

## **ARTH 4585 The American Skyscraper**

University of North Texas/Department of Art History

Spring 2026

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12:30–1:50 pm

Location: Art 288



**New York Skyline in the 1920s.**

**Professor:** Paula Lupkin

**Preferred Contact:** Canvas Message

**Office:** Art 311

**Office Hours are For Everybody:** Thursdays 9:30-12 or Zoom by appointment

*Yes, really. Office hours are a regular part of the course and are meant to be used. You do not need to be confused, behind, or in trouble to come; asking questions, thinking through ideas, or checking that you're on the right track are all good reasons to stop by. Make office appointments [here](#).*

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## Course Description

This course examines the American skyscraper as a historical artifact shaped by design decisions, technological systems, and social life. Students learn how architectural historians study buildings through close attention to form, structure, circulation, and visual evidence, with particular emphasis on reading plans, photographs, and spatial organization. The course begins with early skyscrapers in the Chicago Loop and gradually expands to address broader questions of representation, labor, race, gender, and environmental systems, situating buildings within larger urban, social, and ecological systems. Across the semester, students can expect a steady workload that includes regular reading, hands-on workshops, film discussions, two exams, and a sequence of projects designed to build analytical skills over time.

## Learning Objectives and Texas Core Standards

With engagement and steady work, students will:

- **Analyze** buildings as physical, spatial, and material objects using architectural vocabulary and visual evidence (Critical Thinking; Empirical and Quantitative Skills).
- **Interpret** drawings, photographs, and spatial organization to understand design decisions and their consequences (Critical Thinking; Empirical and Quantitative Skills).
- **Evaluate** the relationship between architecture, technology, labor, and social structures (Critical Thinking; Social Responsibility).
- **Communicate** architectural analysis clearly in written and visual formats (Communication).
- **Demonstrate** understanding of how skyscrapers function as coordinated systems and cultural artifacts (Critical Thinking; Social Responsibility).
- **Collaborate** effectively in workshops and peer discussions to develop comparative and synthetic analyses (Teamwork).
- **Demonstrate** academic integrity and responsible engagement with course materials, assignments, and scholarly practices (Personal Responsibility).

## **Required Texts**

George H. Douglas, *Skyscrapers: A Social History in America*. McFarland and Company, 2004.

## **Suggested Additional Text**

Kate Ascher, *The Heights: Anatomy of a Skyscraper*. Penguin Books, 2013.

Other course texts, images, and films are listed in the syllabus and can be accessed online or in PDF form on Canvas.

\*\*\*Students are expected to complete assigned readings before class; lectures and in-class activities build on the readings rather than repeat them. Guidance on how to approach readings for this course is provided in the **"How to Read for This Course"** guide in the Start Here module on Canvas.

<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Due Date</b>	<b>Points</b>
Syllabus Acknowledgement	Confirmation of syllabus review and course policies	Thursday, January 15	Participation
Exam 1	Covers Weeks 1–3	Thursday, February 5	15
Project 1: The Skyscraper as an Architectural Problem	Analysis of an early skyscraper as an architectural and spatial system	Tuesday, February 17	10
Project 2: Images as Evidence	Analysis of photographs and other visual representations of skyscrapers as historical evidence	Thursday, March 26	20
Exam 2	Covers Weeks 10–15	Thursday, April 30	20
Project 3	Independent research project synthesizing course themes	Finals Period	25
Participation	Attendance, preparation, and engagement in discussion and in-class activities	Ongoing	10

### **Grading Scale (out of 100 points)**

A: 90–100

B: 80–89

C: 70–79

D: 60–69

F: 59 and below

## **Project Descriptions**

### **Project 1: The Skyscraper as an Architectural Problem**

**Introduced:** Thursday, January 22

**Due:** Tuesday, February 17

**Points:** 10

This project asks students to analyze an early skyscraper as an architectural and spatial object. Students will examine how form, structure, circulation, light, and interior organization work together to address the challenges of height and density. The assignment emphasizes close looking, architectural description, and the use of drawings and photographs as evidence, establishing core methods used throughout the course.

