

Urban Design Seminar

PLAN608

School of Planning

University of Cincinnati

Spring Quarter 2012

MW 12:30-1:50 PM

Office Hours: Fridays 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Instructor: Mahyar Arefi, Ph.D.

Course Outline:

This course caters to a wide array of students interested in urban design who may not necessarily have a design background. As a field or inquiry which is closely tied to architecture and landscape architecture, urban design is experiencing major shifts in its intents, content, and scope.

While urban design has produced a flurry of research in recent years, its relationship to architecture and urban planning remains quite controversial. To some, the difference between urban design and architecture is only a matter of scale. Yet to others, it is more than that. More than mere artistic talent architects typically admire, some would argue that an urban designer should have great social and analytical skills because he/she should explore and reflect the needs, visions, and aspirations of their communities; a role which can be characterized more as facilitating and enabling through community organizing and policymaking rather than direct engagement in design. These observations and positions have indeed created a vibrant forum of critical examination and ongoing debates surrounding the definitions, roots, processes, components, scopes, and trends associated with urban design.

As any other seminar, this is a readings-driven class which will selectively address some of these debates. However, since it serves a broad range of students from various backgrounds and disciplines, it also aims to go beyond theory and engage the students in a group project. The goal is to critically examine the readings and learn from them. Gleaning from the assigned readings will allow you to use them creatively in an urban design project.

Learning Outcomes:

- To critically explore the emerging trends/debates in urban design;
- To understand the gap between urban design theory and practice;
- To engage in a group project and while learning try to have fun!;
- To experience the complexity and composition of an urban design project without claiming mastery of conventional design techniques or sensibilities such as the use of computer;
- To experience, and hone individual and group skills in design by constructing a 3D study model of building types;

This course aims to both familiarize the students with the emerging discourses in urban design and at the same time, engage them in a group project.

Expectations:

Students are required to carefully and critically read the articles assigned for each week, and prepare and submit a one-page critical summary of the weekly readings. These summaries should be submitted in class on a regular basis. They also make up 10% of the final grade, and failure in their timely submission affects grades.

Since this is a seminar, students are encouraged to actively participate in class discussions. Exchanging ideas in class will help the students to critically understand the readings, remember their main points, and hopefully, find ways to apply them in their group projects.

The course expectations are fourfold:

- To submit weekly summaries in class;
- To participate in class discussions;
- To critically and comprehensively examine the readings in a 10-page reflection paper (due in 6 weeks);
- To engage in a group urban design project (for about 4-5 weeks), and present them in class (due at the end of the quarter);

Required Books:

Banerjee, Tridib and Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris. 2011. *Companion to Urban Design*. London and New York, Routledge.

Kasprisin, Ron. 2011. *Urban Design: The Composition of Complexity*. London and New York, Routledge.

Weekly Schedule of Readings/Tasks:

Urban Design Companion (Banerjee and Loukaitou-Sideris, eds.)

Week 1

Roots:

Fishman, Robert. The open and the enclosed: shifting paradigm in modern urban design

Palazzo, Danilo. Pedagogical traditions

Components:

Forsyth, Ann. Planned communities and new towns

Francis, Mark. Mixed-life places

Week 2

Process:

Carmona, Matthew. Decoding design guidance

Debates:

Ewing, Reid, Keith Bartholomew, and Arthur Nelson. Compactness vs. sprawl

Madanipour, Ali. Living together or apart: social mixing, social exclusion, and gentrification

Talen, Emily. Form-based codes vs. conventional zoning

Week 3

Influences:

Ford, Larry. Urban design and the traditions of geography

William Michelson. Influences of sociology on urban design

Lawrence-Zuniga, Denise. Influences of anthropology on urban design

Theories:

Verma, Niraj. Urban design: an incompletely theorized project

Week 4

Global Trends and New Directions:

Lang, Jon. City branding

Soja, Edward. From metropolitan to regional urbanization

Scheer, Brenda. Metropolitan form and landscape urbanism

Week 5: Assignment 1 (Reflection Papers) due: present outlines in class

Note on Assignment 1. There are two reasons for writing this paper:

- 1) to ensure that you have thoroughly and critically read and understood the assigned readings;
- 2) to encourage you to glean from the readings directly and purposefully in the subsequent urban design project. While the project has a design focus, you are expected to find ways for incorporating the useful points you may come across from each reading. Reading, remembering and gleaning these points will help you to better incorporate them in your design. The gap between theory and practice of urban design has always been subject to scrutiny and criticism. These are some tips for you while reading each or the assigned article:
 - a. What are the main points the article sets out to address?
 - b. What did you learn from each article and how would they help you in an actual design problem?
 - c. How does this basic understanding of urban design theory help you to better engage in urban design practice?

The point to remember is to read critically. This will help you to not only remember the content but also be able to question their assumptions and think of their linkages to urban design practice.

Weeks 6-9: Urban Design: The composition of complexity

Assignment 2: this group project aims to engage you for the next 3-4 weeks. This is a site-specific project where you will join groups of 4 and construct a 3D study model with corrugated cardboard or chipboard. For details of this project consult and follow the steps discussed on

page 176 of Kasprisin's book. The idea is to propose a program including housing, commercial, etc. followed by design of building types. Each group will prepare two or three design strategies by using cut-outs and placing them on a base map of maximum 36" x 48".

The sequence of tasks includes the following:

- *Background materials*: assemble base maps and general site information
- *Space-Use Program*: Identify what, how much, and organizational relationships before starting design;
- *Model*: work as a team; decide and identify an appropriate scale not to exceed 36" x 48"
Note: the point here is to engage in design without having to go through conventional design techniques. The main purpose here is to encourage and to expose you to fundamental design sensibilities and sensitivities without having to go through architectural training. While to do this exercise successfully you do not have to be architects, you will pay attention to issues of scale, figure-ground relationships, proportion, etc.;
- *Building Components*: study building composition identified by your teams (retail, office buildings to compose different densities, library, townhomes, parking (both on- and off-street parking), public spaces.
Note: Quickly review the first half of the book, but pay special attention and follow the steps covered on p. 179-183.

Week 10: Present Final Projects in Class

Each group member will be asked to evaluate the contribution of the other members of their group at the end of the quarter. These evaluations will be incorporated in the grades for the group projects.

Grading Criteria:

Attendance, Class Participation, and One-page Weekly Summaries	20%
Reflection Paper	30%
Group Project	50%