

MIT 4.222_ Professional Practice

Overview:

What does it mean to be an architect in a world where radical environmental challenges, rapid technological advancements, and profound social crises are forcing us to rethink our place in the profession? How should architecture respond to these pressures, and how do they reshape our understanding of practice? This course is designed to offer both practical insights and space for debate, encouraging students to grapple with these urgent questions while also gaining the tools needed to navigate the realities of architectural practice today.

During the course, we will explore both conventional and evolving practices, providing you with the necessary knowledge and skills to thrive across a range of architectural career paths. Through critical inquiry and real-world examples, we will examine architecture both within and beyond the traditional office, as well as explore the financial, ethical, and labor dynamics that shape the profession. How can we rethink professional practice to better align with a world that demands sustainable, ethical, and innovative responses? This class will host practitioners from a variety of professional backgrounds—both those who challenge the status quo and those working in more conventional settings—offering unfiltered, transparent insights into the day-to-day challenges of running a practice.

Students will be invited to reflect on their own values, goals, and visions of the future as architects, participating in discussions that aim to provide clarity on the various paths available after graduation. By the end of the course, students will have a grounded understanding of how these career options manifest in everyday practice, along with a more personal and realistic approach to their own professional trajectories.

Course Methods and Expectations

Each week, students will receive an overview of the upcoming session, including key themes, guest speakers, and a curated selection of readings and materials. These resources are designed to guide the week's discussions, introduce new ideas, and deepen students' understanding of architectural practice. Students are expected to engage thoroughly with these materials, come prepared to ask questions, and actively participate in class discussions. Prior to each session, students will submit a takeaway, reflection, or question based on the assigned materials by uploading it to Canva at least 24 hours before the session. In addition to weekly reflections, students will also work on developing their vision of an ideal future practice, which they will present to the Professional Practice team on November 15th.

Course Objectives

This course invites you to tap into your unique blend of skills, passions, and experiences, along with the exceptional education you've received as an architect. Together, we will explore how you can create value—however you define it—in a world where social, environmental, and technological landscapes are rapidly shifting.

1. **Gain practical insight into the profession:** You will learn about the financial realities of running an architectural practice, including how to sustain a business, manage projects, and deal with the complexities of the marketplace. You will learn about budgeting, client relationships, and financial sustainability.
2. **Learn from real-world case studies and practitioners:** Throughout the course, we will feature guest speakers and case studies that focus on the practical challenges of maintaining an architectural practice. These sessions will provide unfiltered insights into the day-to-day realities of the profession, including issues around financial viability, project management, and labor dynamics.
3. **Understand labor practices and professional ethics:** This course will examine the current state of labor in architecture, focusing on issues of equity, access, and justice within the profession. You will gain a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities for improving working conditions and advancing ethical practice.
4. **Explore diverse career pathways:** Beyond traditional architectural firms, we will explore a variety of career paths, including academic careers, non-profit work, and alternative forms of practice. You will hear from practitioners who have taken different routes, gaining transparency into how they've built and sustained their careers.
5. **Develop a grounded vision for your future:** By the end of the course, you will have a clearer, more realistic understanding of what it means to build a sustainable practice. You will craft a vision of your own future in architecture, grounded in practical knowledge, financial awareness, and an understanding of labor practices and ethics.

Requirements:

Attending the weekly seminar session and participating in class discussions.
Completing all readings in time for respective class discussions.
Posting one takeaway/reflection weekly on Canva (by midnight before class)
Design of an ideal future practice.

Basis for Grading

In-class and Online Participation 33.3%
Quality of Posting in Canva 33.3%
Future Practice Design 33.3%

Academic Integrity:

Please read and adhere to MIT's policies regarding academic integrity: <http://integrity.mit.edu>

Resources:

All the readings materials will be available in Canva one week in advance.

Course Schedule:

Week 1: **Sept 6th**

Introduction to Professional Practice.

Intro to the team

Overview of the course: Course structure, objectives and expectations.

Week 2: **Sept 13th**

Historical Context

Week 3: Sept 20th

(Student Holiday)

Week 4: **Sept 27th**

Architectural Offices

Guest speakers

Week 5: **Oct 4th**

Design X

Future practices (technology, environment, society...)

Week 6: **Oct 11th**

Design X

Guest Speakers

Week 7: **Oct 18th**

Architectural Offices

Guest speakers

Week 8: **Oct 25th**

Beyond the architectural office

Guest speakers

Week 9: **Nov 1st**

Design X

Innovative business model for a design practice. How to bring value/revenue.

Week 10: **Nov 8th**

The Construction Site

Visit MIT MET

Week 11: **Nov 15th**

Students to pitch their “practice model proposal” to the Pro-Prac team.

Week 12: **Nov 22nd**

Mini symposium on practice with MIT faculty.

Week 13: Nov 29th

(Thanksgiving)