PREMISE: At the beginning of the 21st century, many colleges and universities around the country have realized that they need to have more than a well-planned campus and top-ranked academic programs to attract students and faculty. Rather, they need to have a complementary “town/gown” relationship with their host community. The “college town” – a quintessentially American ideal city form can provide a very high quality of life, both for students of college-age and for faculty, alumni, and retirees who choose to live in these towns. But what if the existing town falls short? Any relationship takes efforts from all parties involved to make it happen. Apparently, the underlying physical fabric of the town where a college or university resides ought to consist of a set of physical components suitable in support “place-making,” which in turn transforms both the town itself and the campus it hosts together into a livable place for all. But what are those components necessary to build a long-lasting town/gown relationship that is beneficiary to both sides?

CONTENT & OBJECTIVES: This sponsored research studio will use Charlotte’s University City as a testing ground for the potential role(s) of students-centered local economy in sustainable urban development. Students will be tasked to develop a project focused on envisioning student/community retail centers that would be the “student place” to hang out, socialize, etc. These centers would have to be welcoming to and supportive of the general community for it to be viable.

METHODOLOGY: Students, in close consultation with the staff of University City Partners, will map out the area’s carrying capacity for future urban growth and economic development. Key research activities will be focused on the following areas: Existing land development patterns, Current land use regulations, Transportation network, Demographic structure, Socio-economic and physical structure of existing neighborhoods, Employment clusters and business centers, Natural resources and green assets.

STUDIO PROJECTS: This studio will engage both collaborative research and design environments. Working individually and collectively, students will engage site mapping (including the use of GIS), diagramming and data analysis, precedent research, master-planning and visioning exercises, as well as urban design processes.

REQUIRED TEXTS: Selected readings from book chapters, journal articles, and online sources, TBA.

EVALUATION: Participation: 10%; Competition Phase: 10%; Mapping Studies: 10%; Team Design: 30% (Masterplan); Individual Precedent Study and Design/Research Phase: 20%; Studio Documentation: 20%