MIT 4.222 Professional Practice

Fall 2023, F 9:00-12:00   Credits: 3-0-3 G // Room 1-135 // *Office Hours: Fridays, 12-1pm, in classroom*

Instructors

Rebecca Berry   berryr@mit.edu
Bob Mohr   bobmohr@mit.edu

TA

Yewon Ji   yewonji@mit.edu
Sahil Mohan   sdmohan@mit.edu

Course Overview

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

Course Description

4.222 Professional Practice is about the making of architecture in the contemporary moment. Our focus will be on both the state of architecture practice – which is not isolated from the systemic societal faults, inequalities, inequities, and deeply-rooted, foundational discrimination and oppression that have been, and continue to be, exposed and laid bare – and on the ways by which designers are broadening the canon and developing modes of practice that are committing to positive change.

The practice of architecture is opaque to many. Behind the well-crafted image of an architectural project is a whole world of complexities – client/patron relationships, programming, contracts, consultants, fees, project management, etc. Systemic barriers persist. The profession can also appear monolithic, when in fact there is a very broad range of ways by which architecture can be defined and practiced. All of this can seem foreign to an architecture student, and very different from a studio curriculum.

The practice of architecture differs from academe in significant ways. Works of architecture are real, not solely abstract or theoretical. They impact the real lives of real people in real places. Real projects take time, they consume resources, they involve stakeholders, and they cost money. Buildings are subject to regulatory approval, building and energy codes, historic districts, and the varied and complex interests of a broad range of community members and stakeholders. Real projects are not always funded by the people or communities they serve. Architecture projects can involve difficult ethical decisions. At times, the work of an architect may not lead to a building, but rather other kinds of change that a community needs.

This environment requires that strong design skills be complemented by strong ethics; skills in communication and promotion; an understanding of complex cultural and community dynamics; stakeholder management and engagement; time management; and financial literacy. Building a relationship of trust between a client / patron / stakeholder and a designer is critical to a project's success and to its relevance. Much of the above is developed over time, putting the less-experienced architect at a disadvantage.

Working in this environment requires the understanding that the profession & practice of architecture is as much a sculptor of our world as it is a product of it - a reflection of its context, however faulted. Works of architecture, and architects themselves, can be vehicles for reinforcing the status quo, as much as they can be a means by which desires for real change can be expressed and realized.

Course Structure

This course is an introduction to critically important aspects of architecture practice – how architects operate beyond academe. Numerous classic metaphors apply… *How does the rubber meet the road? How is the sausage made?* How do you take your ambitions for design, advocacy, or activism and translate them into projects? *How will you make a living as an architect?*

We will explore practice through a discursive, seminar format. Students are expected to come to class sessions prepared for robust and equitable discussion amongst students, instructors, and guests.

This year, we will be doing things a bit differently. *Our exploration of practice will be student-led.*

Course instructors are here to help establish the frame for this work, to act as resources for the research and exploration, and to be guides for how to cover the subjects adequately and accurately and to explore their boundaries in the way that best matches your interests as students.

Each week of the course we will explore a specific subject related to architecture practice – a list ranging from the myriad ways architects practice, to the fees we earn for doing the work, to ethical quandaries we will run into along the way. While each session will cover a particular topic, these topics are all interrelated and we will be exploring these areas of overlap as well.

Each week's 3-hour class session will be led by a student group. Groups will be asked to format, organize, and lead the three-hour class session as they see fit, using course instructors and TAs as guides. Exploring each subject will require a combination of potential approaches - Assigned readings, in-class discussions, in-class exercises and activities, outside guests, site visits, etc. All of this will be curated, organized, and led by the student group. As this

assignment will weigh heavily in course grading, success in the course will bear on the success – the learning, engagement, and participation by classmates – of each class session.

The topics explored by students will be:

Modes of Practice
An exploration of the many ways architects make a living, and make contributions.