#### **Assignment Requirements:**

Students must submit a **1,000–1,250 word analytical essay** and an **original annotated diagram**, using **Chicago Notes and Bibliography style footnotes** where appropriate.

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## **Project 2: Images as Evidence**

**Introduced:** Tuesday, February 24

**Due:** Thursday, March 26

**Points:** 20

This project asks students to analyze photographs and other visual representations of skyscrapers as historical evidence rather than as illustrations. Building on Project 1, students will use close visual analysis to examine how images shape understanding of skyscraper form, scale, labor, and cultural meaning. The assignment emphasizes careful description, use of architectural vocabulary, and interpretation grounded in course readings and lectures.

### **Assignment Requirements:**

Students must submit a **1,000–1,250 word analytical essay** using **Chicago Notes and Bibliography style footnotes**, including properly cited images with captions.

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### **Project 3: The Skyscraper as a System (Final Project)**

**Introduced:** Thursday, April 9

**Due:** Finals Period

**Points:** 25

**Length:** 6–8 pages

This final project asks students to analyze one skyscraper as an integrated system, bringing together architectural form, visual representation, and historical context. Building on the analytical methods developed in Projects 1 and 2, students will develop a focused argument supported by close building analysis, images treated as evidence, and a small number of scholarly sources.

Students will select **one building** from a prescribed list and use 3–5 scholarly sources to support interpretation rather than compile background history. Images must be cited using Chicago style.

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## **Exam Format**

Exams are administered in class and are timed (80 minutes). Students will write by hand in blue books. Each exam consists of *four short-answer questions* and *one image analysis* question. Questions emphasize careful description, use of course terminology, and interpretation of visual evidence rather than memorization.

### **Exam 1**

**Date:** Thursday, February 5

**Coverage:** Weeks 1–3

**Points:** 15

### **Exam 2**

**Date:** Thursday, April 30

**Coverage:** Weeks 10–15

**Points:** 20

## **In-Class Work and Participation**

### **1. Mapping the Chicago Loop**

**Date:** Thursday, January 29

**Graded as:** Complete/Incomplete/Participation

In-class mapping and diagramming exercise linking geography, land value, and skyscraper form.

### **2. How a Skyscraper Works: Circulation and Systems (The Rookery)**

**Date:** Thursday, February 12

**Graded as:** Complete/Incomplete/Participation

Hands-on workshop using Rookery Building plans and images to trace circulation paths and systems integration.

### **3. Image as Evidence: Interpreting the Skyscraper**

**Date:** Tuesday, March 17

**Graded as:** Complete/Incomplete/Participation

Students analyze photographs, paintings, or film stills of skyscrapers as historical evidence rather than illustration, practicing careful description and interpretation in preparation for Project 2 and Exam 2.

## Weekly Schedule

All readings are to be completed **before class** on the date listed.

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### Week 1

#### **Tuesday, January 13 — Course Introduction: What Is This Class About?**

Overview of course themes, expectations, and project scaffolding; discussion of buildings as historical evidence.

*No assigned reading.*

#### **Thursday, January 15 — Introduction to Architectural History**

How architectural historians read buildings, plans, sections, and images.

#### **Reading:**

- Simon Conway and Simon Roenisch, *Understanding Architecture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018), Chapter 1, "What Is Architecture and How Is It Understood?" (Canvas PDF)

**Syllabus Acknowledgement due on Canvas by 11:59 pm**

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### Week 2

#### **Tuesday, January 20 — What Is a Skyscraper?**

Early skyscrapers as a historical phenomenon, focusing on height, function, and urban context.

#### **Reading:**

- George H. Douglas, *Skyscrapers: A Social History of the American Skyscraper* (McFarland and Company, 2004), Introduction and Chapter 1.

#### **Thursday, January 22 — The Skyscraper as an Architectural Problem**

The skyscraper as an architectural object; structure, circulation, and verticality introduced.

