

NC STATE *Design*

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CITY DESIGN CERTIFICATE

Introduction

The Graduate Certificate in City Design is a joint certificate program offered by the School of Architecture and the Department of Landscape Architecture in the College of Design at North Carolina State University. The aim of this certificate program is to certify that students undertaking the program have had extensive exposure to the knowledge base and practice of design at an urban scale. This is accomplished through a 15-hour sequence of courses centrally focused on city design, history and theories of urbanism, and city design methodologies.

Program Intent

The Graduate Certificate in City Design promotes design inquiry and application at the scale of the city, for students and practitioners of architecture, landscape architecture, and city and regional planning. It promotes interdisciplinary and inter-university collaboration among departments at NC State and between NC State and the Department of City and Regional Planning at UNC Chapel Hill.

The program's objectives are to:

- Consider the human condition in the creation of meaningful urban places;
- Design integrated systems of movement that enhance accessibility;
- Promote a greater mix of and association of uses and amenities within a well-scaled urban fabric, bringing a fuller sense of equity to the city;
- Explore innovative urban housing typologies;
- Foster new opportunities for local energy production, collection, and conservation;
- Define new means of “greening” the city;
- Capture greater senses of identity, meaning, and quality within the city fabric;

Market for Graduates

The certificate builds urban design literacy for students and working professionals whose decisions directly influence urban outcomes. It develops an understanding of how policy goals, planning frameworks, and design interventions shape the physical form and spatial structure of cities. Global case studies expose students to diverse models of urban development, enabling them to critically evaluate planning and design approaches and apply comparative insights to their own professional contexts. Graduates leave better equipped to read and evaluate development proposals and to engage more effectively with architects, planners, and landscape architects in shaping urban environments.

Interdisciplinary Initiative

This is an interdisciplinary program, reflecting the collaborative nature of contemporary city design practice. It seeks to bring together students and faculty from Landscape Architecture and Architecture in an interactive, team-based learning environment.

This certificate program is a joint initiative of the School of Architecture and the Department of Landscape Architecture.

Certificate Coordinator

Sana Ahrar, Ph.D.

School of Architecture,

North Carolina State University

Brooks Hall 117

Academic Requirements for Participants

Certificate students must complete a total of 15 credit hours of coursework. This requirement can be met within the existing curricula of the Master of Architecture (Tracks 1, 2, and 3) and the Master of Landscape Architecture (Tracks 1, 2, and 3) programs, or pursued independently as a post-baccalaureate, non-degree-seeking student. ARC 570 Anatomy of the City is required for all students.

Path A is for current NCSU students enrolled in the Master of Architecture or Master of Landscape Architecture programs. Path B is for non-NCSU students, post-baccalaureate non-degree-seeking students, and working professionals.

There are three methods of fulfilling this requirement: one studio option; two studio options; no studio option. All studios must be approved in advance by the Certificate Coordinator to ensure they meet the primary objectives of the program as outlined in the Intent of Certificate Program section.

Path A: Architecture and Landscape Students at NCSU

Option 1: Single Studio

ARC 570 +1 Studio + 2 Seminar = 15 credits

Course	Credit Hours
Required	
ARC 570 Anatomy of the City	3
ARC 503 / LAR 507 Advanced Design Studio (focused on city design)	6
Elective (choose from Elective Menu)	
Seminar from Elective Menu	3
Seminar from Elective Menu	3
Total	15

Option 2: Double Studio

ARC 570 + 2 Studio = 15 credits

Course	Credit Hours
Required	
ARC 570 Anatomy of the City	3
ARC 503 / LAR 507 Advanced Design Studio (focused on city design)	6

Elective (choose from Elective Menu)	
ARC 503 / LAR 507 Advanced Design Studio (focused on city design)	6
Total	15

Path B: Non-NCSU Students / Working Professionals

ARC 570 + 4 Approved Seminars = 15 credits

Course	Credit Hours
Required	
ARC 570 Anatomy of the City	3
Elective (choose from Elective Menu - four seminars)	
Seminar from Elective Menu	3
Seminar from Elective Menu	3
Seminar from Elective Menu	3
Seminar from Elective Menu	3
Total	15

Required Course Offered 2026-2027

- ARC 570 Anatomy of the City, Fall 2026 (Ahrar)

Elective Courses

Note: Not all seminars are offered every year. Enrollment is limited, and students in the host department are generally given registration priority, so it may not be possible to enroll in a preferred seminar in a given semester.

