PORTLAND ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL

Project Description

The whir of Western culture seems to have accelerated the lives of 2011 high school students to an almost blinding speed. As schools everywhere grapple with education in a digital age they are rediscovering the value of smaller educational settings. In Oregon’s only metropolitan area the explosive growth of the suburbs and a school funding crisis has left inner Portland with an immediate and pressing need for modern learning environments. Portland Public Schools recently announced a 550 million dollar school bond measure and disclosed the dire condition of the district’s schools. The Portland Alternative High School is envisioned as a potential prototype for the development of smaller specialized High Schools. This project proposes state of the art learning environments that cater to non-traditional students and create safe and encompassing student communities.

The potential disconnect between community values and the needs of a non-traditional student community means a visionary concept could establish a new typology. The project offers the opportunity to challenge long held assumptions regarding the value of education, and the disenfranchised. What is the role of schools and learning in a democratic, mobile society and how is it made available to all? As a public building and potential community amenity the project will address typologies and precedents, the nature of public spaces and contextual issues.

Your task is urgent and specific: Propose, in architectural form, an urban alternative to the suburban mega high schools surrounding the city. How to engage the community and students to develop a project representing wealth creation and institutional framework building for a disenfranchised group?

The character of the proposals will be expected to critically explore aspects of contemporary urban form utilizing a visionary social and educational idea. Although the project has many social and cultural aspects the studio will be architectural in nature and a strong emphasis will be placed on tectonic explorations and spatial and site relationships.

Project and Site

- The project will be a new freestanding building between 25,000 and 35,000 SF
- The site will be located on an urban edge on property owned by the Portland Public School District.

Skeletal Program

- ENTRY / RECEPTION – (Located with administration suite)
- ADMINISTRATION SUITE - (Principal’s office, secretary, work room, conference room, teacher lounge)
- CLASSROOMS – (10-12 @ 900 SF ea)
- SCIENCE CLASSROOM(S) – (1-2 @ 1000 SF)
- RESOURCE ROOM – (1000 SF)
- LIBRARY – (75 student seating capacity)
- COMMONS / CAFETERIA – (200 student capacity) (Direct access to small kitchen and service area, for deliveries, trash and recycling)
- OUTDOOR AREA(s) – (Gathering and socializing areas)
- MECHANICAL ROOM
Program Notes:

- The program offered is meant as a guide only; room sizes and arrangements may be added or subtracted according to your overall idea. They may not be eliminated merely to ease the planning of your building and there are some aspects of the program that are essential to the nature of the project, i.e. classrooms, commons, library. Creative thinking is encouraged.
- The Alternative High School program offers a couple absolute spatial adjacencies but the final relationship between the parts of the program and the site are to be developed from your ideas and philosophy about the site and program.
- Any parking needs generated by the new building will be addressed by existing Portland parking.
- Sustainable design practices are expected: (natural light and ventilation, on site energy production, landscape integration)

Study Objectives:

Project

- To explore the potential of built form to effect learning and identity
- To understand iconographic typologies and explore new school typologies
- To integrate sustainable lighting and ventilation in the building and understand the effect on learning.
- To strive for an architecture which integrates form and the expressive potential of the tectonic

Process

- To use physical models as design media for primary exploration
- To explore and understand our individual architectural design process

Teaching methods:

This course is organized as an interactive studio, requiring both student and critic participation in readings, discussions, architectural analyses, reviews of student design work, and other group activities. Attendance at studio sessions is required and working in the studio during non-studio time is strongly encouraged. Design education is a non-linear process that benefits from peer input and collective energy. Studio critics will provide ample criticism and guide the class as a whole but will not be didactic in directing proposals toward one solution. Self-motivation and commitment is expected.

Precedents:

Comer Center and School, South Chicago
Sidwell Friends, Washington DC
The Gateway School, New York City
The Calhoun School, NYC
Hazelwood School for the Multiple Sensory Impaired, Glasgow, United Kingdom
The Energy Lab at Hawaii Prep Academy
Camino Nuevo High School, Los Angeles, CA
Falmouth School Design & Technology Block, Cornwall, United Kingdom
Bridge School, Xiashi, Fujian Province, China
Bab Tebbaneh School for Working Children and for Women, Tripoli, Lebanon
St Marylebone School Performing Arts Faculty, London, England
Oundle School Science Technology Block, Oundle, England