



*"Physical poverty is not an abstraction, but we almost never think of impoverishment as evidence of a world that exists. Much less do we imagine that it's a condition from which we may draw enlightenment in a very practical way.... It's not about your greatness as an architect, but about your compassion."*

Sam Mockbee

*"If you think you are a good professional in any field then let's try to test your skills in these challenging issues. The more complex the issue, the more the need for synthesis. These difficult complex issues require professional quality, not professional charity."*

Alejandro Aravena

## PREMISE

It's both an exhilarating and challenging time to be a student of architecture. This is due, at least in part, to 1) changing modes and goals of practice resulting from globalization and 2) rapidly expanding construction alternatives fueled in large part by technology. We can build bigger, taller, faster; we can build anywhere; and our buildings can take on almost any form executed in almost any material. This is not inherently good or bad; it's just a fact.

In this time of greater possibilities and fewer constraints, it is incumbent upon each of us to consider the question, "To what end do we build?" Le Corbusier said, "Nothing has the right to exist that cannot answer the question 'why'." Oftentimes in the present moment the answer seems to be, "Why not?" or, perhaps, "Because we can." This is a reactive stance signaling either an irresponsible lack of reflection or an intentionally glib response to a critical question.

A more exacting line of questioning for each of us might be, "What good do I want to put into the world, and how do I prepare myself to make that offering intelligently and effectively? Of all the possible modes of practice, how do I define my own path? From among the many valid goals of practice, how do I identify and commit to my own?"

While this course does not presume to answer all questions for all students, it does offer an opportunity to explore the modest and sometimes overlooked avenue of professional practice focused on humanitarian design.

Architectural activists engage a vast array of social justice issues and humanitarian design projects, but one commonality between them is that they work with marginalized, poor and vulnerable communities. In working with these communities they seek to identify the preexisting cultural, social, economic and physical systems already in place, not only to understand what the most pressing needs are but also to respond sensitively to the community's unique identity, strengths and richness. What imbues their work with resonance and meaning is the ability to accurately identify the issues at hand and design (and sometimes implement) a creative, respectful and effective solution.

## COURSE CONTENT

We will study 1) activist architects and designers and their strategies for practice; 2) both well-known and under-the-radar buildings and products with a humanitarian focus; 3) the systemic nature of design solutions necessary to turn good design *intentions* into good design *solutions*; 4) relevant partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs); manufacturers, etc. 5) the potential of design to impact poverty, conflict and productivity and 6) the thorny issues and criticisms embedded in the practice of humanitarian design.

## METHODOLOGY

In the first half of the semester students will research and critique examples of activist design through readings, lectures and multiple case studies. They will use this collected knowledge to analyze built works, strategic partnerships, and business models. 'Visual essays' and presentations will be the modes of reflection and dissemination.

In the second half of the semester students will become activists themselves. Working individually or in pairs they will engage a humanitarian project of their choice that responds to a real-world problem. The location of the project can be anywhere in the world other than North America.

The building type and location are up to the students. For instance one may choose to explore the building of an orphanage in Moshi, Tanzania (where scores of children are 'AIDS orphans') while another may choose to address the need for a clinic in Beirut, Lebanon (for Syrian refugees). These projects may be broad or deep according to the students' goals.

*(Note: This course is unrelated to Habitat for Humanity or Freedom by Design. It does not involve design-build activities.)*

## READINGS & FILMS

Throughout the semester the professor will assign films, TEDTalks, podcasts, etc. as well as readings from books, scholarly essays and articles in both the architectural and popular press.

Required texts:

- Murphy, Diana, ed. *Design Like You Give a Damn*. New York: Metropolis Books, 2006.
- Sinclair, Cameron and Kate Stohr. *Design Like You Give a Damn [2]*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2012.

## ETIQUETTE

You are expected to be on time to class, as am I. If you're going to be absent or late please inform me *beforehand*. Feel free to bring a drink to class but avoid bringing food. Cell phones must be 1) turned off and 2) kept out of sight during class hours. If you have a laptop, feel free to bring it to class but keep it closed unless you're using it to take notes or if we're collectively looking up something that arises in the course of our conversation. Use of a cell phone and/or computer for any reason that does not directly pertain to the class itself is not only a detriment to your education but is also seriously rude and will result in a lowered grade.

## THE NITTY GRITTY

Curiosity and a strong work ethic are the primary got-to-haves for this class. In addition, intellectual rigor and professionalism must mark your work. Your education is explicitly YOUR responsibility and privilege and requires your full and focused engagement. Education is about building knowledge,

and knowledge is about building value. Ultimately increasing your knowledge is not something undertaken for a grade but for the intrinsic value it adds to a well-rounded, interesting and richly layered life.

All work is due at the beginning of the class period and/or at the date and time specified. Failure to turn in more than two assignments will constitute grounds for automatic failure of this course. Late work will be accepted but penalized. If you are unable to complete an assignment due to a medical or family emergency, you must notify me prior to the day the assignment is due! Late work will be excused without penalty only for medical conditions and personal or family emergencies. These situations will require evidence of the nature of the emergency (i.e. a doctor's note).