New seminars that qualify for the certificate may also be added in future terms. Students should review this document each semester for the updated list of approved courses. Students enrolled prior to Spring 2026 should also check the list of courses offered in previous semesters, which lists previously approved courses, to see if any apply to them.

Students are encouraged to look beyond the courses listed here. Offerings from other NCSU colleges, as well as courses at UNC Chapel Hill or Duke available through inter-institutional registration, may qualify. If you find a course not listed below that you believe meets the certificate objectives, send the course description and syllabus (if available) to the City Design Certificate Coordinator for review.

Fall 2026 Elective Menu

- ARC 590 001 Housing: Culture, Policy & Production (Barrie)
- ARC 590 009/ LAR 582 009 Real Estate Development (Aukil and Walters)
- ARC 630 Independent Study (requires prior approval by certificate coordinator)
- LAR 552 Survey of Natural Hazards & Disasters (Smith)
- LAR 582 Smart & Healthy Cities (Pasalar)
- LAR 630 Independent Study (requires prior approval by certificate coordinator)

Fall 2026 Studio Menu

- ARC 503. 002: Advanced Architectural Design/Interdisciplinary Urban Design Studio in Istanbul, Türkiye (Ahrar)
- LAR 507.001 / 507.002: Interdisciplinary Urban Design Studio in Istanbul, Türkiye (Pasalar and Smith)

Spring 2026 Elective Menu

- ARC 526 Healthy and Sustainable Built Environment (Rider)
- ARC 590 003 Critical Zones (Moon)
- ARC 590 005 Informal Urbanisms (Ahrar)
- ARC 590 006 Architectures Made & Unmade (Erdim)
- ARC 590 008 Principles of Real Estate (Aukhil)
- ARC 590 009 Urban Plan Practicum (Walters)
- LAR 535 Environmental Social Equity & Design (Boone)
- LAR 554 Disaster Resilient Policy (Smith)
- LAR 582 009 Principles of Real Estate (Aukhil)
- LAR 582 022 How Cities are Built (Aukhil)
- LAR 582 021 Urban Plan Practicum (Walters)
- ARC 630 Independent Study (requires prior approval by certificate coordinator)

Spring 2026 Studio Menu

- ARC 503 - Advanced Architectural Design: Studio Kenya (Moon)
- ARC 502/ 503 Advanced Architectural Design (Hill)
- ARC 502/503: Advanced Architectural Design: Hayti Studio (Leonard)
- LAR 507 Healthy and Resilient Community Design (Pasalar)

Approved courses offered in previous semesters

- ARC 544 American City Planning History
- ARC 589 Architecture Travel Study II (with approval by certificate coordinator)
- ARC 590 Special Topics (with prior approval by certificate coordinator)
- LAR 545 City Planning and Landscape Architecture

Additional Opportunities

Additionally, with permission of the certificate coordinator, students may take up to six credits from another provider of graduate level coursework in city planning and/or design, such as the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at UNC Chapel Hill. However, to count towards the certificate, students must register for these courses through inter-institutional registration.

Application Process

Interested NC State students should email a completed **[Graduate Student Certificate Form Plan Data Entry](#)** to Nikki Evans (anevans3@ncsu.edu) and Sana Ahrar (sahrar@ncsu.edu).

To qualify for admission to the Graduate Certificate in City Design, students must be enrolled in, or have completed, a professional program in architecture, landscape architecture, or urban planning. At the time of application, students must have a minimum grade point average of 3.00 in their professional degree program.

[Please see the FAQs on page 8 for answers to frequently asked questions.](#) For any additional questions about enrollment please contact Nikki Evans (anevans3@ncsu.edu). For questions about the certificate and course eligibility contact Sana Ahrar (sahrar@ncsu.edu).