#### **Reading:**

- Louis H. Sullivan, "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered," *Lippincott's Magazine* 57 (March 1896): 403–409. (Canvas PDF)

**Project 1 introduced.**

### **Week 3**

#### **Tuesday, January 27 — The Central Business District and the Chicago Loop**

Geography of the central business district (CBD) and the history of spatial concentration of skyscrapers in downtown Chicago.

#### **Readings:**

- George H. Douglas, *Skyscrapers*, Chapter 2.
- Larry R. Ford, "Downtown Buildings: The Role of the Skyscraper in Shaping the American Central Business District," in *Cities and Buildings: Skyscrapers, Skid Rows, and Suburbs* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 10–63. (Canvas PDF)

#### **Thursday, January 29 — Mapping the Loop (In-Class Activity)**

In-class mapping and diagramming exercise linking geography, land value, and skyscraper form.

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### **Week 4**

#### **Tuesday, February 3 — Exam 1 Review**

Synthesis of material from Weeks 1–3; key concepts, buildings, and images.

#### **Thursday, February 5 — EXAM 1 (Weeks 1–3)**

In-class exam.

No new readings due.

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### **Week 5**

#### **Tuesday, February 10 — Technology and Structure**

Structural systems that enabled skyscrapers, including steel framing, elevators, and fireproofing.

#### **Readings:**

- George H. Douglas, *Skyscrapers*, Chapter 3.
- Kate Ascher, *The Heights: Anatomy of a Skyscraper* (New York: Penguin, 2013), selections. (Canvas PDF)

## **Thursday, February 12 — Circulation and Building Systems Workshop: The Rookery (In-Class Activity)**

Hands-on workshop using Rookery Building plans and images to trace circulation paths and systems integration.

### **Readings:**

- Simon Conway and Simon Roenisch, *Understanding Architecture*, Chapter 10, "Drawings, Models, and Photographs."
  - *The Rookery*, architectural plans, Library of Congress.
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## **Week 6**

### **Tuesday, February 17 — Construction as Coordination**

Skyscraper construction as a time-based coordination of multiple systems and trades.

### **Reading:**

- William A. Starrett, *Skyscrapers and the Men Who Build Them* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), Part II, "How a Skyscraper Is Built," 69–121. (Internet Archive)

### **Project 1 Due**

### **Thursday, February 19 — Light, Space, and Interior Experience**

Interior space and light in early skyscrapers, including the Rookery and WCTU Temple.

### **Reading:**

- Daniel Bluestone, "A City Under One Roof: Chicago's Skyscrapers, 1880–1895," in *Constructing Chicago* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 112–143.
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## **Week 7**

### **Tuesday, February 24 — Time, Speed, and Tempo**

Time, rhythm, and pace as architectural and social factors in skyscraper design.

### **Reading:**

- Arnold Lewis, "The Urban Transformation of Time and Tempo," in *An Early Encounter with Tomorrow: Europeans, Chicago's Loop, and the World's Columbian Exposition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 46–79.

## **Project 2 introduced.**

### **Thursday, February 26 — Time, Speed, and Tempo**

Time, rhythm, and pace as architectural and social factors in skyscraper design.

#### **Reading:**

- Arnold Lewis, "The Urban Transformation of Time and Tempo," in *An Early Encounter with Tomorrow: Europeans, Chicago's Loop, and the World's Columbian Exposition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 46–79.
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## **Week 8**

### **Tuesday, March 3 — Early Skyscraper Photography**

Photographic representation, ideology, and elevated views.

#### **Readings:**

- Alan Trachtenberg, "Image and Ideology: New York in the Photographer's Eye," *Journal of Urban History* 10, no. 4 (1984): 453–464. (Canvas PDF)
- Meredith T. Grotenhuis Shimizu, "Lofty Domains: Social Climbing and Visual Dominance in Elevated Urban Views," *Photography and Culture* 7, no. 2 (2014): 141–158.
- George H. Douglas, *Skyscrapers*, Chapter 4.

