

Course Syllabus

LARC 503A: Community Design Studio - Urban Agriculture | Spring 2016

Professor: Eric Higbee, higbee@u.washington.edu

Office Hours : M+W, 12:30-1:30, Nancy's office or by appointment

Overview

Today there is a burgeoning movement of food producers, consumers and policy-makers exploring ways to increase access to fresh and local produce within our cities. Cities are blossoming with community gardens, farmers markets and local organic food networks. Seattle, with a robust P-Patch community garden program and progressive food policy, is a leader in this movement.

Places of urban agriculture have numerous benefits: they cultivate healthier lifestyles, strengthen communities, teach stewardship, and provide economic opportunities. As landscape architects we have an important and unique role to play in the developing urban agricultural movement. We can apply our landscape architecture skills to help design dynamic urban agriculture spaces that contain multiple functions and ecological benefits, build community through the design and build process, and reveal and educate communities about natural processes and cultural histories. Urban agriculture is rich with the potential to create successful urban public spaces.

This course will focus on four key themes contained within urban agricultural design:

Social Justice: Many places of urban agriculture seek to correct injustices in our economic, political and food systems that leave many populations without access to fresh and healthy food (food insecure). In addition, as landscape architects, it is argued that we have a social responsibility to design spaces for those most in need. How can the design of urban agricultural spaces address these social injustices and provide access for those in need?

Community Process: Urban farms and community gardens are inherently social places, and the process of their design and construction is almost as important as the design itself. Through participatory processes landscape architects can build communities and cultivate stewardship and ownership. What techniques and approaches can we take as designers to support communities in their effort to create socially vibrant urban agricultural spaces?

Urban Integration: Our increasingly densifying cities means that urban agricultural spaces are typically reclaiming remnant parcels, rooftops, or sharing adjacent or overlapping functions with other open spaces. How can we best apply our skills in designing complex multifunctional urban spaces to urban agricultural sites?

Culture and Meaning: Many urban gardeners and farmers come from diverse immigrant communities, and their cultivated spaces often express their cultural backgrounds. In addition, many urban gardeners find meaning by re-creating their experiences of rural agricultural

landscapes within the city. How can the design of urban agricultural spaces express this cultural milieu and accentuate the meaningful associations of agriculture?

Learning Objectives

- Develop an understanding of the urban agriculture movement and the role of landscape architects in this movement
- Develop your understanding and professional skills in community engagement process
- Explore landscape design strategies that grapple with the complexity of urban landscapes while incorporating urban agricultural uses
- Continue to develop skills in representation and communication.

Project Client and Overview

Our primary studio project will be the Cascade P-Patch and the area around the adjacent Cascade People's Center, located in the Cascade Neighborhood of Seattle. Our client will be the community of gardeners at the P-Patch, future gardeners currently on the garden's waitlist, the Cascade People's Center (operated by the YMCA), and other representatives from the surrounding community. We will be engaging the client through a student-led community meeting on Sat 4/16 and an open-house presentation on Sat 6/4. Our site and context analysis, along with our summaries of the community's input, will be prepared for the client's use in future project planting. We will be assembling all our work, including your final designs, into a booklet.

Design Studies

Concurrent with your research and design work around the Cascade P-Patch, you will be undertaking a series of quick design studies exploring different aspects of urban agricultural design. These are meant to keep your design thinking loose and nimble while we plod through the early stages of site analysis and meeting preparation. They will also hopefully feed into your final studio design.

Reading and Reflections

Over the course of the quarter there will be a series of required readings on different topics grouped loosely around the themes listed above. These readings are intended to give you a basic overview of key concepts related to the design of urban agricultural spaces, and give your design thinking some intellectual foundation. Some of these readings you will be applied to your design studies, and for others you will be required to write a short response addressing provided questions.

Assignments, Performance Evaluation and Learning Expectations

Grades are not given for advanced MLA studios, so you will be evaluated on the effort and attention that you apply to this studio and its assignments. Each of the following assignments will be evaluated for satisfactory performance.

- Readings and Reflections
- Design Explorations
- Assignment 1: Context and Site Analysis
- Assignment 2: Community Meeting Preparation and Performance

- Assignment 3: Community Feedback Visualization
- Assignment 4: Conceptual and Schematic Alternative Design
- Assignment 5: Final Site Design and Renderings

Satisfactory performance means that you have given adequate effort and attention to each of the assignments. What is most important is that you grapple and engage with the challenges presented to you and become a better landscape architect in the process.

At the end of the quarter, I will arrange times to meet with each student individually to discuss their studio experience. Mid-quarter meetings may also be arranged.

Studio Time and Expectations

Studio will meet every Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoon of the quarter, except for one holiday and two Fridays when the instructor will be away. Occasionally we'll go beyond these times for special events and work times. Fridays are generally reserved for field trips or work. Each participant is expected to be in class during the scheduled class time, and to participate as a full member in your teamwork. Should a circumstance arise that prohibits you from attending class, it is your responsibility to email the instructor in advance or immediately afterwards, and arrange to make-up what you have missed.

Electronic Submittal of Documents

Digital and print copies of your final work will need to be submitted at the end of the quarter per department policy.

Class email list and share space

Communications to the class will go through a class email list. Your UW email address has been automatically added. If you use a different email for your UW correspondence, please let me know.

In order to email the class, send messages to: larch503a_sp16@uw.edu

I will be setting up a GDrive folder that will contain all of the course materials, and folders to submit your assignments. If you are using an email besides your UW email address, please let me know so I can share the GDrive folder with you.

Books and Resources:

There is no required textbook for this class. The following books below are not required, but may be helpful in your intellectual and design explorations.

Urban Agricultural Design and Planning

Designing for Urban Agriculture by April Phillips.

Green Communities Growing Communities - Jeffrey Hou, Julie Johnson & Laura Lawson

Carrot City - Creating Places for Urban Agriculture

Continuous Productive Urban Landscapes - Andre Viljoen

Food and the City - Jennifer Cockrall-King
Building Commons and Community - Karl Linn
To Dwell is to Garden - Sam Bass Warner, Jr.

Participatory Design Process and Community Building

Neighbor Power by Jim Deirs
Participatory Workshops by Robert Chambers
Multiple Victories by Milenko Matanovic, Pomegranate Center
Placemaking Guidebook - City Repair
Community Participation Methods in Design and Planning by Henry Sanoff
Insurgent Public Space: Guerrilla Urbanism, and the Remaking of Contemporary Cities ed.
Jeffrey Hou

There are numerous other books, magazines, and websites that may be useful in your urban agricultural design explorations.

One last word:

"Nobody tells this to people who are beginners, I wish someone told me. All of us who do creative work, we get into it because we have good taste. But there is this gap. For the first couple years you make stuff, it's just not that good. It's trying to be good, it has potential, but it's not. But your taste, the thing that got you into the game, is still killer. And your taste is why your work disappoints you. A lot of people never get past this phase, they quit.

Most people I know who do interesting, creative work went through years of this. We know our work doesn't have this special thing that we want it to have. We all go through this. And if you are just starting out or you are still in this phase, you gotta know its normal and the most important thing you can do is do a lot of work. Put yourself on a deadline so that every week you will finish one story. It is only by going through a volume of work that you will close that gap, and your work will be as good as your ambitions. And I took longer to figure out how to do this than anyone I've ever met. It's gonna take awhile. It's normal to take awhile. You've just gotta fight your way through."

— Ira Glass