

## **ARCH 698aL Directed Design Research / ARCH 697aL Thesis**

Class Meetings: Wednesdays, 10:00-11:50am in Landscape Architecture Corner  
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Directed Design Research (DDR) is the title given to the independent design exploration that is the final studio-based requirement for the M.Arch degree. The sequence of design studies builds in complexity and scope from one semester to another. The DDR overlaps the second studio and continues through to the third and final semester of the program. As a basis for the DDR studies, each student chooses a focus and project requiring initiation of creative action, authorship of an appropriate program, and a response that is consequential both as a design and as an exploration of transcendent, generally applicable, issues and principles.

“Thesis” is the title given to the independent exploration using academic inquiries rather than design. As a basis for thesis study, each student chooses a subject and issues requiring initiation of creative research and authorship of a scholarly paper that includes findings that are consequential and transcendent.

### **A. TOPICS AND ISSUES**

The distinction between “thesis” and “directed design research” follows the distinction between the primary means of inquiry in the arts and the primary means of inquiry in the physical and social sciences. A “thesis” in the sciences is a proposition that allows a method of study towards a resolution or “proof.” Such study allows replication by other persons to validate the findings. Such proof and validation is not characteristic of findings in the arts. Rather, issues and ideas are explored to generate greater insight about “aspects” and about “qualities,” as well as the generation of background knowledge and information. The findings are valuable as they resonate with the experience of other artists and with the public. In both the thesis and directed design research, serious inquiry requires both an identification of an issue that deserves exploration and a means of study that promises to provide useful findings.

The beginning of any study is a choice of general topics. Within an overall consideration of urban life, five sets of investigations are fully supported by the faculty and other resources of the University and the region.

- ***the opportunities to create more supportive urban places***  
habitat; the public realm; open space and the streets; historic places and districts; places of commerce and exchange; amenity and meaning.
- ***understanding the integral importance of ecology and technology***  
natural systems and infrastructure; processes and materials for landscape remediation and construction.
- ***attention to design methodologies and processes***  
theories and practices of designing; collaborative approaches to project investigation, development and implementation; methods and techniques of simulation and visual communication;
- ***attention to issues of theory, history, and criticism***  
methods of historical inquiry, theories of interpretation and criticism; and socio-cultural implications of process and form.

The identification of a topic does not yet define a direction of study. What remains is definition of an issue to be resolved. Louis I. Kahn in the designing the Kimball Museum of Art studied not only how to introduce natural light in the galleries, but also how to protect the paintings from the harmful effects of natural light. The study had its origins in his intuition that every inhabited space must have natural light in order to preserve the fundamental rhythms of life, and also that paintings should be seen in the light of an artist's studio. The "issue" was how to both have the light and protect the paintings. He had no satisfactory precedents to follow, but many precedents of partial and important value. Aldo Van Eyck speaks of "twinphenomena" as the essential conditions that architecture must address in relating inside and outside, public and private, etc., in ways that allow both qualities not only to independently co-exist, but also to be interrelated. A both/and issue defines Kahn's topic "gallery light". Van Eyck explores transitions by developing twin-phenomena issues. Robert Venturi argues for "the hybrid," an architecture encompassing many levels of meaning and combinations of focus. At this time, the complexity of contemporary conditions requires us even more than previously to attend to many things at once, and the understandings of ecology and sustainability encourage us to embrace complexity. Landscape architecture is inherently complex and comprehensive. Contemporary practice and theory is issue-oriented more than ever before.

It is therefore assumed that one of the five general topics above cannot become the lone basis for your thesis. A hybridized argument integrating and fusing the topics can offer a focused and richer venue of study. Contemporary practice and theory is issue-oriented more than ever before and the School of Architecture is blessed with the presence of four distinct graduate programs to address such pluralistic agendas. Students are encouraged to integrate and assimilate topics and advisors from the different programs to form a holistic and interdisciplinary project.

## **B. SCHEDULE AND STRUCTURE**

Throughout the first semester the class will meet two hours each week to develop study programs and to compare approaches and methods. Students will also meet with faculty advisors and committee members each week.

The initial work of the first semester will be to define topics, associated issues and projects for each student and to identify principal faculty advisors by the middle of February. Students will begin regular weekly meetings with their principal faculty advisors as soon as they have been selected. Two additional committee members will be selected. The principal advisor and one of the committee members must be from the School of Architecture faculty. An additional committee member may also be from the School of Architecture, or from another program at USC, or an outside practitioner whose interests and accomplishments are highly related to the DDR exploration.

Progress reviews will be held at the end of October and again at the end of November with full committees. The purpose of these reviews will be to assess the quality of the work already started, to provide other advice as appropriate, and to assure strong progress prior to the beginning of the spring semester 2010. Four interim reviews will be held during the spring semester, at the end of January, February, March, and April. The final review for each student will be held in mid-May.

## **C. FINAL REPORTS**

For both the DDR and the Thesis, a report is required at the conclusion of the initial semester and a Final Report will be due at the conclusion of the study, at the date specified by the University for thesis submission, and no later than the end of final weeks in May 2010 for the DDR. These reports are required to be printed or drawn on 8½" x 11" sheets, portrait orientation, with 17" x 11" and 34" x 22" foldouts as necessary and appropriate. The School of

Architecture will take responsibility for binding. Additionally, all materials must be documented and submitted electronically to provide a complete digital file. The format for the Thesis is specified by the University.

The following outline is the required structure of the DDR final report. Items “I-V.1” and initial conceptual design studies will constitute the interim report at the end of the initial semester. The outline for Thesis reports will include some of the same elements, but will be tailored to the individual studies.

I. Executive Summary (two pages)

The information and findings of items I-VI below are to be summarized (the Executive Summary for the interim report will include only the study of the spring semester).

