ARCH 7201
DESIGN METHODOLOGIES

Spring 2016 Syllabus
Instructor: Thomas Forget, Assistant Professor
University of North Carolina at Charlotte, School of Architecture
3 Credit Hours: Tuesday, 2:00 pm - 4:45 pm, 155 Storrs

“... there is no such thing as an entirely new system, and if a system claims to be such, it is either stupid or dangerous.”
Hanno-Walter Kruft

PREMISE
Design Methodologies is a historical, theoretical, and (above all) critical exploration of the design process from the perspective of the designer. It addresses ideas and projects that students normally encounter in history and theory courses, and it does so in ways that resonate with the objectives of design studios. The course, therefore, creates a bridge between thinking and making. Moreover, it promotes a reciprocal relationship between research and design: research as a component of the design process, and design as a form of research in itself. The course situates contemporary design practices within the context of the Modern Era that begins with the Renaissance. Through readings, lectures, discussions, and analytical workshops, it engages various conditions of Modernity and questions the extent to which contemporary design is still regulated by them. The course is envisioned as an experimental laboratory of ideas about the design process, not a survey of known truths. It seeks to reveal the built environment as not only an aesthetic condition, but also a technological, cultural, economic, and political act. As designers, how do we navigate ideas, take advantage of limitations, and operate within the flux of history?

OBJECTIVES
The primary objective of this course is to promote a culture of critical inquiry and research in architectural design. To that end, it seeks:

- to train students to navigate the design process with theoretical depth and agility
- to demystify the design process and to reveal it as an interdisciplinary act of research
- to promote reading, writing, design, and graphic analysis as complementary modes of knowledge
- to promote history and precedent as contingencies of contemporary practice
- to develop and hone students’ abilities to communication through writing and speaking
- to reveal representational strategies as analytical discourses that impact design

METHOD
After preparatory lectures and discussions that elucidate the scope of the course objectives, the course embarks on a sequence of four primary inquiries that reflect the four primary scales of the design process: representation/process, building design/formal composition, materials/technology, and site/cultural context. Each inquiry begins with an introductory set of historical readings and includes further sets of readings by seminal practitioners and theorists. The readings in each inquiry serve as models of research, and students are expected to incorporate ideas and resources from their academic and personal backgrounds in order to narrow the topic of the inquiry in a manner that complements their own objectives as a designer. Each week, the instructor delivers a lecture and leads a discussion on the readings, and students develop critical responses to historical and contemporary architecture through writing and analytical diagramming, which they present to the class as a design provocation on a rotating basis. Special emphasis is placed on the differing roles of verbal and graphic argumentation, and students are expected to take intellectual and graphic risks. Major projects include a midterm historical case study and a final project that compiles, reworks, and expands the critical responses from throughout semester. Student work will be evaluated in terms of its depth, rigor, and creativity.