

## **3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Delta Omega Curriculum Award Winner**

Urban Environmental Health: EH 807  
A Project-Based and Community-Based Course  
Boston University School of Public Health

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Problems of the emerging urban environment in the late 19th century, which gave rise to the public health and environmental health movements, continue to enervate inner cities of the United States and imperil poor people in rapidly expanding mega-cities of the world. Yet, the idea of environment has historically been split off from health and cities. Environment is generally framed by mainstream environmental groups as wilderness without people and fragmented by environmental protection agencies into physical media including air, water, and soil threatened by pollution. What has been overlooked and lost in these central trends is the historic connection of environmental health to the lived environment: the nexus of buildings, infrastructure, streets, social life, and human services with ambient air, water, soil, and green space--the environment as city people experience it.

This course, Urban Environmental Health, situates its students and faculty in our school's urban environment where poverty, poor services, and pollution are most concentrated. The neighboring communities of Roxbury, North Dorchester, parts of the South End and South Boston have the highest indices in Boston of household poverty, ill health, childhood lead poisoning and asthma, mixed industrial and residential zoning, 21E hazardous waste sites, vacant land, and injury by weapons. Simultaneously, these neighborhoods are increasingly known for their assets--community-based organizations which are rebuilding their often devastated urban neighborhoods with creative initiatives around affordable housing, environmental justice, community health, urban gardening, and local economic development.

The Department of Environmental Health has built a partnership with its neighboring communities and with public health and environmental protection agencies under the aegis of the Urban Environmental Health Initiative. In this course students benefit from the experiences of these partners and apply the lessons learned from thousands of person hours of working to improve the lives and health of people in cities. It builds upon presentations on focused topics and readings of background literature to give students an understanding of how the built environment interacts with other public health issues. Teams of students then analyze an issue, illustrate how it affects urban communities and develop solutions to reduce environmental burdens.

Public health is an applied field in which scholarship includes not only the discovery of knowledge but also the integration, communication, and application of knowledge. All these dimensions of scholarship are employed and encouraged in this course.