

USC School of Architecture

University of Southern California School of Architecture

Introduction to Landscape Architecture Design: Translations & Dialectics

Landscape Architecture 541A, 6 units, Fall 2019 Semester

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| Location | Watt Hall (WAH), 3rd Floor, Landscape Studios University of Southern California |
| Time | Monday / Wednesday / Friday 2-5:50PM |
| Coordinator | Alexander Robinson, Associate Professor email: alexander.robinson@usc.edu |

To design is to devise courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones.

– *Herbert Simon*

Course Introduction

The intent of this studio is to teach students a method by which to design. The course loosely interprets the economist, political scientist and cognitive psychologist Herbert Simon’s influential definition of design as a process of “translation”—or specifically for landscape, a process of translating an existing site situation into a new, more preferred, situation. This studio proposes that the overarching idea of “translation” as design also does well to describe most intermediate steps of design, that is, the funny mechanics of (for example) translating a trashy napkin sketch (or crude model) into a national legacy landscape. Through a variety of exercises “translating” between various drawing and modeling types we will examine and hone this practice of design. Besides giving us a place to start and a way to move forward, translation will also inform our ongoing (and often fraught) relationship to source material and precedent. It will also become a practice by which we critically engage in and master the conventions of landscape architecture drawing and modeling practices, as well as material logics.

A second agenda of the course is to introduce landscape architecture practice as dialectic—a design practice that creates by crafting on-going—even open ended—relations or dialogues between distinct logics, identities, and processes. In this course I will argue that good landscape architecture thrives on symphonic tension and contrast as much as harmony, clarity, and invention, as is often suitable for intervening on sites with complex spatiotemporal legacies, critical identities, and on-going processes. A totalitarian self-contained logic might make for an interesting object, but not for ordering a lively field condition—unless somehow made profoundly dialectic.

The course is structured in the following way: it begins with basic design translation exercises; following these we travel to USC’s Wrigley Institute on Catalina Island, the location of the first studio project to practice field site analysis and other exercises; returning to the mainland, the studio will develop a mid term design sited on the island; after midterm and the all-school vertical workshop, we will study case studies, which will dovetail into a final design project located on campus, with relations to the Wrigley Institute. The second project builds on the practices in the first but inverts the site of intervention from “natural” to built (in addition to other inversions).

Class Objectives

- Introduce basic ideas of landscape & landscape architecture.

- Introduce iterative design experimentation: experimenting with design techniques, methods, materials, (etc.) and crafting ideas through repeated processes of making. Develop two small landscape architecture projects this way, with detailed descriptions of planting and materials.
- Fieldwork: investigative on-site research and observation; interpretive visualization.
- Master basic drawing types: site analysis, plan, section, & model.
- Introduce case study analysis and related concepts.
- Develop presentation and critique skills

Exercises and Deliverables

Part 1: Translations & Dialectics

Practice translations and adaptations between the mediums and techniques of landscape architecture design tools to generate content and form from form and site. You will also practice basic skills of form making, drawing, and modeling.

Translation Exercises (Drawing & Models – 2 weeks)

Catalina Project (Models & Drawings – ~5 weeks)

Part 2: Urban/Nature Dialectics

Adapt part one content and logic to site conditions and then condition a formal intervention to this hybrid of existing site logic and introduced logic.

Case Study: Drawings and Model (~2 weeks)

Campus Project: Drawings and Model (~5 weeks)

Other Class Methodology

In Class Pin-Ups

The class will predominantly consist of group pin-up reviews. After the second meeting, you will be expected to pin up all the work due/you want to discuss before class starts! Any work that is not ready (and pinned up) by then will not be discussed and considered late.

Carefully pin up your drawings using good pins and pinning and careful trimming (with a straight edge) when necessary. They should be straight (using a level) and evenly spaces (1” apart in general with 2” apart between students – measure!). No multi-colored pins! Poorly pinned up drawings / poor quality pin-ups may not be assessed. Besides the physical presentation of your drawings affecting your grade, these presentations are likely your drawings most critical and meaningful moment in its “life” and the quality of their physical presentation should respect the hard work you have done up into this point. Poor printing, paper, alignments, or pinning could seriously diminish an otherwise high-quality work (and vice versa!).

