Course Objectives. How do we know if our designs meet the needs of those who use the spaces we create? This question is especially important considering that architecture, interior architecture, and landscape architecture as professions are “practices” where lessons learned from previous projects should inform future proposals. In this seminar, we will explore two methods for researching the fit between environments and socio-cultural behavior. The first is an environmental ethnography, which is a method grounded in anthropological theory but tailored to the needs of designers interested in learning how to read cultures through place and place through cultures. This type of method gives designers a more thorough understanding of how places are used. The second method is the Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE), which designers use to evaluate the performance of a building after occupancy. In this seminar, we will study POEs as a means to analyze socio-spatial relationships. The objectives of this seminar are for students to develop an awareness of these methods, an understanding of how they are applied, and an ability to use these methods in the analysis of urban form.

Course Assignments. The course will have two major assignments. First, students will individually prepare an environmental ethnography of a setting of their choice. This may be a park, plaza, or a building. Second, working in small teams, students will conduct a POE of several buildings and open spaces on the campus of the First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley. These buildings include student housing, a “green” office and classroom building, and a designated historic structure that has been renovated into a classroom building. Open spaces include a large plaza and several smaller courtyards. The research will include qualitative and quantitative aspects. The student teams will conduct interviews and administer surveys with staff and users of the selected buildings and outdoor spaces; they will observe the ways in which the settings are used and maintained; they will analyze the physical aspects of each setting; and they will interview design consultants as appropriate to identify the fit between planning objectives and actual outcomes. In addition to these two major assignments, students must also prepare weekly reading responses. These two page papers address issues raised by the week’s readings. However, they are not simple summaries, rather they are critical reflections on the material presented and will serve as guides for in-class discussion. There will be no final exam. A reader will be available at the UO Bookstore.

Course Structure. In addition to regular class meetings, we will be taking a field trip to Berkeley, California to conduct the research October 24-27. Travel and expenses will be funded by a grant. In-class sessions will consist of instructor-led presentations; student-led critical discussions of the readings; and student presentations of research findings. The course is appropriate for students in architecture, landscape architecture, interior design, historic preservation, and planning.