Description

How can we translate ecological values and abstract concepts of the social good into pragmatic design decisions? Living lightly on the land requires working together, looking at how an individual can be part of sustainable systems at the scale of the unit, block, neighborhood and city.

This class will design an affordable, ecological residential community for farmworkers. Students will work in pairs or groups to better understand the rewards and challenges of being in community. We will look at adapting communal living models such as eco-villages, Scandinavian cohousing and communes to affordable farmworker housing. We will visit local communities to understand how an environment with shared resources and activities can create opportunities for casual camaraderie and deep friendship.

Students may choose from sites being developed by the Farmworker Housing Development Corporation (fhdc.org) in Woodburn or Medford, OR identify a third site.

Process

We will begin by focusing on community in the client culture. This will be followed by site visit, analysis and a conceptual site response. (Medford can be visited as part of the Option II trip to the San Francisco) Students will consider the project at different scales to understand how urban-level decisions affect the immediate spatial experience. After reflecting on the best approach to the site, students can regroup and each person will take part of a site strategy to develop with modular construction.

Students will develop a modular building prototype and then test how the system can create unit configurations to accommodate a wide range of clients, such as unrelated adults and single parent families, in comfortable yet compact quarters. Each student will focus on one sustainable technology, integrating case study ideas into the design. After a careful study of the unit and cluster, students will return to the whole, looking at how shared spaces can support different circles of community.

Media

Students will use techniques strategically, starting with sketching and sketch modeling and moving towards digital refinement. Assignments will encourage quick experimentation and hand-computer hybrids. Students will keep blogs to communicate with clients and reflect on progress towards learning goals.

Nancy Cheng (B.A. Yale, M.Arch. Harvard, RA, LEED AP) cultivates both real and virtual communities. She brings clients into her studios to bring depth to the problem and give students client contact. From classes on cohousing, ecovillages and the White Stag Block, she has amassed strong eco-design resources and community connections. Nancy has taught design and digital methods for 16 years in Hong Kong and Oregon after 8 years in Boston firms. She researches digital media and design process.

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