You are generally encouraged to participate in the in-class pin-up reviews. Eventually, student input will become mandatory. This is a portion of your grade!

Lectures & Workshops

There will be semi-regular lectures / workshops to introduce topics and demo assignments. These will generally be conducted after the pin-up.

Site Visits

There will be site visits. In general, no transportation will be provided with the exception of the Catalina boat and transportation on the island. You will be required to share a ride or take a Taxi or public transportation. In this case, the only transportation required is traveling to the harbor to take the boat. Please bring suitable shoes (covered), water, and visit a bathroom prior!

Limited Software Instruction

The class and instructor only provide instruction as related to the assignments. For basics and additional software instruction beyond what is provided in media courses, see the resources listed below (Lynda in particular is a great resource!).

Studio Instruction Time

Following pin-ups, presentations, and class discussions you are expected to stay in studio (with necessary for bathroom / coffee, etc. breaks) and work until the end of class-time. Professor Robinson will be available for specific questions and consultations at a nearby desk. Please consider whether the question can easily be answered by your peers prior to consulting a professor. You are expected to be collegial with your classmates and support each other!

Final and Mid Reviews

Outside reviewers will come to discuss and evaluate your work at mid and final reviews. Presentation orders will be posted. All students must be pinned up 30 minutes prior to the scheduled start time to participate in the review (and not be penalized). The entire class must be present (and awake!) during the course of the review. Do not take your own notes – ask another student to make notes for you. Presentation durations will be specified.

Readings

There will be semi-regular readings associated with class assignments.

Model Photography

All models must be photographed by the standards and instructions presented in class. In general, this means that models must be naturally lit (outside) with a naturally lit solid color background (white be default). The background of model photographs should not be “photoshopped” out – white background or not!

Schedule

| Week | Date | Content |
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| 1 | 8.26 | Translation Exercises A & B* <i>*Rhino 3D & Adobe Illustrator required for both</i> 8.30 Robinson Out of Town—Rescheduled time TBD |
| 2 | 9.2 | 9.2 Labor Day Holiday Translation Exercises C & D |
| 3 | 9.9 | 9.9-9.12 Catalina Island Field Trip & Site Studies Beat leaves at 7:30AM on Monday morning from Terminal Island, San Pedro and departs from Wrigley at 3:30PM on Thursday afternoon. Catalina Project (1) <i>Boat transportation to & lodging at USC Wrigley Institute for Environmental Studies provided. 531A & 539L will be held on the island.</i> |

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| 4 | 9.16 | Catalina Project (2) |
| 5 | 9.23 | Catalina Project (3) |
| 6 | 9.30 | Catalina Project (4) |
| 7 | 10.7 | Catalina Project (5) |
| 8 | 10.14 | 10.14 Mid Review 10.17-18 Fall Recess |
| 9 | 10.21 | All School Vertical Workshop (1) — No 541A Studio Meetings |
| 10 | 10.28 | Case Study Project (1) |
| 11 | 11.4 | Campus Project (1) Case Study Project (2) |
| 12 | 11.11 | Campus Project (2) Catalina Daytrip #2 (?), TBD |
| 13 | 11.18 | Campus Project (3) |
| 14 | 11.25 | Campus Project (4) 11.27-12.1 Thanksgiving Recess |
| 15 | 12.2 | Campus Project (5) 12.6 Last day of classes |
| Finals | 12.16-18 | 12.16 Final Review |

Grading

Grading is made through a synthesis of the following: completion of assignments, instructor & outsider reviewers' assessment of work quality, effort, and participation in class.

Midterm Projects (30%)

Case Study Project (10%)

All School Project (10%)

Campus Project (40%)

Reading Assignments & Discussion (5%)

Participation throughout (5%)

Equipment and Resources

Students will be required to use the Adobe Creative Suite (Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign) and the latest version of Rhino (Windows recommended).

Lynda Software Tutorial (USC provided)

<https://itservices.usc.edu/lynda/>

A lightweight drawing board ~24x24” for the Catalina trip.

Also, equipment as listed for workshop.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards”

<https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and micro-aggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. <http://dsp.usc.edu>

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, <http://emergency.usc.edu>