Practicing Professionals and Graduate Students in Approved Alternative Programs are also welcome to apply. Please reach out to Nikki Evans (anevans3@ncsu.edu) for the admission process.

Certificate Completion

Students must apply to graduate from the certificate at the same time they apply to graduate from their degree program; it is a separate application process but completed in the same way.

There is an assessment process associated with completion of the certificate requirements, which requires completing a form detailing the coursework taken for the certificate, and an explanation of how the learning objectives for the certificate have been met.

To receive a Graduate Certificate, a student must complete 15 hours of coursework and have a minimum 3.00 grade point average (GPA) on all certificate course work. All grades on courses taken towards the certificate program in courses numbered 400 and above are included in the GPA. Courses at the 300 level and below are not eligible for certificate credit and subsequently do not affect the graduate GPA.

The minimum grade to receive certificate credit can be no lower than a grade of B-. GCP students who take letter-graded 400-, 500- and 700-level courses do not have the option of taking the courses for "credit only" if they intend for the course to be part of their GCP. Transfer credit from other institutions is not allowed for GCP. All course work must be registered for through NC State University. All GCP requirements must be completed within four (4) calendar years, beginning with the date the student commences courses applicable to the GCP, unless a more restrictive time limit has been established by the program or academic college/school. A student may obtain more than one certificate. Each certificate must have at least nine (9) credit hours that are unique to it.

Note: Academic success might have a strong bearing on admission to a degree program, but completion of a certificate program in no way guarantees entry into a graduate degree program, which is done through a separate application process.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. What courses count towards the certificate?

The courses approved for the current semester are listed on Page 5 of this handbook. Courses offered in prior semesters that count toward the certificate electives are listed on Page 6 of this handbook.

2. I found a course not on the elective menu that seems relevant. Can it count?

Possibly. Send the course description and syllabus (if available) to the Certificate Coordinator for review. Do not assume it counts until you receive written confirmation.

3. Can I take a course for credit only rather than a letter grade?

No. Certificate students must take all letter-graded courses (400-, 500-, and 700-level) for a letter grade. Courses taken on a credit-only basis are not eligible for certificate credit.

4. What courses from previous semesters still count for the certificate?

If a course you completed does not appear on that list but you received prior confirmation that it would count, contact the City Design Certificate Coordinator.

5. How do I know if I have met the requirements for the Certificate Program?

You must complete 15 credit hours total, including ARC 570 (Anatomy of the City) as the required seminar, plus 12 additional credit hours structured in one of three ways: one city design studio and two theory and/or skill-based seminars; two city design studios and one additional seminar; or four theory and/or skill-based seminars. See page 3-5 for details.

6. When do I apply to graduate from the certificate?

You apply to graduate from the certificate at the same time you apply to graduate from your degree program. It is a separate application but follows the same process. You will need to submit a form detailing your coursework and an explanation of how you have met the certificate's learning objectives.

Faculty Participants

SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

Kristen Schaffer, Associate Professor (Phased Retirement)

Sara Queen, Professor

Burak Erdim, Associate Professor

Traci Rider, Associate Professor

Adam Gebrian, Assistant Professor of Practice (Prague)

Igor Kovacevic, Assistant Professor of Practice (Prague)

DEPARTMENT OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Maria Bellalta, Professor and Head

Meg Calkins, Professor

M. Elen Deming, Professor and Director of the Doctor of Design (Phased Retirement)

Gavin Smith, Professor

Kofi Boone, Professor

Andy Fox, Professor

Celen Pasalar, Associate Professor

Rodney Swink, Professor

MEDIA, ART, DESIGN & TECHNOLOGY (MADTech)

Tania Allen, Professor and Head, Media, Arts, Design and Technology (MADTech)

NOTE: Not all courses taught by faculty participants qualify for the City Design Certificate.

Certificate in City Design

Outcomes Assessment Plan

Objectives

1. In this certificate program, students will develop an understanding of the complexity of large urban contexts and develop an ability to design at the scale of the city, in ways that respond to issues of economy, ecology, and equity. For the purposes of this certificate program, a city is defined as a relatively large and permanent settlement having complex systems for sanitation, utilities, land usage, housing, and transportation. Such cities are usually associated with metropolitan areas and urban areas, creating numerous business commuters traveling to urban centers for employment.
2. The certificate program will provide an educational experience that satisfies the expectations of its graduates.

