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"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) globalized practice models and 2) rapidly expanding construction and material alternatives fueled 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 just is.

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 course does not presume to fully answer this question, it does offer an opportunity to explore the challenging 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 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 what the most pressing needs are but also to maintain the community's identity and richness. What imbues their work with resonance and meaning is the ability to accurately identify the problem at hand and design (sometimes implement) a creative, respectful and effective solution.

Course Content   We will study 1) vernacular architecture; 2) both well-known and under-the-radar architects practicing in the field of humanitarian design; 3) contemporary humanitarian design projects; 4) the systemic nature of humanitarian design solutions; 5) the potential of architecture to impact poverty, conflict, health 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 explore readings, films and videos to analyze and critique specific humanitarian design projects and their architects; strategic partnerships with NGOs and governmental organizations; the potential pitfalls of humanitarian design; etc. Critical essays and presentations will be the modes of dissemination and reflection.

In the second half of the semester students will work in teams to research and engage a systemic design project of their choosing that responds to a real-world problem. The project can be located anywhere in the world except North America and Europe and can involve any underserved community. *(Note: This course is unrelated to Habitat for Humanity or Freedom by Design. It does not involve design-build activities.)*

Texts & Films   Throughout the semester the professor will assign research via specific films, scholarly essays and book chapters and articles in the architectural press. These will be scanned to Google Drive. No text is required, but students are encouraged to purchase the following foundational publications for their personal libraries: *Ground Rules for Humanitarian Design* and/or *Design Like You Give a Damn.*