Premise:
Architects can be agents of positive change. Given this premise, we will ask the questions: How can design be part of a movement for social and environmental justice? How can activism reinvigorate the social practices of design professions?

Architecture as Activism encompasses a wide range of civically/socially engaged practices and an emerging field of professional activities often described as Public Interest Design. Community planning and advocacy, public service media campaigns, not-for-profit architecture or design build efforts, art as social action—each of these activities involves design professionals as they seek to influence positive change in both the social and the physical worlds. This course will focus upon the role that design professionals can have in fostering such change.

Content/Method:
This seminar takes an interdisciplinary look at design and its abilities to address contemporary social issues. Socially conscious works have a long history but recent decades have witnessed a renewed interest in the public role of design in society and a robust body of work has emerged as a result. The class will explore the connections between activism and design practices as well as the politics of representation within diverse civic realm, ethical responsibilities of professionals engaged in the public interest, questions of the public/of multiple publics, the shape of the public realm, and practical issues associated with design “services.” We will cover these topics in search of the methods employed by a growing movement of activist designers whose work is socially responsive and environmental transformative. This course will collaborate with the City.Building.Lab in its efforts to bring design expertise to bear upon issues confronting our city and region.

Research Connections:
This class builds upon the work of the City.Building.Lab, which serves as the public outreach arm of the SoA.

Required Readings:

Projects/Evaluations/Measures:
Students will address a specific need within Charlotte and work collaboratively with local not-for-profits and/or other organizations that will benefit from our design assistance. The result will be a term-long and student-team pro-bono design study (40%). Attendance and weekly progress as demonstrated through weekly reading reflections (written reflections on weekly readings 20%); “1% Charette” 5%; Case Study presentation (individual project, 25%); Final document and collaboration on course portfolio (10%).