Spring 2015
Urban Design Seminar  11.333j/4.244j  2-0-7 units
2015 Topic: Practicing Perspectives on Urban Design

Instructor: Brent D. Ryan  bdr@mit.edu
Teaching Assistant: Sunny Menozzi  sunnym@mit.edu
Stellar site: stellar.mit.edu/S/course/11/sp15/11.333/
Seminar meetings: Mondays, 12:30 to 2:30 PM, Room 10-485
Public lectures: Mondays at 12:30 PM or 6:00 PM, 10-485 or Long Lounge

Course introduction and purpose

This is a dramatic moment for urban design. Global urbanization, technological shifts, and social unrest have placed urban design at the forefront of thinking about the design of cities at multiple scales. Much of this innovation is occurring in the world of practice and built projects, both in the United States and around the world. With climate change, rapid city growth, and citizen participation on the increase, it is only natural that designers have responded with multiple urban design approaches and ideologies, from small-scale, incremental action to transnational infrastructure projects.

Amidst this multiplicity, three broad design responses can be perceived: first, a new appreciation of small-scale, incremental change, and the hint of a rapprochement between the long-divided fields of architecture and planning at the level of the street; the second, a shift toward landscape as a medium for design, and third, a scalar shift upward that places ‘urbanism’ as a central concern in architecture for the first time since the end of Modernism.

The Urban Design Seminar is intended to interrogate pressing issues in contemporary urban design through the examination of the work of innovative, leading practitioners in the professions of urban design, architecture, planning, and landscape. Projects and topics discussed will include the role of art and culture in building community, the design of global cities, concern for energy systems and sustainability, and design’s accommodation of global capital and investment.

The Spring 2015 Urban Design Seminar features six public lectures by national or international practitioners, all of whom are major figures in the nonprofit, public sector, and private sector realms of urban design. Each of these practitioners works at multiple scales and their presentations will focus on the content and strategies of current work in their practice. These public lectures also comprise the Spring 2015 City Design and Development Forum of the Department of Urban Studies and Planning (see attached schedule).
Course structure and requirements

Seminar meetings will be based on student group presentations and on in-class discussions and short lectures led by the instructor.

There are three primary course requirements. First is a set of readings associated with each lecturer, representing coverage of that urban designer’s work or literature related to that lecturer’s approach to urban design. Since the seminar weeks alternate with lecture weeks, readings are required only once every two weeks and all students are responsible for completing readings.

Second is an in-class ‘reading presentation’ on the work and urban design approach of one of the lecturers in the week following the lecture. Presentations should both assess the designer’s lecture in the previous week, as well as review a selection of the designer’s written works provided as part of the course reading list. This presentation will be done as part of a group of students (group size will depend on number of enrolled students) and should last 45 minutes to an hour. The presentation should be accompanied by a collectively (team) written 2,000 word (approx. 5 pages) write up of the presentation. Presentation teams (3 to 5 students) will be chosen by the instructor in the second week of class. Additional details about presentations are provided on page 6 of this syllabus.

Third is an in-class final presentation at the end of the semester on an approach to urban design on a specific site. Students will apply knowledge gained from presentations during the semester to develop this approach. These presentations will occur in teams of two (2) or three (3) students (depending on class enrollment) and should last approximately 10 minutes. The presentation should be accompanied by a 2,000-word (approx. 5 pages) individual writeup (one per student). Additional details on this final presentation will be circulated in March.

Participants are responsible for attending both seminar sessions and public lectures and participating in class discussions. The course schedule follows on a succeeding page. Please note that seminar sessions generally meet Mondays from 12:30 to 2:30 PM and that seminar weeks alternate with public lectures, which occur on Mondays from 12:30 to 2 or from 6 to 7:30 PM. Exceptions to this schedule are noted.

The Urban Design Seminar has a strict policy on class absences. The course load for the seminar is comparatively light, and given that the course meets only once per week, even one absence adversely affects students’ learning. Please do not miss any seminar sessions or lectures! Accordingly, absence from class or public lectures is not permitted except with prior written (emailed) permission of the instructor. Legitimate excusable absences comprise illness (with physician’s letter), religious holiday, or family emergency. However, employment interviews, course field trips, studio demands, etc. do not constitute excused absences and such absences will adversely affect your course grade (-3% of total grade subtracted per unexcused absence). Arriving to class more than 15 minutes after the scheduled time constitutes an unexcused absence. Only the instructor, not the TA, may provide excused absences from class.

Course grades will be based on reading presentations (20%); team writeup of reading presentations (15%); urban design project presentations (25%) and individual writeup (25%); and general class participation, attendance, and engagement (15%).
## Course Schedule and Calendar

Seminar sessions will meet on **Monday afternoons**, 12:30 to 2:30 PM in 10-485 unless otherwise specified below. Public lectures will occur in 10-485 or the Long Lounge on **Monday afternoons** from 12:30 to 2, or on **Monday evenings** at 6 PM, as specified below. Seminar weeks will generally alternate with lecture weeks. Please note an unusual course schedule in the beginning weeks of the semester due to other Departmental meetings and lecturers, which the Urban Design Seminar is accommodating.

