ENGAGING COMMUNITY: MODELS AND METHODS FOR DESIGNERS AND PLANNERS

Time: Spring 2020, Thursday 2:00 pm – 5:00 pm,
Location: Room 9-217
Instructor: Ceasar McDowell, Ceasar@mit.edu
Office Hours: Thursday 10:00 am – 11:30 am (Bookit)
Room 9-422
Class Website: Stellar

Throughout the world, cities contain the most demographically complex set of people that have ever lived together. In democratic societies, this demographic complexity presents fundamental design challenges for planners and other professions that have a responsibility to engage the public.

This course proposes that most cities have neither the infrastructure nor the processes in place to support the demographically complex public in fulfilling its role in democracy. Through this course, participants will learn a set of design principles for creating public engagement practices necessary for building inclusive civic infrastructure in cities. Participants will also have the opportunity to review and practice strategies, techniques, and methods for engaging communities in demographically complex settings.

Students participating in this class will walk away with the following:
- Working knowledge of the theory and application of the Civic Design Framework
- Ability to use the CD Framework to assess public engagement design
- Ability to use the CD Framework to design public engagement
- Ability to construct learning experience to teach CD Framework

CLASS SECTIONS:

Section 1 – Public Engagement and Democracy [Feb 6 – Feb 27]: We begin with a discussion of democracy and its relationship to community/public engagement, as well as the challenge to public engagement in demographically complex settings. What do some of these demographically complex communities and places look like, and how does the complexity impact true collaboration and how we act as planners?
Next, we explore six critical public conversations, and the corresponding challenges, that the public needs to play in a democratic society. Throughout the semester, we will continue to discuss these issues and related questions like: What does it mean to be a professional planner/designer who aspires to engage a community and be a democratic leader? How can one offer expert knowledge and also honor the expertise of the general public? What values underlie the various approaches to community engagement? How do we measure the success of a community engagement effort? A comparison of public engagement efforts in several cities will be used to explore this question.

The second half of this session explores eight design principles for developing inclusive community engagement processes. Next, we will conduct one-on-one conversations to assess the level of competency others have around the civic design principles. The goal of each of these conversations is to test the six conversation types and eight design principles against the demands of specific engagement opportunities. Also, the process will build participants' fluency with the design principles. The session ends with a report out and a discussion of the findings.

Section 2 – Learning Design [March 5 – March 19]: In this section, the class will be introduced to the Gather platform developed by the Goldin Institute. We will use the Gather pedagogical framework to develop teaching exercises for each of the design principles. The exercises will be informed by the one-on-one conversations, past class projects, and the work of students at Florida Gulf Coast University.

Spring Break – [March 23 – March 27]:

Section 3 – Engagement Design [April 2 – April 30]: After spring break the class will focus on designing a public engagement process for one or more clients. Each design will consider the following questions:

1. Which of the six roles introduced during the first part of the class to include;
2. Which three design principles should be prioritized to engage the broadest spectrum of the public, and:
3. What activities and processes to use in the engagement process?

The finished products will include a design brief for the client, a blog post on the design brief, and a personal reflection on the experience of creating the design brief. The class session will include lectures and guest speakers as well as time to work on your design brief. The last class of this section consists of the clients and class members, participating in an open review of the design briefs.
Section 4 – Clarify [April 30]: Based on readings, guests, lectures, and client work, this session is organized to address any additional skills, knowledge, or examples class members feel they need to complete their respective contributions to the design workbook.

Last class – [May 7]: The final class dedicated to reflection on the entire.

