overall theme. Submit the complete 10-15 pages with images as InDesign file (the complete package folder!) and as PDF.

Please follow the Chicago Manual of Style for any document you produce.
Classes

Faculty presented overview of general theories and approaches

1/23 Introduction: The role of theory for landscape research, planning, and design.

1/27 Post-Suburban Nature.

1/30 Meaning/Semiotics

2/3 Meaning/Hermeneutics

2/17 Good Taste and Success

2/24 European Landscape

2/27 American Landscape

Groth, Paul; Wilson, Chris (editors) 2003: Everyday America: cultural landscape studies after J.B. Jackson. London. Pages 1-22


3/2 Suburbia and New Urbanism

3/5 Post-Industrial Landscapes,

3/6 Ecological Urbanism

Cole, Indian Pass 1847
Great Northern Railroad timetable for Glacier National Park Chase 1910
Chevrolet advertisement 2001
Additional approaches on LA Theory

The lectures of this class outline one of many possible views on the theory of landscape architecture. The literature listed below is not required reading but may be helpful when you are developing your own approach.

Parks and Suburbia


Nature and Design


Theory and Design


Seggern, Hille von; Werner, Julia; Grosse-Bächele, Lucia (ed.) 2008: Creating Knowledge. Innovation Strategies for Designing Urban Landscapes. (German/English) [Übers.: Rachel Hill ...]. ∘ Jovis Verlag, Berlin


Girot, C. Freytag, A. Kirchengast, A. Krizenecky, S. Richter, D 2013: Topologie/Topologie. (Pamphlet 15) gta publishers Zurich
Except for circumstances truly beyond the student’s control, all assignments are due at the dates and times specified throughout the semester. Contributions that are incomplete on the due date should still be submitted on the date it is due to receive at least partial credit. Any work submitted late will be penalized a grade step for each day past due. Working beyond a due date is both unrealistic in a professional setting and unfair to your classmates in this course.

If you encounter any personal circumstances that inhibit your ability to fulfill the requirements of this course, you should immediately contact the instructor. In addition, any student with a special need, circumstance, or disability, should make an appointment to see me during the first week of classes.

Attendance and participation in all lectures and class discussions are essential for success. More than three unexcused absences will result in a step reduction in your semester grade. Content missed due to an excused absence will be made available; however, any missed quizzes or in-class assignments will not. In addition, an excused absence does not prolong an assigned due date for any assignment. All information in this syllabus and course schedule is subject to change throughout the semester. Changes will be announced in the scheduled lecture periods. It is your responsibility to stay informed!

### Grade Rational

**A – Outstanding** – This not only means fulfilling the requirements, but impressing and going beyond the initial expectations of the project. The student has demonstrated a superior grasp of the subject matter coupled with a high degree of creative or logical expression, and strong ability to present these ideas in an organized and analytical manner.

**B – Very Good** – The student has demonstrated a solid grasp of the material with an ability to organize and examine the material in an organized, critical, and constructive manner. The projects and in class performance reveal a solid understanding of the issues and related theories or literature.

**C – Acceptable** – The student has shown a moderate ability to grasp concepts and theories for the class, producing work that, while basically adequate, is not in any way exceptional. This performance in class display a basic familiarity with the relevant literature and techniques.

**D – Unacceptable** – The work demonstrates a minimal understanding of the fundamental nature of the material or the assignment with a performance that does not adequately examine the course material critically or constructively.

**F – Failure** – The student has demonstrated a lack of understanding or familiarity with course concepts and materials. Their performance has been inadequate. Failure is often the result of limited effort and poor attendance which may indicate that the student is not in the proper field of study.

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### Fine Print

**Due Dates and Grades**

**Step 1 Outline (10%)**
February 20: 1-page paper submission and 4 min headline presentation in class

**Step 2 Draft (not graded)**
March 23: 8-12 pages with images, (WORD) “It shall feel like a final paper!” Submitted for peer review by classmates.

**Step 3 Review (10%)**
March 30: Peer review using WORD review function back to author and professor. The grade given is considering the quality of the review, not the quality of the paper itself. April 6: Revised paper to professor. April 16: Professor’s review back to author

**Step 4 Presentation (20%)**
Student lead sessions scheduled from 3/12, to 4/27

**Step 5 Final Paper (40%)**
4/30 Submit the complete 10-15 pages with images as InDesign file (the complete packaged folder!) on the R-Drive and as PDF on Canvas.
5/4 Combined seminar documentation

**Participation (20%)**
Active participation in class discussion and on time contribution of reading question.