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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time/Place</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Feb 9</td>
<td>12:30 - 2:30</td>
<td>Seminar 1</td>
<td>Introduction to course</td>
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<td>Mon</td>
<td>6 – 8 PM</td>
<td>Lecture 1</td>
<td>Rick Lowe: <em>Project Row Houses</em></td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>6 – 8 PM</td>
<td>Lecture 2</td>
<td>Christine Gaspar: <em>Pedagogical Urbanism</em></td>
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<td>Tues</td>
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<td>Note: Lecture on Tues b/c of Presidents Day</td>
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<td>Seminar 2</td>
<td>Discuss Lecture 1 (Lowe)</td>
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<td>Mar 4</td>
<td>9 – 11 AM</td>
<td>Seminar 3</td>
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<td>6 – 8 PM</td>
<td>Lecture 3</td>
<td>Phil Enquist, SOM: <em>Energy and Urbanism</em></td>
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<td>6 – 8 PM</td>
<td>Lecture 4</td>
<td>Scott Page, Interface Studio: <em>Urban Interfaces</em></td>
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<td>12:30 - 2:30</td>
<td>Seminar 5</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>12:30 – 2P</td>
<td>Lecture 5</td>
<td>Jennifer Bolstad, Local Office LA: <em>Design for Resilience</em></td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>12:30 – 2P</td>
<td>Lecture 6</td>
<td>Jeff Shumaker, NYC DCP: <em>Designing New York</em></td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>May 4</td>
<td>12:30 - 2:30</td>
<td>Seminar 6</td>
<td>Discuss Lectures 5,6 (Bolstad, Shumaker)</td>
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<td>12:30 - 2:30</td>
<td>Seminar 7</td>
<td>Urban Design Project Presentations</td>
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Seminar Readings

February 25 (Wednesday). Discussion: Rick Lowe, Project Row Houses.


March 4 (Wednesday). Discussion: Christine Gaspar, Pedagogical Urbanism.


March 16 (Monday). Discussion: Phil Enquist, Energy and Urbanism.


Other readings TBA.

April 6 (Monday). Discussion: Scott Page, Urban Interfaces.


Page, Scott, and Brian Phillips. “Urban Interfaces: Designing In-Between.” Unpublished MS.

May 4 (Monday). Discussion: Jennifer Bolstad, Design for Resilience, and Jeff Shumaker, Designing New York.

Bolstad/Meyer


**Shumaker**


New York City Department of City Planning. *One City, Built To Last: Transforming New York City’s Buildings*. (c 2014, N.D.) Download and read Executive Summary, (pp 5-17) and skim rest of volume.
Speaker Biographies

2/9 Rick Lowe, Public Artist, Project Row Houses

Rick Lowe is an artist whose unconventional approach to community revitalization has transformed a long-neglected neighborhood in Houston into a visionary public art project that continues to evolve, two decades since its inception. Originally trained as a painter, Lowe shifted the focus of his artistic practice in the early 1990s in order to address more directly the pressing social, economic, and cultural needs of his community. With a group of fellow artists, he organized the purchase and restoration of a block and a half of derelict properties—twenty-two shotgun houses from the 1930s—in Houston’s predominantly African American Third Ward and turned them into Project Row Houses (PRH), an unusual amalgam of arts venue and community support center.

2/17 Christine Gaspar, Executive Director, the Center for Urban Pedagogy

Christine Gaspar is Executive Director of the Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP), where she partners with designers and community organizations to create visually-based educational tools that help demystify complex issues from zoning law to sewage infrastructure. Christine has over fifteen years of experience in community design. Prior to joining CUP, she was Assistant Director of the Gulf Coast Community Design Studio in Biloxi, Mississippi, where she provided architectural design and city planning services to low-income communities recovering from Hurricane Katrina. She holds Masters in Architecture and in City Planning from MIT, and a Bachelor of Arts from Brown University. She teaches in the Design & Urban Ecologies program at Parsons The New School for Design. In 2012, she was identified as one of the “Public Interest Design 100.”

3/9 Phil Enquist, Partner in Charge of Urban Design and Planning, SOM

Philip Enquist is the leader of SOM’s Global City Design Practice, the world’s most highly awarded urban planning group. Enquist and his studios have improved the quality and efficiency of city living on five continents by creating location-unique strategic designs that integrate nature and urban density within a framework of future-focused public infrastructure. The scale of Enquist’s design perspective continues to expand from innovating sustainable urban forms that enhance city living with walkable, transit-enabled districts humanized by their natural amenities to rapidly changing urban clusters within regional ecosystems like North America’s Great Lakes basin and China’s Bohai Rim. He was honored with the 2010 Distinguished Alumnus Award from the Architectural Guild of the University of Southern California’s School of Architecture for his dedication to strengthening the physical, social, and intellectual infrastructure of cities. The year prior, the Chicago Tribune named him and his studio "Chicagoans of the Year in Architecture,” citing “the city-friendly designs of Phil Enquist.”
3/30 Scott Page, Founder and Principal, Interface Studio