### **Thursday, March 5 — The Mid-Century Office**

Corporate modernism and office interiors.

#### **Readings:**

- George H. Douglas, *Skyscrapers*, Chapter 5.
- Jennifer Kaufmann-Buhler, *Open Plan: A Design History of the American Office* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2021), chapter excerpt. (Canvas PDF)

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## Week 9

### March 9–15 — Spring Break

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## Week 10

### Tuesday, March 17 — The Image as Evidence Workshop (In-Class Activity)

Applying visual analysis methods to architectural photographs and drawings.

### Thursday, March 19 — The Mid-Century Office

Corporate modernism and office interiors.

#### Readings:

- George H. Douglas, *Skyscrapers*, Chapter 5.
  - Jennifer Kaufmann-Buhler, *Open Plan: A Design History of the American Office* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2021), chapter excerpt. (Canvas PDF)
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## Week 11

### Tuesday, March 24 — Race and the Skyscraper

Race, labor, and visibility in skyscraper history.

#### Readings:

- Adrienne Brown, "Erecting the Skyscraper, Erasing Race," in Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis II, and Mabel Wilson, eds., *Race and Modern Architecture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020), 203–217.
- David Weitzman, *Skywalkers: Mohawk Ironworkers Build the City* (New York: Roaring Brook Press, 2010), 91–109.

### Thursday, March 26 — Gender, Labor, and Office Space

Gendered labor and office hierarchies.

#### Reading:

- Lisa M. Fine, "The Female 'Souls of the Skyscraper,'" in Roberta Moudry, ed., *The American Skyscraper: Cultural Histories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 63–84.

## **Project 2 Due**

### **Week 12**

#### **Tuesday, March 31 — Labor and the Building Process**

Construction culture and craft.

#### **Readings:**

- Sarah Woods, "Built Language of Class: Skyscrapers and Labor Protest in Victorian Public Space," in Moudry, *The American Skyscraper*, 185–200.
- Ezra Shales, "Corporate Craft: Constructing the Building," *Journal of Modern Craft* 4, no. 2 (2011): 119–145.

#### **Thursday, April 2 — Environmental Systems and Sustainability**

Environmental performance and systems thinking.

#### **Reading:**

- Kiel Moe, *Empire, State & Building* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), selections. (Canvas PDF)
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### **Week 13**

#### **Tuesday, April 7 — Project 3 Introduction**

#### **Thursday, April 9 — Film Discussion: *Safety Last!* (1923)**

(No in-person class)

Students watch independently and post to Canvas.

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### **Week 14**

#### **Tuesday, April 14 — Film Discussion: *Playtime* (1967)**

(No in-person class)

Students watch independently and post to Canvas.

#### **Thursday, April 16 — The World Trade Center**

The World Trade Center as a Cold War architectural and urban project.

#### **Readings:**

- Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), World Trade Center chapter (excerpt).
  - Robert A. M. Stern, Thomas Mellins, and David Fishman, *New York 1960: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Second World War and the Bicentennial* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995), World Trade Center section (excerpt).
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## **Week 15**

### **Tuesday, April 21 — Unpacking the Meaning of the World Trade Center**

Meaning, vulnerability, and interpretation after 2001.

#### **Readings:**

- Mark Wigley, "Insecurity by Design," in *After the World Trade Center* (London: Routledge, 2002).
- *New York Times*, selected articles on the World Trade Center (1970s–2001), posted on Canvas.

### **Thursday, April 23 — Exam 2 Review**

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## **Week 16**

### **Tuesday, April 28 — EXAM 2**

### **Thursday, April 30 — No class**

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## **Finals Week — Project 3 Due**

## **Course Policies and Practices**

### **Participation, Engagement, and Attendance**

#### **Monitored throughout the semester**

**Points:** 10

Participation and engagement are assessed cumulatively across the semester and reflect intellectual presence, preparation, and attentiveness, not how often a student speaks. Participation may take multiple forms, including in-class discussion, engagement with images and case studies, office hours, email communication, and assigned activities.

