

Urban Environmental Education

Online course syllabus • Cornell University's Civic Ecology Lab



Cornell University

Cities are innovation hubs where the environment, infrastructure, and community come together. This course prepares educators, planners, nonprofit staff, teachers, and volunteers to help urban audiences understand local ecosystems, reimagine city systems, and improve neighborhoods. You will examine equity and environmental justice, sense of place, climate resilience, and collaborative governance, and translate these and other themes into actionable projects for organizations, schools, and communities. We will explore how project-, place-, and community-based learning approaches can enable people of any age to contribute to safer, healthier, more resilient cities. Learn with a global cohort by sharing experiences, exchanging feedback, and tackling real education and sustainability challenges. With input from instructors and webinar speakers, you will apply concepts and case studies to refine your educational programs and initiatives to benefit urban people and nature.

Who is this course for?

- **Nonformal educators & nonprofit staff** – Design engaging urban stewardship programs that resonate with diverse communities.
- **School teachers** – Weave city-based phenomena into science, civics, or art classes while meeting learning standards.
- **Municipal & private-sector professionals** – Create people-centered green spaces and allocate resources that spark community learning.
- **University students & early-career professionals** – Build a portfolio project, grow your network, and explore careers at the nexus of cities, sustainability, and education.

Learning goals

Based on chapters from the *Urban Environmental Education Review* and recent research, you will be able to:

1. **Understand** urban contexts, participants, and learning settings.
2. **Apply** research-based approaches (place-based, problem-based, project-based).
3. **Connect** urban EE activities to science, climate, and sustainability standards.
4. **Create** and peer-review an Urban EE action/lesson plan for your community, organization, or classroom.

Tangible course outcomes

Different participants will derive different benefits, including:

- **Action-ready plan.** Draft an urban EE lesson or stewardship action plan you can implement the next day in your organization, school, or community.
- **Standards alignment.** See how urban nature, climate, and community projects map onto literacy and science standards.
- **Professional network.** Join a global cohort of educators, planners, and city staff committed to greener, biophilic, resilient, and more just cities.
- **Cornell certificate.** Earn a digital certificate verifying 25 professional development hours you can share with employers or licensure board.

Course outline, sample topics

Week 1 Why Cities Matter

Advancing urbanization
Cities as opportunities
Environmental justice
Sense of place
Community assets
Environmental governance

Week 2 Learning Spaces

Cities as classrooms
Nonformal education settings
Community environmental education
Sustainable campuses
Urban agriculture
Green infrastructure

Week 3 Engaging Participants

Early childhood
Positive youth development
Adult education
Inclusive education

Week 4 Creative Approaches

Participatory urban planning
School partnerships
Ecological restoration
Environmental art

Certificate Requirements

To earn a digital certificate, complete weekly discussions, post comments for peers, participate in at least one webinar (live or recorded), and submit a 2-page capstone Action Plan or Lesson Plan by the deadline. The capstone reflects our philosophy of putting concepts into practice and aims to create tangible benefits in schools, communities, or organizations by linking ideas such as justice, resilience, and urban biodiversity to real outcomes. The certificate reflects 25 hours of engagement. If you seek professional development credit, you may share this syllabus with your district or organization to verify rigor and applicability; approval varies by institution.

Tips for Success

(1) Finish assignments on time; (2) communicate proactively with peers; (3) pick a capstone that directly benefits your work; (4) share your context and ideas even if you are new to urban EE; (5) center equity and inclusion in project design and your own participation; (6) link course ideas to local data and quick pilots.