Similarly, more than two unexcused absences will constitute grounds for automatic failure of this course. Please note that these requirements may be more stringent than those of the University or other courses within or outside the SoA. Absences are excused only for medical conditions and personal or family emergencies and require evidence of the nature of the emergency.

If you find yourself unable to complete the requirements for this class due to circumstances beyond your control, don't hesitate to come talk to me. A final grade of 'Incomplete' can be issued only if the relevant circumstances are discussed before a grade is assigned. I am receptive and will work as much as I can with any student who is having a problem.

As in all other courses in the School of Architecture, work completed for this course must comply with the *UNCC Code of Academic Integrity*. You are expected to follow ethical practices in all aspects of your work. Plagiarism and other unethical acts are serious breaches that result in stiff penalties.

UNC Charlotte and the SoA insist on an academic climate in which the dignity of all individuals is respected and maintained. Therefore the SoA celebrates diversity that includes, but is not limited to, ability/disability, age, culture, ethnicity, gender, language, race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation and socio-economic status.

## GRADING

Grades will conform to the university grading scale for undergraduate and graduate students and will be based on progress as well as product. A student who has a disability that qualifies for academic accommodations must provide a "letter of accommodation" from Disabilities Services within the first two weeks of the course. All such notifications shall be strictly confidential between the student and instructor. Every student is a unique individual, and I need and want to know how to best facilitate your learning.

### Undergraduate Criteria

A (Outstanding) - demonstrates the following qualities:

- extensive intellectual curiosity;
- exemplary self-motivation;
- exemplary research and presentation skills;
- strong time management skills (all work complete and on time);
- a compelling ability to question and critique him/herself and others productively;
- a consistent desire and ability to bring insightful issues, observations and questions to the table during class activities, discussions and critiques;
- significant improvement in understanding and execution over the course of the semester.

B (Above Average) - demonstrates the following qualities:

- notable intellectual curiosity;

- productive self-motivation;
- notable research and presentation skills;
- successful time management skills (all work complete and on time);
- a desire and ability to question and critique him/herself and others productively;
- some ability to bring insightful issues, questions and observations to class activities, discussions and critiques;
- some improvement in understanding and execution over the course of the semester.

C (Average) - demonstrates the following qualities:

- limited intellectual curiosity;
- limited or inconsistent self-motivation;
- baseline research and presentation skills;
- inconsistent time management skills (some work incomplete and/or late);
- limited willingness and/or ability to question and critique him/herself or others productively;
- limited willingness and/or ability to bring meaningful issues, questions and observations to class activities, discussions and critiques;
- little improvement in understanding and execution over the course of the semester.

D (Below Average) - demonstrates the following qualities:

- extremely limited intellectual curiosity;
- extremely limited self-motivation;
- poor research and presentation skills;
- poor time management skills (significant work incomplete or late);
- little or no willingness and/or ability to question and critique him/herself or others;
- little or no willingness and/or ability to bring meaningful issues, questions and observations to class activities, discussions and critiques;
- little or no improvement in understanding and execution over the course of the semester.

F (Failing) - demonstrates the following qualities:

- little to no intellectual curiosity;
- no apparent self-motivation;
- extremely poor research and presentation skills;
- little or no time management skills (significant work incomplete or late);
- no willingness and/or ability to question and critique him/herself or others productively;
- no willingness and/or ability to bring meaningful issues, questions and observations to class activities, discussions and critiques;
- no improvement in understanding and execution over the course of the semester.

### Graduate Criteria

A (Outstanding) - demonstrates the following qualities:

- extensive intellectual curiosity;
- exemplary self-motivation;
- exemplary research and presentation skills;
- successful time management skills (all work complete and on time);
- a compelling ability to question and critique him/herself and others productively;
- a consistent desire and ability to bring insightful issues, observations and questions to the table during class activities, discussions and critiques;
- significant improvement in understanding and execution over the course of the semester.

B (Above Average) - demonstrates the following qualities:

- notable intellectual curiosity;
- productive self-motivation;
- notable research and presentation skills;
- successful time management skills (all work complete and on time);
- a desire and ability to question and critique him/herself and others productively;
- some ability to bring insightful issues, questions and observations to class activities, discussions and critiques;
- some improvement in understanding and execution over the course of the semester

C (Average - Below Average) - demonstrates the following qualities:

- limited intellectual curiosity;
- limited or inconsistent self-motivation;
- baseline research and presentation skills;
- inconsistent time management skills (some work incomplete and/or late);
- limited willingness and/or ability to question and critique him/herself and others productively;
- limited willingness and/or ability to bring meaningful issues, questions and observations to class activities, discussions and critiques;
- little improvement in understanding and execution over the course of the semester.

U (Failing) - demonstrates the following qualities:

- little to no intellectual curiosity;
- little to no self-motivation;
- poor research and presentation skills;
- poor time management skills (significant work incomplete or late);
- little to no willingness and/or ability to question and critique him/herself and others productively;
- little to no willingness and/or ability to bring meaningful issues, questions and observations to class activities, discussions and critiques;
- little to no improvement in understanding and execution over the course of the semester