Objectives and Outcomes

Objective 1: By the time they complete this certificate program, graduates should be able to:

- a) Describe the impact of the history of cities on urban form
- b) Possess awareness of the existence of the key 20th theoretical foundations of city design
- c) Apply research methods applicable to working within an urban context.
- d) Demonstrate ability to produce a design at the scale of a city or district that addresses at least three of the following areas of concern:
 - Multi-modal transportation issues, including human-powered
 - Multi-family housing Inclusive zoning
 - Urban ecology
 - Brownfield restoration
 - Equity Urban open space
 - Mixed-use development
 - Infill development Infrastructure
- e) Demonstrate ability to design an interventional, site-specific project within a complex urban context that addresses at least three of the following:
 - pedestrian environment
 - public space
 - streetscapes
 - transit stations
 - multi-family housing

- mixed-use buildings
- urban recreation facilities
- public markets
- civic buildings, such as performing arts, recreation centers, schools, etc., located on urban sites ecological landscapes
- infrastructure systems

Objective 2: At the time they complete this certificate program, graduates are expected to:

- a) be satisfied with the usefulness of the certificate program in enabling them to achieve their professional goals
- b) be sufficiently satisfied with the certificate program to recommend it to others with the same professional goals
- c) be satisfied with the appropriateness of the courses in providing the knowledge or training they anticipate needing for their professional goals
- d) be satisfied with the frequency and timeliness of courses offered for the certificate
- e) be satisfied with the quality of teaching in certificate courses
- f) be satisfied with the overall educational experience of the certificate program

Objective 1

Students will develop an understanding of the complexity of large urban contexts and develop an ability to design at the scale of the city, in ways that respond to issues of economy, ecology, and equity.

Outcome	Evidence to be Collected	Source of Evidence	Frequency of Collection
Ability to describe impact of the history of cities on urban form	Courses and Learning Objectives Form	Students	Annually
Awareness of the existence of the key 20th theoretical foundations of city design	Courses and Learning Objectives Form	Students	Annually
Ability to apply research methods appropriate to working within an urban context.	Courses and Learning Objectives Form	Students	Annually
Ability to produce an advanced-level design at the scale of the city or district that addresses at least three of the following areas of concern: ○ Site located in an urban context ○ Multi-modal transportation issues, including human-powered ○ Multi-family housing ○ Urban ecology ○ Brownfield restoration	Courses and Learning Objectives Form	Students	Annually

○ Equity ○ Urban open space ○ Mixed-use development ○ Infill development ○ Infrastructure			
Ability to produce an advanced-level design that is site-specific and within a complex urban setting that addresses at least three of the following: ○ pedestrian environment ○ public space ○ streetscapes ○ transit stations ○ multi-family housing ○ mixed-use buildings ○ urban recreation facilities ○ public markets ○ civic buildings, such as performing arts, recreation centers, schools, etc., located on urban sites ○ ecological landscapes ○ infrastructure systems	Courses and Learning Objectives Form	Students	Annually

Objective 2

The certificate program will provide an educational experience that satisfies the expectations of its graduates.

Outcome	Evidence to be Collected	Source of Evidence	Frequency of Collection
To be satisfied with the usefulness of the certificate program in enabling them to achieve their professional goals	Exit survey administered by Graduate School	Students	Annually
To be sufficiently satisfied with the certificate program to recommend it to others with the same professional goals	Exit survey administered by Graduate School	Students	Annually
To be satisfied with the appropriateness of the courses in providing the knowledge or training they anticipate needing for their professional goals	Exit survey administered by Graduate School	Students	Annually
To be satisfied with the frequency and timeliness of courses offered for the certificate	Exit survey administered by Graduate School	Students	Annually

To be satisfied with the quality of teaching in certificate courses	Exit survey administered by Graduate School	Students	Annually
To be satisfied with the overall educational experience of the certificate program	Exit survey administered by Graduate School	Students	Annually