II. Topic.

Presentation of the subject as an aspect of architecture from one of the five general topics, shall be described in sufficient detail to distinguish this study from other possible studies within the topic area.

III. Issues and Inquiries

The design research questions shall be identified that allow this study to be a genuine inquiry rather than only an application of present understandings, techniques, and skills.

IV. Project Description.

A description is required of the specific site(s) and the objectives and program of the project that has been chosen as a means for exploration of the topic and issues.

V. Design Research

1. Precedents:

- a. Regarding the topic
- b. Regarding the issues
- c. Regarding aspects of the site
- d. Regarding project elements

2. Design Studies:

- a. Representations of the methods by which the project design was developed.
- b. Representations of means and sources by which critical information and relationships were discovered through the process of design.

3. Design Proposal.

VI. Summary of Findings.

1. Discussion of general relationships and principles, of design problems and opportunities, and other insights regarding the central issues of study.
2. Suggestions regarding further inquiries beyond the immediate scope and findings of this study.

VII. Bibliography and Reference Sources.

## D. SCHEDULE, FALL SEMESTER, 2009

Class meetings will be held each week with the coordinator except during the weeks of Student-Committee Meetings

	Date	Activity
<b>August</b>	week one	First class meeting: 8/26
<b>September</b>	week two	<b>Draft statements due: 9/2</b>
	week three	Individual consultations: 9/8-11 to be arranged
	week four	<b>Second draft statements due: 9/16</b>
	week five	<b>Final draft statements due: 9/23 advisor proposals</b>
	week six	Meetings with faculty advisors; appointment of faculty committees
<b>October</b>	week seven	Meetings with faculty advisors
	week eight	Meetings with faculty advisors & committee members (individually)
	week nine	Meetings with faculty advisors & committee members (individually)
	week ten	<b>DDR Student-Committee Meetings re: issues, project, site</b>
<b>November</b>	week eleven	Meetings with faculty advisors & committee members (individually)
	week twelve	Meetings with faculty advisors & committee members (individually)
	week thirteen	Meetings with faculty advisors & committee members (individually)
	week fourteen	<b>DDR Student-Committee Meetings re: study progress</b>
<b>December</b>	week fifteen	Meetings with faculty advisors & committee members (individually)
	week sixteen	<b>Interim Report Due: 12/16</b>

## E. ATTENDANCE AND GRADING

Attendance is expected without exception at all scheduled classes and reviews. Regular weekly meetings are expected with principal advisors when they have been selected and assigned. Absences, when necessary, should be arranged in advance, or in the case of illness, communicated to the instructor by email as soon as possible.

Students will receive regular progress reports, but no grades are given at USC for the DDR or thesis study. The grade "in progress (IP)" will be assigned at the end of the spring semester and until the work is completed.

## F. DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENTS

**First Draft of Study Interest** (due at beginning of class, week two)

- 1 Basic Topic
- 2 How it matters, and to whom
- 3 Issues, Dilemmas

**Second Draft of Study Interest** (due at beginning of class, week four)

1-3 First draft (REVISED)

4 Possible project(s)

5 Some ideas about how the study should go forward

6 Resources:

Personal Experience (for example, previous studies and projects)

Annotated Bibliography (research studies, precedents, theoretical works, etc.)

Available Data (documents, direct observation of sites, etc)

Individuals (faculty, other professionals and consultants)

**Final Draft of Study Interest** (due at beginning of class, week five)

1-6 Second Draft (REVISED and EXPANDED)

7 List of Possible Faculty Advisors:

Identify at least two as “principal advisor” possibilities

Identify at least two as “committee member” possibilities

**First Student-Committee Meetings: issues, project, site** (during week ten)

DDR: Maps; diagrams; site/place information; identification of precedents to study; proposition about methods, calendar, and products; essential bibliography and resources

**Second Student-Committee Meetings: study progress** (during week fourteen)

Materials from first meeting revised and expanded

Developed issue statements:

Precedent studies and site understandings

Conceptual diagrams, study models, design strategies

**Interim Report** (due December 16)

See outline of contents under “C” above.

**G. GENERAL COURSE INFORMATION**

**Accreditation Status**

The USC School of Architecture’s Master of Landscape Architecture First Professional Degree 6-semester curriculum (+3) and Advanced Placement 4-semester curriculum (+2) have been awarded candidacy status towards becoming an accredited professional degree program. All students can access and review the LAAB Conditions of Accreditation (including the Student Performance Criteria) on the ASLA Website,

[http://www.asla.org/nonmembers/education/pdf/2005  
LAAB Accreditation Standards Procedures.pdf](http://www.asla.org/nonmembers/education/pdf/2005_LAAB_Accreditation_Standards_Procedures.pdf)

**Statement for Students with Disabilities**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to my TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30AM-5PM, Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

**Statement on Academic Integrity**

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles.

Scampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A:

<http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>

Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at:

<http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>

The following website provides assistance in avoiding plagiarism:

[http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/student-conduct/grad\\_ai.htm](http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/student-conduct/grad_ai.htm)

### **Religious Holidays**

The University of Southern California recognizes the diversity of our community and the potential for conflicts involving academic activities and personal religious observation. The University provides a guide to such observances for reference and suggests that any concerns about lack of attendance or inability to participate fully in the course activity be fully aired at the start of the term. As a general principle, students should be excused from class for these events if properly documented and if provisions can be made to accommodate the absence and make up the lost work. Constraints on participation that conflict with adequate participation in the course and cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of the faculty and the student need to be identified prior to the add/drop date for registration. After the add/drop date the University and the School of Architecture shall be the sole arbiter of what constitutes appropriate attendance and participation in a given course.