ARCH 407/507: Humanitarian Design

Fall 2014
Monday: 6:30PM – 8:20PM
Lawrence 279

CRN: 17451/17452 (2 Credits)

Instructor: James Miller
Office: LA 261
Office hours: TBD

Overview:

The aim of this course is to explore the fundamental connection between global forces, Public Interest Architecture, Humanitarian Design, and social-entrepreneurship. This course will equip students with a critical approach to humanitarian design in order to better understand and contextualize the implications of such design. Drawing on readings, discussion, exercise, and group based projects; our goal is to understand the general linkages between theory and practice.

Humanitarian design/ architecture will be defined here as the convergence of social architecture and humanitarian aid. Several organizations, such as Architecture without Borders, Architecture for Humanity, Basic Initiative, Rural Studio, and Teddy Cruz are well known for their practice of humanitarian architecture. One well known precedent and winner of the 2004 Aga Khan award is Diébédo Francis Kéré’s primary school in Gando, Burkina Faso.

Over the course we will look at both the historical development of humanitarian design, the current models and trends of humanitarian/ public interest architecture, analyze specific case studies, such as the one noted above, based on theory and practice, study social business models incorporated with humanitarian design, and produce recommendations for a specific project. As many humanitarian
projects take place within the informal settlements of developing countries, we will consider the lessons learned from these environments and how they may influence design - especially in the process of slum upgrading and creating supportive environments. Lastly we will work to integrate social entrepreneurship and humanitarian architecture and consider best practices. At every step along the way, we will grapple with issues of ethics, representation, validity, and politics in Humanitarian Design.

Throughout the course we will have the opportunity to learn from local, national, and international practitioners of public interest architecture, humanitarian design, and social entrepreneurship. For students seeking careers in humanitarian design, the goal of this course is to develop your awareness of these critical issues in order to understand all facets of working on the margins and learn to prepare for and mitigate potential unintended consequences of your work.

Key Imperatives: Cultural, Social, Economic, Environmental, and Political

Key Questions: How can the western architect/designer/planner learn from informal settlements? How will this perspective benefit our implementation of Public Interest projects? What will you take away from a critical approach to humanitarian architecture? How can we be effective developing cross-cultural exchange of ideas in our own backyard through social architecture and humanitarian design?

Format and expectations:

The course meets once a week for 2 hours. Class meetings for the first half of the term will incorporate two interrelated components: 1) the theoretical approach through a discussion of readings; and 2) the application of theory to exiting modes of humanitarian design. The second half of the term will focus on: 1) the applied theory to practice; and 2) the integration of social entrepreneurship.

Learning outcomes: Be able to deconstruct the design and implementation of humanitarian design and apply a pragmatic and advocacy/participatory theoretical framework to humanitarian architecture. Gain an understanding of theory development, applied theory, and gain experience with case study design. Be cognizant of the potential for the integration of social entrepreneurship and humanitarian design.

Required Texts:

All weekly readings will be provided on Black Board. The reading under week one, *Wisdom from the field: Public Interest Architecture in Practice* must be completed prior to the first class! I highly suggest purchasing Turner, John F.C. *Housing by the People*, and Easterly, William. *The White Man’s Burden*

Assignments and Evaluation:

Students will be responsible for weekly readings and assignments to be prepared for our in class discussion and analysis (verbal and design based). The term final will be the case study project, applying lessons learned. Students should meet with the instructor by week 3 regarding the final project.
Participation in Weekly Discussion 40%
Exercises 20%
Final Project 40%

Graduate students taking this course will be expected to complete a short proposal (3-5 pages) for a project they may have interest in undertaking in addition to the final project. This can be discussed with the instructor during week 5.

Participation:
Participation (40% of final grade) consists of two components. Prior to class meeting, by 12:00PM the day prior to class, students will submit 3-5 questions ..to a thread on Blackboard. Questions should address a core theme of the assigned readings for that particular week, and aim to stimulate discussion in class. The second component consists of active engagement in class meetings. Active participation is defined by: asking questions in class (especially to guest lecturers); responding to questions or points raised; thoughtful contribution to class discussion; sympathetic critiques of the readings and case studies.

Exercises:
Over the term, students will complete two exercises (each is worth 10% of final grade for a total of 20%) designed to foster knowledge and skills in critical analysis of humanitarian design issues.

Exercise 1: Context Analysis – analyze the political, environmental, economic, social, and cultural forces influencing a specific case study. Base on this analysis was it successful? Why, Why not?

Exercise 2: Complex Systems – use a theory such as Neoliberal theory and consider its implications on as specific case study?

Exercise 3: Social Enterprise Solution: Develop a solution to a specific context which responds to economic, social, and environmental needs.

Term Project:
In teams of 2 (or 3 if necessary) – and in consultation and planning with the instructor – student groups will develop a presentation on best practices for a specific case study (must meet with instructor by week 3 regarding final project). From early on in the term, students should be researching humanitarian/social/ public interest built projects that draw their interests most for use as the case study. The goal of this project will be to apply everything learned throughout the term into the analysis of a selected case study in order to develop best practices and recommendations for future projects in a similar context. In addition to the contextualization of the case study, analysis should include financing models (make sure to select projects that have transparency – e.g. USA nonprofits are required to
provide financial documents to the public) and forms of social entrepreneurship and capital building (social, cultural, and/or economic) associated with the project. This means doing the homework on the stakeholders, non-profits, and other institutions in addition to the architect of the project. Examples of possible case studies are: Santo Community, Leogane Haiti – Architecture for Humanity X Habitat for Humanity; Villa Rosa, Port-au-Prince, Haiti – Architecture for Humanity X Cordaid (http://architectureforhumanity.org/blog/02-23-2012/villa-rosa-rebuilding-high-density-housing-port-au-prince); an ACHR project; an Enterprise project; or a slum upgrading project.

The Schedule: (TBD)

Week 1: Public Interest Architecture

Read: Wisdom from the field: Public Interest Architecture in Practice

Available for free here:

Reading List (Partial):

ACHR Website & Articles (Environmental Urbanization)


Design Like You Give a Damn

Easterly, W. (2006). The white man’s burden: why the West’s efforts to aid the rest have done so much ill and so little good. Penguin.


**Comments:**

This course could provide a great opportunity for students interested in pursuing real life experience in the design development and funding of public interest and humanitarian design projects locally and internationally. Utilizing existing networks, this may be a plausible case.