“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

“Architecture is bigger than the subject of architecture.”
Marlon Blackwell (Lecture, UNCC CoA, 2007)

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PREMISE
It's both an exhilarating and challenging time to be a student of architecture. This is due, at least in part, to changing models of practice resulting from globalization and rapidly expanding design and construction alternatives fueled by technology. We can build bigger, taller and faster, and our buildings can take on almost any form executed in almost any material.

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?” Corbu said, “Nothing has the right to exist that cannot answer the question ‘why’. “ Oftentimes today the answer seems to be, “Why not?” This is a reactive stance signaling either an irresponsible lack of reflection or an intentionally glib reply to a critical question.

A more exacting query might be, “What good do we want to put into the world, and how do we prepare ourselves to make that offering?” Of all the ways to practice, how do we choose our path?

While this studio does not presume to fully answer this question, it does offer an opportunity to explore the sometimes overlooked realm of architectural activism focused on humanitarian design.

COURSE CONTENT
Architectural activists engage a vast array of social justice issues and humanitarian design projects, but one commonality among them is that they work in marginalized, poor and vulnerable communities. In working with these communities they seek to identify the preexisting cultural, social, economic and physical systems in place not only to understand the most pressing needs but also to respectfully maintain and even enhance the community’s specific identity and richness.

We will study 1) the systemic nature of design necessary to turn good intentions into good long-term design solutions; 2) the potential of architecture to impact poverty, conflict and productivity and 3) the thorny issues and criticisms embedded in the practice of humanitarian design.

METHODOLOGY & PROJECT
Throughout the semester we will research and analyze activist architects and humanitarian design via case studies, documentaries, and readings from books, journals, and the popular press.

Individually or in pairs of two (pairs preferred), we will engage a series of design projects that build upon one another to result in a fully developed project at the end of the semester. All projects will respond to a real-world issue (of your choice) in a specific part of the world (of your choice – generally excluding North America and Western Europe). Building types might include but will not be limited to schools, clinics, orphanages, disaster relief housing, etc.

In addition to faculty and other architects, a range of professionals experienced in humanitarian design will serve both as resources and critics of your work.

NOTE – This course is unrelated to Habitat for Humanity or Freedom by Design. It does not involve design-build activities.