The city as a physical space, a site of human interaction, and an imaginary place is a fertile research topic for scholars from many disciplines: historians, architectural historians, political scientists, economists, sociologists, literary scholars, and others. As such, the city is a salient subject for interdisciplinary interaction. The aim of this urban studies seminar is to foster a dialogue among faculty and graduate students who study the city from diverse perspectives. Possible lines of inquiry include but are not limited to: the symbolic use of the cityscape to assert political, religious or social authority; the interaction between mass and space; the cultural dimensions and consequences of urban transformation; the influence of economic development on urban planning; conservation and sustainability in the development of cities; the impact of new technologies; consequences of and responses to population growth; strategies for rebuilding following natural disasters; the play between cities and representations of them; and ideal or visionary plans.

The seminar will meet 3–4 times each semester during this academic year. Meetings will take place at lunchtime, on dates to be determined; the ILA will provide lunch. The first meeting will be introductory and organizational. At subsequent meetings one participant will present his/her work with discussion following. The presenter will provide a reading list for the meeting and further bibliography for future study. The group has the option to invite an outside speaker. Stephanie Leone, art and architectural historian in the Fine Arts Department, is the organizer, but it is expected that the participants will shape the course of the seminar.

In sponsoring this seminar, the ILA is building upon the strengths of the University, specifically the widespread interest in urban studies among the faculty and the special role of Boston College as the repository of the papers of the influential urban critic Jane Jacobs. It is hoped that the seminar will foster new understandings of and approaches to urban studies, and that these ideas will be valuable to the research of the participants. The seminar may foster collaboration among the participants. It will serve as a forum for discussing future ways to enhance urban studies at Boston College possibly through interdisciplinary courses, an urban studies program, and recommendations for future Jane Jacobs Lecturers and events in the Lowell Humanities Series.

To apply, please submit a paragraph about your interest in cities and note which days of the week you are available at lunchtime to Stephanie Leone (leonest@bc.edu) and Mary Crane (mary.crane@bc.edu) by September 16, 2011. For questions about the seminar, you can contact either Stephanie or Mary. Please circulate this call for participation to interested parties.