THE GREAT CHICAGO

CHICAGO STUDIES
Chicago Studies is a program of the undergraduate College at the University of Chicago. “The Great Chicago Drift” was developed by Tess Conway and Chris Skrable based on a class project designed by Niall Atkinson. Learn more: CHICAGOSTUDIES.UCHICAGO.EDU/DRIFT
To drift is to eschew the well-worn paths, to resist going to places that you know or want to see and, instead, to allow yourself to discover the city by a series of random turns, taking account of the psychological and bodily effects such random spaces have upon you. Insert yourself into the narrative of the city; immerse yourself in the knowing of your own local history, rich in personal allusions, comparisons, historical connections, poetic imaginings; envision the social, spatial, historical, and emotional alignments between spaces and people you have come across, and with other places you know in Chicago or beyond. Craft a dialogue between you and the city.
How to Drift

1. Before the drift, agree where and when your team will meet. (If you’re drifting alone, this will be easy.) If possible, travel to your assigned location together.

2. When you arrive at your drifting location, look around you in all directions. For the next 2-3 hours, you will maneuver through this landscape to build your own unique Chicago journey, one that you will build into a spatial narrative along the way.

3. Your route will be determined by following a simple rule (or a short series of rules) that you agree to as a group prior to beginning your drift. For example, you could decide to keep turning left at every possible opportunity, whether it be into a field, forest, church, alley, street, garden, or public building. You may also choose a more complex rule, e.g. to alternate turning left and right, but then you must keep track of which direction to turn next! You may even create an algorithm to direct you, so long as your path is clear and remains neutral and random. Resist the desire to game the system!

4. Having established your walking rule, agree with your team on an initial direction you’d all like to go, set an alarm or timer for ten minutes, and begin drifting! To document your exact drifting route, turn on Strava or a similar walking/running app as you begin.

5. Once you are in motion, let your walking rule guide the direction of your drifting. In between turns, discuss what you are seeing and experiencing. When your alarm goes off, pause in your drifting to take more specific account of where you are, and what/whom you experience there. These moments of pause are opportunities to think both hard and creatively. In the following pages, you’ll find separate sections to guide your reflections, with spaces to record your observations at each of your pauses. Each participant should record their own notes, but feel free to collaborate with your teammates as you describe what you are feeling.
6. In addition to directing your attention to specific aspects of your experience, each stop will also ask you to:
   - Make a sketch based on your observations. You should do this directly in this notebook. You do not need to draw well, you can make doodles, scratch marks, or even attach objects you’ve found along the way;
   - Take note of your geolocation using your phone’s compass app;
   - Take a photo (you’ll find a specific prompt in each section) and post it to your team’s Instagram story. (Remember to tag @chicagostudies and use the hashtag #GreatChicagoDrift.)

7. Once you have fully taken account of your context, set your timer for ten more minutes, and resume your drift through the area. Let yourself get thoroughly lost, feeling free to explore anything fascinating you discover along the way. If you happen to turn into a cafe, order a drink; a bookstore, read something; a garden, smell something; etc. Wherever you are when your alarm goes off, do the next reflection section, never starting the next timer until you are in motion again.

8. Along the way, feel free to take other photos, videos, or capture audio clips that will remind you of specific moments in your drift. You can also use this content in your team’s (optional) final artistic product.

9. Although you are taking notes in your notebooks, take advantage of the opportunity to discuss your situation, experience, dreams, hopes, and the region as a whole with your drifting companions as you are making your way through it.

10. Once you feel fully lost (and have arrived at your final stop), rejoice in your feeling of spatial liberation! Stop Strava (or whatever has been documenting your path for you); take note of the time and geolocation where you finished drifting; thank your teammates; and begin your journey home.
Drifting Wisdom

◊ Take advantage of opportunities to physically touch the surfaces of your surroundings to experience them tactiley.

◊ Engage with people you encounter if you feel comfortable, watching and listening for stories they may tell or suggest.

◊ Never ask for directions, but give them if others ask you.

◊ Most journeys are better with a snack, and something to drink as well. Pack wisely!

◊ Resist the urge to move toward a destination. The journey is the goal, and wherever it may take you is where you should be.

◊ At every stage of your journey (but especially when you are paused), be aware of what is stimulating your senses.

◊ If your turns bring you to a dead end, don’t panic - just return to the last turn and continue.

◊ Be careful not to turn onto someone’s private property. Drifting need not include trespassing.

◊ If your drifting turns you toward a public space (even one that is alien to you), enter, if you feel you can do so respectfully. Try to be a “perfect stranger” while there.

◊ Keep turning until it no longer makes sense, and try to exit without breaking the rules too much, but adjust your rule slightly if you become caught in a circle, etc.

◊ Don’t let the technology dominate your experience...but it would be wise to periodically check to make sure your walking/running app is still tracking you!

◊ Follow good wilderness etiquette, even in the city: leave nothing behind, and take nothing with you (except the things you brought in the first place).