Place is a location with meaning. It is the difference between where you reside and where you feel at home. Often that meaning gets expressed through the large- and small-scale traces people leave in their environment, from urban infrastructure to individual signs, or even the names given to an area’s features.

But whose meaning gets expressed, and what decides what any trace in a place means? Are there patterns to whose meaning gets placed, which traces endure, and why? And what about those whose meaning gets hidden, seemingly without a clear trace?

In seeking answers to these questions, we will examine those places where meanings are purposefully cultivated: memorial landscapes. These are landscapes where certain memories are meant to remain and represent what is “true” about that place, like historic districts in cities, or former battlefields, or even statues. Using key insights from geography, we will learn how to analyze these landscapes in order to understand what they are supposed to mean, to whom, as well as what happens when their meanings shift, change, multiply, or even fade. We will also look for traces of those whose meaning may be hidden in these landscapes, and discern why.

UNC’s campus will serve as one of the main “textbooks” for this course, so we will be outside and around different parts of the campus as much as possible. The course of study will build up to students’ final project work: to develop what you think would be a fair and just process for the creation of future memorial landscapes here at UNC-Chapel Hill.