PRODUCTS & ASSIGNMENTS

Civic Design Skill Assessment [Individual Effort]– Using the Civic Design Framework Grid, conduct a one-on-one interview with a person of your choice (we will develop criteria in the class). This assessment will ask people to rate their knowledge/skill for each of the 48 design challenges represented in the framework. Instructions for the exercise will be provided in class. [20%]

Learning Design [Team Effort]– Using the Gather pedagogy work in teams of 2-3 to craft a learning journey for two design principles (to be assigned in class). These learning journeys will be a combination of readings, online exercises, on the ground activities, and discussion guides. The product is a detailed lesson plan for teaching the design principles [30%]

Design Briefs [Team Effort]– The brief is a document that assists a specific client in the design of a public engagement effort. The brief begins with an analysis to determine which of the six conversation types is best suited for the engagement effort, given the goals of the client and the constraints of the engagement opportunity. Next, the brief suggests which the design principles to focus on, providing a list of possibilities and limitations in deploying the design principle in the client's community. The brief includes exercises for learning about the different principles (devised from the Learning Design products. The team will create a blog post on the client and the design brief. [30%]

Design Workbook [Team Effort]– Think of the workbook as a field guide for people responsible for designing public engagement for today's complex public. The guide consists of the final design guides for the six conversation types the eight design principles. Also included are the completed client design briefs and how-to-use instructions. The workbook is produced as an online document. [10%]

Other Requirements include weekly readings and looking assignments, class participation, leading a class discussion, and participation in all reflection activities [See note at the end of Syllabus]. [15%]
Required readings are on reserve at Rotch Library and are available on Stellar for those registered in the class. Some are accessible directly from the links provided in the reading list below.
Weekly Topics

- February 6  Introduction
- February 13 Demographic Complexity and Public Conversation
- February 20 Civic Design Framework
- February 27 Civic Design Skills Assessment
- March 5  Learning Design and Intro to Gather
- March 12 Learning Design Session 2
- March 19 Learning Design Presentations
- March 26 Spring Break
- April 2 Engagement Design Workshop – Client Meetings
- April 9 Engagement Design Workshop – Design Session
- April 16 Engagement Design Workshop – Design Session
- April 23 Engagement Design Workshop – Open Presentation
- April 30 Open Topic Based on Class Request
- May 7  Closing Reflection

Academic Integrity and Support

In this course, I will hold you to the high standard of academic integrity expected of all students at the Institute. I do this for two reasons. First, it is essential to the learning process that you are the one doing the work. I have structured the assignments in this course to enable you to gain a mastery of the course material. Failing to do the work yourself will result in a lesser understanding of the content, and therefore a less meaningful education for you. Second, it is important that there be a level playing field for all students in this course and at the Institute so that the rigor and integrity of the Institute’s educational program is maintained.

Violating the Academic Integrity policy in any way (e.g., plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, cheating, etc.) will result in official Institute sanction. Possible sanctions include receiving a failing grade on the assignment or exam, being assigned a failing grade in the course, having a formal notation of disciplinary action placed on your MIT record, suspension from the Institute, and expulsion from the Institute for very serious cases.

Please review the Academic Integrity policy and related resources (e.g., working under pressure; how to paraphrase, summarize, and quote; etc.) and contact me if you have any questions about appropriate citation methods, the degree of collaboration that is permitted, or anything else related to the Academic Integrity of this course.

Special Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you need disability-related accommodations, I encourage you to meet with me early in the semester. If you have not yet been approved for accommodations, please contact Student Disability Services at sds-all@mit.edu.

I look forward to working with you to assist you with your approved accommodations.
**Student Mental Health**

As a student, you may experience a range of challenges that can interfere with learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, substance use, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may impact your ability to attend class, concentrate, complete work, take an exam, or participate in daily activities.

Undergraduates: Please discuss this with Student Support Services (S³). You may consult with Student Support Services in 5-104 or at 617-253-4861.

Graduate Students: Please reach out to the deans for personal support in the Office of Graduate Education.

For urgent or after-hours concerns, please contact MIT Police.

**Diversity**

MIT values an inclusive environment. I hope to foster a sense of community in this classroom and consider this classroom to be a place where you will be treated with respect. I welcome individuals of all backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, national origins, gender identities, sexual orientations, religious and political affiliations – and other visible and nonvisible differences. All members of this class are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment for every other member of the class. If this standard is not being upheld, please feel free to speak with me.