MIT 4.222 Professional Practice

Fall 2019, F 9:00-12:00
Credits: 3-0-3 G // Room: 1-135

Instructors
Rebecca Berry rberry95@mit.edu
Robert Mohr (coordinator) bobmohr@mit.edu
TA
Nathaniel Joseph Elberfeld njelbe@mit.edu

Course Overview

4.222 Professional Practice gives a critical orientation towards a career in architectural practice. Through intensive case studies, critical discussions on urgent topics, and role-playing exercises, the course challenges students to explore a range of legal, ethical, political, and professional questions they will face in practice.

Course Description

The practice of architecture differs from the academy in significant ways. The reasons for this are varied and systemic, at times healthy and at others not. Works of architecture are real, not solely theoretical. They impact the real lives of real people, and they are a vehicle through which real change can be achieved. Real projects take time, they involve stakeholders, and they cost money. Buildings are subject to regulatory approval, historic districts, building codes, and the whims of community members and stakeholder groups. At times, architecture projects involve difficult ethical decisions.
This environment requires that strong design skills be complemented by skills in communication, promotion, stakeholder management, time management, and financial awareness. Building a relationship of trust between a client/patron/stakeholder and a designer is critical to a project’s success. Much of this is developed over time, putting the young architect at a disadvantage.

A single course can only reasonably give a brief introduction to the complexities of this professional environment. Rather than deliver information to students via lectures and exams, the course has a discursive and conversational format, allowing for both critique of the profession and the positing of new models of practice. Throughout the semester, student groups will interrogate built projects, and the offices that created them, and investigate important/urgent questions issues facing practice. In addition, the course will involve simulation and role-play as a means to place students directly into scenarios in which they are likely to find themselves upon graduation.

**Course Structure**
The course has three vehicles for exploring practice.

**BEHIND THE FACADE**
The practice of architecture is opaque. Behind the well-crafted images of an architectural project is a whole world of complexities — client/patron relationships, programming, contracts, consultants, fees, project management, etc. All of this can seem so foreign to an architecture student, and so different from a studio course, that the professional world can seem impenetrable.

To tackle this, the course will feature a series of intensive interrogations of built work. These “Behind the Façade” investigations will crack open projects and dissect them in detail from a variety of angles — mission, cost, contracts, fees, etc. — all in the interest of laying bare and de-mystifying the inner workings of a project. A small group of students will be tasked with preparing background research and an analytical report for each session. The lessons learned in this series will be applied to the students’ own work later in the semester.

**OPEN QUESTIONS**
The Professional Practice course will organize and host a series of panel discussions open to the public. Each of the three panels will focus on the airing of a particular critical, timely, and urgent question facing architectural practice today. Each panel will involve a small group of students who will be tasked with advance research, the preparation of questions for the panel of guest speakers, and the compilation of a summary report. *Students should note that these panel discussions will extend into the lunch hour on these days.*

**QUASI-PRACTICE**
The course will have students engage in a semester-long group-based project. Through a series of exercises, student teams will engage in role-play to simulate their future in architectural practice. These scenarios — forming an office, curating a portfolio, communicating a body of work, pitching/interviewing for work, and preparing project proposals — are all undertaken within an environment of experimentation and criticality. The ambition of the course is that, by experimenting within the critical but safe environment of the classroom, students will be more prepared, and in turn more confident, when real projects are at stake.
Course Method and Expectations
While the course will cover the many practical, structural, legal, and ethical questions that define professional practice, the aim is to do so through discussion, exploration of scenarios and case studies, and group-based exercises that allow students to actively learn through role-play.

Collaboration is indispensable to contemporary multidisciplinary environments and necessarily extends out beyond the internal workings of a given practice. The course will expose students to the opportunities and challenges that working with others poses, and to finding ways to excel as a collaborative group by identifying and harnessing individual talents. Role-playing and simulation by student teams is essential to the course, and a high level of commitment among team members is required.

The panel discussions and project case studies featured in the course are most valuable and successful with a high level of student participation. The richer the interrogation by students, the more valuable the result. Beyond the specific groups tasked with a particular event, all students are expected to actively participate in the investigations and Q+A sessions, and to be present during the entire class session.

Course Objectives
- Students will learn how practice differs from the academy, and in turn how to navigate the professional world they are about the enter.
- Open discussions focused on how the profession has addressed, or not addressed, critical contemporary topics will lead the students to see the practice of architecture as malleable and open to change.
- Through long-term group-based work, students will learn both that the practice of architecture is inherently collaborative and that good professional relationships last well beyond a project.
- Students will explore the meaningful difference between communicating a singular project and a body of work.
- Role-play will allow students to understand the critical differences between how projects are communicated between the academy and the profession, and in turn to gain confidence in their abilities beyond design.

Evaluation and Grading
Attendance for the full duration of class is mandatory. As the class will meet only once weekly, there will be relatively few class sessions over the course of the semester. An excused absence is defined as one that was discussed with and approved by the professor at least 24 hours prior to the date of absence, or a family or medical emergency that is confirmed by your physician or a dean in Student Support Services.

