

Architecture has the capacity to extend both the physical and social faculties of those who experience it, and as such, it can also be understood as a mechanism to build the culture of a place. The practice of architecture within cultural programs is the project of a building as well as of the institution that it defines. Here, architecture plays a fundamental role: it is the device to expand our collective culture as well as the understanding of the place in which we work and learn.

The design of learning environments is of critical importance. Once the locus of the highest social values and the best architectural intentions, the architecture of schools in the United States has existed for the last fifty years as a building type in which millions of students have spent fifteen years of their lives having their expectations lowered as to what the built environment can offer and associating learning with dismal windowless rooms and hardened buildings. While students should consider issues of affordability, sustainability, flexibility, security, and durability, the focus of this program is to design a place that optimizes the school experience and where the exhilaration of learning is paramount. Designs should instill a sense of pride in the institution, capture the spirit of learning and youthfulness, and encourage students to individuate as well as cooperate in their own education.

Austin Montessori School

This project is for the design of a new facility for Austin Montessori School (AMS). The oldest and largest Austin area school recognized by Association Montessori International (AMI), AMS is internationally recognized as a leader in authentic Montessori education. The Montessori environment contains specially designed, manipulative *materials for development* that invite children to engage in learning activities of their own individual choice, cultivating concentration, motivation, self-discipline, and a love of learning. The goal of AMS "is to guide the intellectual and character development of each child along a path towards his [/her] full and unknown potential" and "to guide each child along a path of development and education that is natural to him [/her]." It combines an authentic Montessori curriculum with a rich academic and social environment and is "dedicated to Montessori's mission of world peace through human development."

Founded in 1967, AMS currently accommodates 350 students (ranging in age from 18 months through 15 years) in 14 buildings on 3 campuses. Their main campus at the intersection of Sunset Trail and Jones Road has grown in size since 1967, accumulating adjacent properties over the years, and is the site for our project. The new facility is conceived as the central gathering place for the school, and includes a community gathering hall / gymnasium / auditorium, catering kitchen, administrative offices as well as the requisite restroom, service and circulation spaces to support these spaces. The project includes responsibility for the larger master planning of the campus as well as the interior design of the individual rooms. Montessori education in general and AMS in particular proposes a special educational model for its students, and how architecture embraces and enhances to this model will be a major focus of this studio.

The prospect of a new facility for AMS is of paramount importance to them. It is my hope that this project will be instrumental in assisting the school in developing goals and ideas for such a project. While we will be working with the school leadership and hope to have some consequence on their future plans, it should be noted that the primary focus of the class is the education of our respective students and input from AMS should be understood in this context. While students should consider issues of affordability, sustainability, flexibility, security, and durability, the focus of this project is to design a place where public and private social occasions are paramount, and where the physical environment is a vital component of the Montessori educational model. Designs should capture the ambition intrinsic to the institution, and project a new and exciting future for the school.

The focus of this particular studio is the relationship between spatial perception and built surface. As a consequence please note that the most successful projects in this studio tend to be those that focus on the subject matter at hand. In this sense students are encouraged to pay slightly less attention to the overarching formal gesture, and slightly more attention to the way in which the space is made and the character of that space is translated into detail.

Studio

Hours: MWF 1-6:00 PM (contact hours are 12 hours within the 15 hour allotment). These 12 hours will be determined with your input in conjunction with the needs of the studio. You should be sure to be available during all of the above noted class hours.

Location: GOL ???

Contact information

Kevin Alter office: BAT 104
 email: alter@utexas.edu
 mobile: (512)797-6903

Course Grading

Establishing grades for projects of a creative nature is a more complex matter than grading in other academic areas. While each project contains certain quantifiable elements by which it may be evaluated, a significant portion of each grade is derived from a broader, more subjective set of issues. Student work will be evaluated according to its rigor and evolution over the semester.

Grading for Vertical Studios is broken into four components:

- 40% grasp: the ideas and understanding of the project at hand, combined with an appropriate process of inquiry
- 40% resolution: the demonstration of competence, completeness, and finesse through representation
- 20% engagement: the active participation in studio activities, leadership, collaboration, group discussions and reviews

Grades are subject to deductions for absences, late work, and late arrivals at the discretion of the instructor. With respect to the assignments in this course that require a constructed response, the criteria for establishing a grade for each project are as follows:

A/A- Outstanding work

Work is complete at all levels -- i.e. concept, process, product -- and surpasses the expectations for Advanced Design work with respect to development, inventiveness, impact, appropriateness and graphic ability.

B+/B/B- Above Average Work

Work is complete at all levels. Each level is done thoroughly, is well researched and is diligently pursued. Student has pursued ideas and suggestions presented in class and put in effort to resolve the required projects. Their project is complete on all levels and demonstrates potential for excellence. *This is the expected performance for this class*

C+/C Average work

The project meets the minimum requirements. Suggestions made in class were not pursued with dedication and rigor. Not all levels of the project are developed fully, and it is incomplete in one or more areas. For example, a brilliant concept and a casual product, or a weak idea, an indifferent development and a good end result will get a grade of C.

C-/D+/D/D- Poor work

Not all levels are present, some of the requested components of the project are missing. Either care and attention are missing or basic skills in logic and development are not evident. Project is incomplete. Basic grasp of skill is lacking, visual clarity or logic of presentation are not level-appropriate.

F Unacceptable work

Project is unresolved. Minimum objectives are not met. Performance is not acceptable. Note that this grade will be assigned when a student has missed an extended amount of class-time (more than three classes) without notifying the instructor or the School of Architecture.

X Excused incomplete

Can be given only for legitimate reasons of illness or family emergency. Simply not completing the work on time is not an adequate cause for assigning this symbol. It may only be used after consultation with the instructor or the Associate Dean, and with an agreement as to a new completion date. Studio work has to be completed before the second week of the next design semester in which a student wishes to enroll, according to school policy.

Studio Culture

A general spirit of collaboration amongst all members of the studio is expected. Our school has developed a Studio Culture Policy that can be found at: <http://soa.utexas.edu/architecture/culture>.

Attendance

Punctual and regular attendance is essential, and students are expected to work on projects *in the studio*. Students with three unexcused absences during the term, or two *consecutive* unexcused absences, may result in administrative failure or deductions to final grades.

Disabilities

Please notify your instructor of any adaptation you may require to accommodate a specific physical need. Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259. Specialized services are also found via the web at <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/ssd/>.

Security, Safety and The Studio

The studio is an exceptional learning environment. Since it is a place for all, it necessitates the careful attention to the needs of everyone in it. Please see your instructor if there are any problems (music, visual pollution) that you are unable to resolve on your own. All spraying of fixative, spray paint or any other substance should be done in the shop. Security is a necessary component for a studio that is accessible to you and your colleagues 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Please be mindful not to admit any uninvited visitors and keep all exterior doors locked after hours.

Recommendations

I am happy to write recommendations for students who have received a grade of B+ or higher, and with at least two weeks advance notice.