Regular attendance is a core component of participation. Being present in class supports engagement with lectures, images, discussions, and activities that cannot be replicated outside the classroom. Attendance is tracked throughout the semester and affects the Participation and Engagement score as follows:

- Up to five unexcused absences: no attendance-related reduction
- Six to eight unexcused absences: up to a five-point reduction within Participation and Engagement
- More than eight unexcused absences: up to a seven-point reduction within Participation and Engagement

Attendance does not function as a separate grade and does not exceed the 10 points allocated to Participation and Engagement.

Excused absences include documented illness, religious observances, university-sponsored activities, and documented family or personal emergencies. Excused absences do not count toward the unexcused absence total. Students are responsible for notifying the instructor and for keeping up with course material.

Detailed expectations and the Participation and Engagement rubric are available on Canvas.

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### **Office Hours, Communication, and Feedback**

Students are strongly encouraged to seek feedback before submitting assignments by attending office hours. Office hours are an appropriate place to clarify expectations, test ideas, confirm use of course material, ask questions about structure or evidence, and review material missed due to an absence.

Office-hour appointments must be scheduled through Google Bookings. Make office appointments [here](#).

Email is appropriate for brief, logistical questions. Requests for summaries of missed class sessions, or emails asking whether "anything important was missed," will not be addressed by email. Guidance on how to catch up after an absence and appropriate communication after missing class is provided on Canvas.

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### **Student Course Evaluations (SPOT)**

The University of North Texas administers student course evaluations (SPOT) near the end of the semester. These evaluations provide important feedback on the course and instruction. Time will be set aside during class for students to complete SPOT evaluations when they open. Participation is voluntary and anonymous, and instructors do not have access to individual responses.

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### **Lecture Slides and Devices**

Lecture slides will be posted on Canvas shortly before class begins so that students may take notes directly on the PDF using their own devices. Slides are provided as a reference and study aid and are not a substitute for attending class or taking notes.

Electronic devices such as laptops and tablets may be used for note-taking and engagement with course materials. Device use that distracts or disrupts other students may result in the loss of device privileges. Headphones are not permitted unless approved through a documented ADA accommodation.

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### **Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Writing Tools Policy**

This course is designed around direct engagement with assigned readings, lectures, films, images, and primary visual material discussed in class. While students will conduct independent research for projects, all written analysis and interpretation must be the student's own work.

#### **Permitted Use**

- Using AI tools to help locate sources, databases, or archival materials

- Using AI tools to understand unfamiliar concepts or terminology encountered during research
- Standard spell-check
- Basic proofreading for typographical errors

### **Prohibited Use**

The use of AI-generated writing, analysis, summaries, or paraphrasing tools is not permitted.

This includes, but is not limited to:

- AI-generated drafts, outlines, or written content
- AI-assisted writing or rewriting of analysis, arguments, or interpretations
- AI-generated summaries or paraphrasing of sources
- Writing assistants such as Grammarly when used beyond basic spelling correction

Use of AI-generated or AI-assisted writing beyond the permitted limits constitutes a violation of the UNT Academic Integrity Policy.

When in doubt, students should consult the instructor before submitting work.

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## **University of North Texas Policies**

### **Academic Integrity Policy**

According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to, cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

### **ADA Policy**

UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA). If verified, the ODA will provide an accommodation letter to begin a private discussion regarding course needs. Accommodation requests should be made as early as possible to avoid delays.

### **Emergency Notification and Procedures**

UNT uses Eagle Alert to notify students in the event of emergencies such as severe weather, campus closure, or health and safety incidents.

### **Retention of Student Records**

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained by the instructor of record for at least one calendar year after course completion.

### **Code of Student Conduct**

Student behavior that interferes with the instructor's ability to conduct class or with other students' learning is unacceptable and may be referred to the Dean of Students.