

## **Arts, Culture and Urban Neighborhoods**

Cities have long been centers of cultural innovation, yet urban planner and scholars alike have rarely taken arts, music, and culture seriously – until recently. Today, as urban economies shift from production to consumption, arts, music, and culture are suddenly at the center of debates over the future of the American city. These shifts and debates provide the impetus and backdrop for this course, a semester-long examination into the role of arts and culture in the contemporary American city, with special (but not exclusive) attention to Boston.

This course will introduce students to the major research traditions in both urban sociology and the sociology of culture, by focusing on their points of intersection and overlap. Given this breadth, the course will not be a comprehensive survey. Instead, we will explore several key topics related to urban culture, chosen on the strength of recent scholarship, relevance, and the opportunities enabled for original student research. We will start with classic models of the city and the production and consumption of culture, before delving into contemporary studies of cognitive maps, music scenes, night-life economies, place branding and media strategies, cultural capital and inequality, graffiti and social disorder, and cultural tourism. Across these topics and discussions, we will come back time and again to the dual challenge of relating artistic creativity to urban change – and to how to best understand the image and cultural organization of the city.

Through a series of empirical projects carried out in Boston-area neighborhoods, students will apply and evaluate ideas from readings, develop their expertise in a variety of research methodologies, and learn to collect data suitable for reanalysis by their peers. In place of response papers or exams, students are required to complete three medium-length (4-5 page) independent research papers that lead up to a final paper due at the end of the term. For each of these assignments, students will employ a different research methodology to apply, evaluate, and extend ideas from the readings in reference to data they independently (or collaboratively) collect. One assignment requires students to gather and analyze cognitive maps of Boston's spatial structure from area residents, another assignment asks students to describe and analyze specific musical scenes based on in depth interviews with key insiders, while a third requires students to observe different venues within the visual arts world. Students will be required to turn in their data with each assignment, so that all enrollees can draw on pooled resources for their final projects. For broad the final paper (12-15 page), students can extend one of the earlier assignments, draw on pooled data for comparative analysis, or pursue a new project pertaining to any number of issues related to urban culture.