Ethics & Responsibilities
An architect's obligations and responsibilities to people, society, clients, the planet, and each other.

Equity & Justice
Building an equitable profession and doing just work.

Getting Work / Contracts / Relationships
Exploring how architects build relationships and find work, while avoiding legal and financial pitfalls.

Fees & Compensation / Labor
Architecture's "value," and fairness within the profession.

Climate / Planet
Planetary responsibilities, from an architect's agency to codes and policies.

In order to best match student groups to their preferred topics, students will identify and rank the topics in order of preference. When doing so, students are requested to closely cross-reference the course schedule to identify potential conflicts, such as studio travel, thesis reviews, or other excused absences. **Students should not sign up for any session with a potential conflict, as these sessions cannot be skipped due to their heavy weight in the grading rubric. See assignment for more details.**

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 and direct engagement with subject matter. This course will only be successful with a high level of student participation. The richer the interrogation by students, the more valuable the result. All students are expected to be present during the entire class session and to regularly and actively participate.

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.

Course Objectives

- Students will learn how practice differs from academe, and in turn how to navigate the professional world they are about to enter.
- Students will learn that architecture practice is not monolithic, and that there is a broad range of ways by which architecture can be defined and practiced.
- Students will learn about the state of equity and access within the profession, and avenues for challenging systemic barriers.
- 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 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 learn the value of having skills and abilities beyond design.

Course Assignments

Students are expected to actively participate in all class sessions. In addition to the required readings, the course has two assignments – one individual assignment, and one done in a small group. There will be no final exam for the course.

1. **Interrogating Practice.** Group assignment. Leading a three-hour class session that explores a defined topic.
2. **Imagining Practice.** Individual assignment. A series of personal reflections on your future practicing self.

Assignment Schedule

Assignment 1	**INTERROGATING PRACTICE**
Mon 11 Sept, 9:00am	Students submit ranked choices for class session.
Mon 11 Sept, 6:00pm	Groups and class sessions assigned by instructors
Fri 15 Sept	Assignment 1, Part 1 due in class (presentation and work session)
Wed 20 Sept, 6:00pm	Submit proposal / vision for feedback
2 weeks prior to assigned class	Full review of final class proposal, with instructors and TAs Any assigned readings to be distributed to class as this time.
1 week prior to assigned class	Meeting and dry run with TAs
Date of assigned class	Group leads class session
Monday following class, 6:00pm	Collateral material, any assigned readings and group self-evaluation to be submitted Monday following the session.
Assignment 2	**IMAGINING PRACTICE**
Fri 29 Sept, 9:00am	Part 1 due on Canvas
Fri 13 Oct, 9:00am	Part 2 due on Canvas
Fri 3 Nov, 9:00am	Part 3 due on Canvas
Fri 1 Dec, 9:00am	Part 4 due on Canvas

Evaluation and Grading

Attendance for the full duration of class is mandatory. Participation is highly valued, as shown below. Students are encouraged to keep in mind that the grading of the group assignment relies heavily on the participation of fellow students in the class session. An individual's participation can therefore affect their grade as well as that of others.

Absences. The class meets only ten times over the course of the semester, and absences have a major impact on the in-class dynamic and the learning objectives. Students are allowed only one excused absence for the semester. An excused absence is defined as one that was discussed with, and approved by, the instructor(s) 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. Absences beyond the one allotted are considered *unexcused*, and will result in a decrease in your final grade. *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.

Students will be evaluated on the following criteria, which will be used to determine final course grading.

Quality of In-class and Online Participation   25%

Students are expected to engage with class content in an active and constructive way, to come prepared for active in-class discussion by reading required text and researching topics and guests.

Assignment 1: Interrogating Practice   50%

Students are evaluated on the rigor and success of the student-run class session.
See assignment for detailed grading criteria.

Assignment 2: Imagining Practice   25%

Assignment 2, which has four sub-assignments, is graded as a whole.

