SYLLABUS

ARCH 4363

Urban Design Theory/Arch Theory

How do settlement patterns evolve? How do they affect the specific development of an urban area? How should they affect the development of the city and its constituent parts—its blocks, streets, public open spaces and landmarks? We will address current architecture theories that address these questions.

Urban Design Theory:

What intellectual and theoretical framework do we apply to the work that we do as urban designers? We will explore the various methods of conceptualizing urban design as we work on an urban design problem in Puebla, Mexico. It is impossible, and not useful, to separate theory from practice; so, we will attempt to answer theoretical questions concerning the dimensions of urban design as we develop an urban design for a small quarter of Puebla. We will also examine contemporary architecture theory as it relates to the design and execution of urban interventions.
The Course Objectives:

Urban Design is distinguished by its sensitivity to policy—the types of policy that determine the evolution of the urban environment. How do we write policy and how do we determine its concomitants? For each phase of the studio we will address certain policy objectives and perform a short exercise to define policy limits and intentions. From each exercise it is anticipated that you will learn how to use policy development and some basic urban design skills to enhance your urban design thinking. As you work on each phase of the design for Puebla you will have an opportunity to employ these methods. You will also be required to critically evaluate your design ideas using contemporary theory.

Methodology:

1. The methods used for the inventory of the quartier will, to a limited extent, determine the nature of the urban design that you end up with. Consider the descriptions of urban design by Kevin Lynch, Jane Jacobs and Christopher Alexander and apply their logic to your team’s analysis. Treat each item on their lists carefully. What insights do you get from looking at the existing urban area in this manner (see lecture notes on chapter 1)? When you have completed the urban design—after four weeks—use their lists again to critique your proposal. Consider the items of sustainability see table 3.2—smart growth—and list them as bullet points. Describe each item briefly as it relates to our project; tell me if you think that the item is economic, political, or social (or some combination of the three—see the diagram from the lecture); and, list what rules you would write to make the interventions that we plan to design more sustainable. Write a position statement on the role of sustainability in the design of contemporary urban interventions.

2. Before we set priorities and weigh options we must analyze the inventory that we have constructed. What are the land use patterns, the cadastral patterns, the plot patterns and the building patterns that make up the study area? How can you present each so that the existing pattern is clear and expressive? Once you have an elegant expression of each manipulate the pattern to reinforce its latent logic. The four “proposals” do not have to agree. Draw a figure ground diagram of the public open space with the attendant “urban cake” drawing of the public open space. Write three “policies” that relate in some way to your five sets of diagrams. A policy has the following elements: a title, a diagram, a description of desired behavior and metrics. Refer to the chapter on the morphological dimensions of urban design. The Policy statements should state a specific argument and will be evaluated for writing acumen.
3. The Urban Design Framework Plan is a **representation** of the collection of interventions that we propose. Pick two proposals from the class and analyze them for their perceptual dimensions: cognitive, affective, interpretive, evaluative and eidetic. Do not pick your own. Focus on potential and use a tabular matrix—what will you choose to be the other set of parameters? Write a position paper on each proposal. Use the five paragraph method. Write it as if you were explaining the proposal to someone who did not have special knowledge of architecture and urban design.

4. Understanding that Urban Design proposals will carry multiple **intensions** is fundamental to developing intentional depth in your project. Each one of Attoe’s intensions—functionalist, humanist, systematic, and formalist—can be used to build meaning and value into your design. Pick one point of view and apply it to your proposal. Describe your position using the five paragraph argument. As the other written exercises you will be evaluated on writing and theoretical acumen.

All writing exercises may be rewritten for a higher grade.

**Teaching Objectives:**

Ability to conduct an inventory of an existing urban area

Ability to perform abstract urban analyses of inventory issues and write policies

Ability to analyze the perceptual dimensions of any urban design proposal

Ability to develop form alternatives and intentional depth

Ability to write a position statement

**Readings:**

Public Places Urban Spaces: the Dimensions of Urban Design; Carmona et al.

Selected Readings from Attoe, Trancik, Gosling, Boyer, Cullen and Bacon

**Evaluations:**

Each exercise is worth 25 points. All are due the Tuesday after the design submission to which they relate. They will be graded and they may be redone to increase the grade. Attendance is mandatory. Four unexcused absences will result in automatic failure—a grade of “D” will be submitted for the semester and an additional theory course will be required for graduation.