Scott Page founded Interface Studio to test and develop a unique and innovative set of urban design ideas. Scott is an urban designer and planner with degrees from the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Design and the Georgia Institute of Technology Architecture Department including a year of study at the Ecole Des Beaux Arts in Paris. Scott has more than fifteen years of diverse experience ranging from city-wide master planning to site specific design and redevelopment strategies. He has been a leader in developing innovative neighborhood plans targeted toward enhancing communication, awareness and empowerment at the community level. Scott is a lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania School of Design and his research on urban design, emerging technologies and sustainability has been presented and published both in the United States and Europe. Interface Studio is a firm of 9 urban designers and planners based in Philadelphia. Founded in 2004, the firm is an intentionally small, collaborative office engaged in projects across the country including neighborhood and commercial corridor plans in Philadelphia, downtown plans in Macon (GA) and Grand Rapids (MI) and co-author of the economic growth chapter of the Detroit Future City plan.

4/13 Jennifer Bolstad and Walter Meyer, Founders, Local Office Landscape Architecture

Local Office Landscape & Urban Design was founded in 2006 by Harvard Graduate School of Design classmates Jennifer Bolstad and Walter Meyer. Operating between infrastructure, urbanism, and ecology, the firm’s primary focus is coastal landscapes. From residential gardens on the dunes to coastal parks that employ sustainable and resilient technologies at the scale of the city, Local Office seeks to ameliorate the impact of cities on the sea, while protecting cities from sea surges. The firm has garnered accolades from across the disciplines of architecture, landscape architecture, public policy, science and art. The firm’s recent built work includes the Parque del Litoral, in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico, the largest urban park ever constructed on the island. The 2.5 km long beachfront park served as the site of the 2010 Central American Games. In April 2013, The White House recognized the firm’s partners’ initiatives with the Hurricane Sandy “Champions of Change” award. In September 2010, they were recognized for their ‘leadership and innovation in the green economy’ by the Congressional Hispanic Caucus.

4/27 Jeff Shumaker, Chief Urban Designer for the NYC Department of City Planning

Jeffrey Shumaker is currently the Chief Urban Designer for the NYC Department of City Planning (DCP). Over the last seven years with DCP, Jeffrey has worked to ensure a high level of design quality on projects across the city and has helped shape plans for neighborhoods as diverse as Coney Island in Brooklyn, Hudson Yards in Manhattan and Hunters Point South in Queens. He played a key role in the recent adAPT NYC micro-unit pilot initiative, and previous collaborations with NYCHA. This work builds on Jeffrey’s prior experience and research focusing on innovative housing design, both public and private, across the country. He has also worked on DCP’s implementation of PlaNYC sustainability and resiliency efforts. He is currently focusing on a variety of projects including the implementation of the City’s recently released housing plan. He holds dual Master’s Degrees in Architecture, Planning and Urban Design from MIT.
On The Presentation of Readings (Guidelines for presenting in class)

Seminar meetings will be organized around student team presentations. Presentations will center on teams’ understanding and assessment of an urban designer’s course readings as well as their lecture. Each week’s readings are either authored by or are about the lecturer. For example, the team presenting Jeff Shumaker should present an assessment both of Shumaker’s lecture as well as the Shumaker-related readings in the course bibliography.

Presentations should be between 45 and 60 minutes long. Each presentation should contain around 40 to 60 slides. For each presentation, a student team should read and assess a speaker’s works in the above bibliography. Unless otherwise noted, read a work in its entirety. The length of ‘works’ varies; for those speakers with shorter works, teams will be required to read, and in some cases identify, more works. In the case of some speakers, student teams will be asked to identify additional works.

Each student team will comprise 2 or more students, depending upon class numbers. Students should submit their top three choices for a reading team by 5 PM on Friday, February 13 (students need choose only their top three urban designers, not their student partners!) and teams will be assigned by Monday, Feb 16 at 5 PM. Student preferences will be taken into account, but first choices cannot be guaranteed. Most of the works in the above bibliography have been posted to Stellar, and occasional longer works will be placed on reserve in Rotch library. Reserve status places restrictions on use (the book may not be removed from the library during the day), but it also removes the possibility of books being recalled.

Team presentations should not only summarize the readings/lecture, but provide a team’s opinion (assessment) of the designer’s urban design argument/work being presented. The team’s opinion and assessment should not be a brief add-on at the end of a long summary, but should comprise approximately half of the presentation. Make sure your presentation includes both an assessment of a designer’s work as well as a summary, otherwise points will be deducted! For instance, if Jeff Shumaker presents incentive zoning, do not just tell us what incentive zoning is (although demonstrating that you understand it is important), but tell us what you think of it. Some questions that you must answer in your presentation and write up:

- Does the designer have a coherent ‘argument’ or theory of urban design, or are they just summarizing projects?
- Does this ‘theory’ address critical issues in urban design as you perceive it, i.e. sustainability, technology, public participation, etc? (You must articulate your own position on urban design in order to answer this. Spend some time answering this question.)
- If you agree with the designer’s ‘theory’, how and where do you think this theory should apply to the contemporary city?
- What are some shortfalls or improvements that you can imagine to this theory?

Good luck! I will have office hours available for teams that wish to discuss their presentations beforehand.