All unexcused absences will result in a reduction to course grading. Each unexcused absence will result in a reduction of the student’s grade by half a letter grade. More than two unexcused absences can result in the student being asked to drop the course, or their receiving a failing grade. A student’s absence from a class session, either excused or unexcused, does not exclude them from the learning objectives or other requirements of that session, be they readings or group work.

Assignments in the course will all be undertaken by students working in teams. Teams will be assigned by the instructors shortly after the first class session, and teams will remain together throughout the term. Students will be evaluated on their overall contribution to their team. Students shall approach the instructors with any issues that are unresolvable by the team or detrimental to the team’s process and progress.
Students will be evaluated on the following criteria, which will be used to determine final course grading.

**Quality of Class and Team Participation  15%**
*Students are expected to engage with class content in an active and constructive way and to come prepared for active discussion.*

**Project 1  25%**
**Project 2.1  20%**
**Project 2.2  20%**
**Project 2.3  20%**
*Group assignments are expected to be undertaken with rigor and a dedication to collaboration among team members. Presentations must be clearly delivered and articulated.*

**Grades are defined as follows.**

A  Excellent. High level of participation and engagement with subject matter during in-class discussions. Assignments surpass expectations in terms of inventiveness, verbal and visual ability, and personal development. Student pursues concepts and techniques above and beyond what is discussed in class.

B  Above Average. Assignments are thorough, well-researched, diligently pursued, and successfully completed. Participation is high. Good performance demonstrating capacity to use the appropriate concepts, a good understanding of the subject matter, and an ability to handle the problems and materials encountered in the subject.

C  Average. Adequate performance demonstrating an adequate understanding of the subject matter. Assignments and participation meet the minimum requirements. Suggestions made in class are not pursued with dedication of rigor. Assignments are incomplete in one or more areas.

D  Poor. Assignments are incomplete and participation is marginal. Minimally acceptable performance demonstrating only partial familiarity with the subject matter. Student does not demonstrate the required scholarly skill and knowledge base.

F  Failed. Assignments are unresolved and participation is low. Minimum objectives are not met and performance is not acceptable. This grade will be assigned when student has excessive unexcused absences. This grade also signifies that the student must repeat the subject to receive credit.
**Academic Integrity + Honesty**
MIT’s expectations and policies regarding academic integrity should be read carefully and adhered to diligently:  [http://integrity.mit.edu](http://integrity.mit.edu)

**Writing and Communication Center**
The MIT Writing and Communication Center offers free one-on-one professional advice from communication experts. The WCC is staffed completely by MIT lecturers. All have advanced degrees. All are experienced college classroom teachers of communication. All are published scholars and writers. WCC lecturers have a combined 130 years’ worth of teaching here at MIT (ranging from 1 to 26 years).

The WCC works with undergraduates, graduate students, post-docs, faculty, staff, alumni, and spouses. The WCC helps everyone strategize about all types of academic and professional writing as well as oral presentations and slide design.

**No matter what department or discipline you are in,** the WCC helps you think your way more deeply into your topic, and helps you see new implications in your data, research, and ideas. The WCC also helps with non-native speaker issues, from writing and grammar to pronunciation and conversation practice. To make an appointment, go to [https://mit.mywconline.com](https://mit.mywconline.com) and register with our online scheduler. The WCC is at E18-233, 50 Ames Street.

**NAAB Student Performance Criteria**

*Realm D: Professional Practice*
D.1 Stakeholder Roles in Architecture
D.2 Project Management
D.3 Business Practices
D.4 Legal Responsibilities
D.5 Professional Conduct
| W 1  | 06 Sep | 9h00-10h30 | Introductions // Course Overview // Syllabus review |
|      |        | 9h00-10h30 | Lecture + Discussion // Ethics + Responsibility |
| W 2  | 13 Sep |            | Lecture + Discussion // Relationships: Contracts / Liability / Project Delivery Methods |
|      |        |            | Assign Teams + Assignments 1 and 2.1 |
| W 3  | 20 Sep |            | STUDENT HOLIDAY / NO CLASS |
| W 4  | 27 Sep |            | Behind the Facade #1 // Shepley Bulfinch // Countway Library @ Harvard |
| W 5  | 04 Oct |            | Panel Discussion #1 // Practice + Ownership |
| W 6  | 11 Oct |            | Quasi-Practice // Assignment 2.1 // The Gatekeeper |
|      |        |            | Assign Assignment 2.2 |
| W 7  | 18 Oct |            | Panel Discussion #2 // Practice + Authority |
| W 8  | 25 Oct |            | Behind the Facade #2 // Office TBD // Project TBD |
| W 9  | 01 Nov |            | Quasi-Practice // Assignment 2.2 // Pitching |
|      |        |            | Assign Assignment 2.3 |
| W 10 | 08 Nov |            | Panel Discussion #3 // Practice + Planetary Ethics |
| W 11 | 15 Nov |            | Behind the Facade #1 // Studio Enée // Project TBD |
| W 12 | 22 Nov |            | Quasi-Practice // Assignment 2.3 // Making a Project |
| W 13 | 29 Nov |            | THANKSGIVING // NO CLASS |
| W 14 | 06 Dec |            | Wrap-up discussion // Feedback |
Bibliography


