

Newberry Library Undergraduate Seminar 2027

Responding to the City: Imagined Pasts, Utopian Futures

January 19 through April 29, 2027 / Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2-5pm

The course meets at the Newberry Library, 60 West Walton Street, Chicago, IL



“Florenzia (Florence)”, from the Nuremberg Chronicle, 1493. Inc. 2086 and “Official Birdseye View of the World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago, USA”, C. Graham, 1893. Folio R 1832.161.

This course surveys the responses of artists, architects, archaeologists, and urban planners to increasing urbanization, from the rise of cities in the European Middle Ages to contemporary Chicago. Faced with industrialization, disease, and extreme wealth disparities, artists and thinkers responded by imagining utopian civic plans, reviving past relationships to urban space and the natural world, and embracing the frenetic chaos of urban life. Through an examination of the Arts and Crafts Movement’s reimagining of the Middle Ages and the Chicago World’s Fair’s return to neoclassical style, we will discuss contrasting visions of idealized pasts and the ways they were recombined to inspire urban futures. Moving between Europe and the Americas will also prompt discussions of colonization and Indigenous urbanism. We’ll conclude with an exploration of modernism in Chicago and consider how those imagined pasts could be jettisoned altogether to create something new. We will engage with the Newberry Library’s strengths in early cartography, the Arts and Crafts movement, and the history of Chicago, and students will work directly with manuscripts, prints, and ephemera.

Instructors: Brandiann Molby (Loyola University) and Ben Weil (The Medieval Academy of America)

For application information, please contact the advisor at your home campus:

DePaul University

[Megan Heffernan](#)

Department of English

Roosevelt University

[Priscilla Archibald](#)

Department of Literature and Languages

Loyola University Chicago

[D. Bradford Hunt](#)

Department of History

University of Illinois Chicago

[Ellen McClure](#)

Department of History and Institute for the Humanities