Grades are defined as follows.

A   Excellent. Exceptionally good performance demonstrating a superior understanding of the subject matter, a foundation of extensive knowledge, and a skillful use of concepts and/or materials. High level of participation and engagement with subject matter during in-class discussions.

B   Above Average. 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, an ability to handle relatively simple problems, and adequate preparation for moving on to more advanced work in the field.

D   Poor. Minimally acceptable performance demonstrating at least partial familiarity with the subject matter and some capacity to deal with relatively simple problems, but also demonstrating deficiencies serious enough to make it inadvisable to proceed further in the field without additional work.

F   Failed. This grade also signifies that the student must repeat the subject to receive credit. This grade will be assigned when student has excessive unexcused absences.

Academic Integrity + Honesty

MIT's expectations and policies regarding academic integrity should be read carefully and adhered to diligently: *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 and register with our online scheduler. The WCC is at E18-233, 50 Ames Street.

Student Support Services and GradSupport

If you are dealing with a personal or medical issue that is impacting your ability to attend class, complete work, or take an exam, undergraduate students should contact a dean in Student Support Services (S3) and graduate students should contact a dean in GradSupport. These offices are here to help you. The deans will verify your situation, provide you with support, and help you work with your professor to determine next steps. In most circumstances, undergraduate students will not be excused from coursework without verification from a dean. For graduate students, no verification is needed if arrangements are made between instructor/advisor and students. Please visit the S3 and GradSupport websites for contact information and more ways that they can provide support.

Disability and Accessibility Services

MIT is committed to the principle of equal access. Students who need disability accommodations are encouraged to speak with Disability and Access Services (DAS), prior to or early in the semester so that accommodation requests can be evaluated and addressed in a timely fashion. Even if you are not planning to use accommodations, it is recommended that you meet with DAS staff to familiarize yourself with the services and resources of the office. If you have already been approved for accommodations, please contact DAS early in the semester so that they can work with you to get your accommodation logistics in place. Please visit the DAS website for contact information.

NAAB Student Performance Criteria

PC.1 Career Paths   SC.2 Professional Practice
PC.6 Leadership and Collaboration   SC.3 Regulatory Context
PC.8 Social Equity and Inclusion

Some Source Texts

No single book or resource can completely summarize the complexities of Architecture Practice. Those that come close can quickly become obsolete as practice and technology evolve. Some key resources are listed here, and a more extensive bibliography and resource list is available on the course website.

A concise overview of conventional practice:
> Segal, Paul. *Professional Practice: A Guide to Turning Designs into Buildings*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2006.

Lengthy and more detailed:
> Pressman, Andrew. *Professional Practice 101: Business Strategies and Case Studies in Architecture*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2006.

Less architecture-specific, but with a good overview on business for designers:
> Granet, Keith. *The Business of Design: Balancing Creativity and Profitability*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011.

Course Schedule

Wk 1   **08 Sep**   Introductions // Syllabus review // **Review of Topics**

Wk 2   **15 Sep**   **In-class work workshop on assigned topics**

Wk 3   22 Sep   NO CLASS (Student Holiday)

Wk 4   **29 Sep**   **Projects A to Z** – Lecture and discussion on the means of practice.

Wk 5   **06 Oct**   **Modes of Practice**

Wk 6 *   **13 Oct**   **Ethics & Responsibilities**

Wk 7   **20 Oct**   **Equity & Justice**

Wk 8   **27 Oct**   **Getting Work / Contracts / Relationships**

Wk 9 **   **03 Nov**   **Fees & Compensation / Labor**

Wk 10   10 Nov   NO CLASS (Veterans Day)

Wk 11   **17 Nov**   **Climate & Planet**

Wk 12   24 Nov   NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

Wk 13   **01 Dec**   **Collective Review // Class Dismissed**

* *Bob Mohr absent (NOMA Conference)*
** *Rebecca Berry absent (HNE presentation)*