Designing the “Not So Big” City Hall
Architecture 484/584  
Donald Corner  
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The City of Eugene has recently commissioned two planning studies to investigate alternatives for the current city hall. One study examined a re-use of the current structure. The second proposed a much smaller, entirely new structure that would house the council chambers and a relatively small amount of office space for the mayor, council members, the city manager and lead staff. The majority of city services will be relocated to other buildings in the downtown core. A model for this second approach is provided by the City of Seattle.

The “build new” option proposes a signature building that will reinforce community interest in a vital, pedestrian oriented city center, and visibly demonstrate our shared commitment to sustainable design. At the same time, the focused program offers an opportunity to review the rich history of the city hall as a building type and ask fundamental questions about the role of such iconic buildings in the modern city.

This studio will focus on the design of the building itself. It will not attempt to solve all of the intractable urban design challenges that the downtown presents. Students will be encouraged to select one of a site options developed in the “Build New Design Study” to be completed by Rowell Brokaw Architects in December 2011.

The building program totals approximately 25,000 square feet. The ceremonial rooms must be a source of pride and inspiration. The bank of offices must project accessibility, hospitality and flexibility. The building as a whole must perform at a high level in terms of its carbon footprint.

This studio will emphasize design development and technical integration. There will be two available tracks: an emphasis on structure and space for those who are concurrently enrolled in ARCH 4/562, and an emphasis on the building enclosure and finish systems for those who have recently completed ARCH 4/571. The investigation of alternative structural systems and materials will be encouraged. For example, the UBC-CIRS (Vancouver) pictured above is a five story building with major public spaces framed with glue-laminated timber. The building envelope, particularly at the office wing, must support best practices for daylight and space conditioning. The ceremonial rooms offer the opportunity to explore light and space in the context of an appropriately high level of finish.

Students interested in this studio are encouraged to visit case study buildings as the opportunity of travel during the holidays may permit: public buildings of distinction, city halls of comparable scale and program, buildings with innovative systems of structure and construction.