**Green Spaces, Urban Places**

*Engaged Scholarship Course*

Preceptor: Sarah Case

From [Boston Common](https://www.bostoncommonmasterplan.com/) to the [Charles River Basin](https://www.mass.gov/locations/charles-river-reservation), Boston boasts many beautiful green spaces. With over half of the world’s population living in cities, urban green space is more important than ever. The value of public parks to those fortunate enough to live near them is considerable, whether through the reduction of the negative effects of climate change, improved public health, or ample opportunities for residents to connect with and appreciate the power of the natural world. But as cities boom and prices skyrocket, access to spaces like parks is increasingly expensive and exclusionary. This course will consider a series of related questions: What exactly are the benefits of resources like public parks and rivers? Should urban green space be considered a right of every citizen? [Has access to green space in cities become a privilege of the elite?](https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/may/06/dangers-ecogentrification-best-way-make-city-greener) In exploring these questions, students will think about why access to green space matters in an increasingly urbanized world.

We will begin by examining questions of public access to parks through the case study of Boston Common, America’s oldest urban park. We’ll think through the thorny relationship between public and private green space for urban communities by learning about and hearing from organizations including Boston’s [Parks and Recreation Department](https://www.boston.gov/parks/boston-common) and the [Friends of the Public Garden](https://friendsofthepublicgarden.org/). In conjunction with virtual explorations of Boston Common, students will read a foundational and controversial essay about public space, Garrett Hardin’s “[The Tragedy of the Commons](https://science.sciencemag.org/content/162/3859/1243).” We’ll use online mapping tools like the [Opportunity Atlas](https://www.opportunityatlas.org/) to explore who has access to Boston Common.

Next, we’ll think about the Charles River, a serpentine waterway that winds its way through Cambridge, passing Harvard’s campus along the way. As an infamously polluted river known in the 1960s for its “[dirty water](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5apEctKwiD8),” efforts to clean up the Charles began with the foundation of community organizations including the [Charles River Watershed Association](https://www.crwa.org/). The CRWA works to build community and environmental health through revitalization of the Charles River. In conjunction with your research, you will consider the relationship between urban green initiatives and the residents who benefit from them while learning about CRWA’s environmental projects. Today, the river is a standout example of urban sustainability, recreation, and innovation. But at what cost? The research essay will provide you with a unique opportunity to explore how academic research on questions of environmental access is playing out on the ground through partnerships with local stakeholder organizations including the CRWA.

We’ll wrap up the semester with a capstone project that asks you to translate your research in Unit 2 for a public audience by writing an op-ed for a publication of your choosing. Whether you write about the Charles River or decide to focus on a different case study, the capstone will allow you to apply your innovative ideas and research towards a more public form of writing.

In addition to developing your talents as a writer, this course will virtually allow you to explore Boston and Cambridge and get to know your new home. I’m drawn to teaching this course topic because of how often I, just like so many people, take access to nature and green space for granted. Cities, where green space is often limited and crowded, force us to confront that complacency. Whether you plan to develop solutions to climate change, fight against environmental inequality, design cities, create sustainable green spaces, or simply enjoy a jog through a park or along a river, this course aims to allow you to look at the natural world through a new critical lens.

*There will be one outside-of-class activity students will be asked to attend over Zoom at specific times, and for which they should plan to keep their schedules open:*

* *Friday Feb. 12, 3-4:15pm – A discussion with Ryan Woods, Commissioner, Boston Department of Parks and Recreation*